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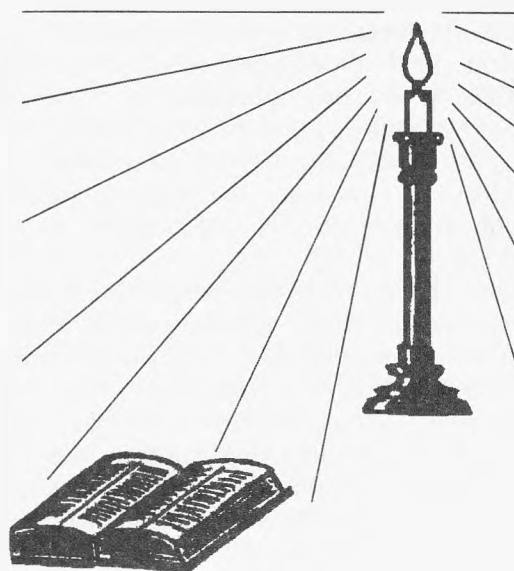
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"You crown the year with your bounty" (Psa. 65.11 NEB)

Some looking upon the world today may be pardoned for doubting the validity of those words. It might have been all right in those far off days when the world was comparatively young, its unspoiled and fertile lands responding prolifically to the tilling of men who found time between labours for religious observance and meditation on the place of God in their lives. They did not have to live in a world threatened with over population and insufficient food production; a world slowly suffocating in its own pollution or a world threatened by fear of weapons of mass destruction. Where is the logic, some may ask, in speaking of the goodness of God when the ordinary man is faced with so many dangers he can neither avoid nor control?

In point of fact, those early days were not so calm and peaceful as the rapturous strains of the Psalmist would seem to infer. Life was no more secure then than it is now. True, the soil had not been exhausted by 'scientific' farming and the crops were plentiful and health giving, but there was not the knowledge of conservation and preservation against lean times so the threat of famine was always very real. Some of the physical and psychological disorders of this modern world had not yet appeared but men had not learned how to deal with the diseases they did have and so they died just the same. Violence, battle, murder, and sudden death were just as much in evidence then as now. Yet men could lift their hearts to heaven and say with sincerity "You crown the year with your goodness". The difference was that most people in that day believed in God, that He was not unmindful of their woes and distresses and that He would at the end bring them forth into a world of everlasting peace. They did not profess to much

philosophy and they would not understand about the permission of evil as much as we do with our greater knowledge of so many things. They were however sure that God held the whole world in His hands and would eventually put right everything that was wrong. So they went about their tasks giving thanks for the benefits they did receive and in faith that all that is of evil will one day pass away.

It is that consciousness of Divine overruling in the affairs of men that is lacking today and therein lies the cause of so much dissatisfaction, frustration and discontent. Latterday prophets have taught that their welfare depends upon their own efforts and that they have no obligations toward their fellowmen or a distant and probably mythical Creator. In any case, so they believe, it all comes to an end at death and after that there is nothing. No wonder they blunder on, in Paul's telling phrase, *"having no hope, and without God in the world"*. Men have the knowledge and the ability to make this earth a paradise and to alleviate or banish most of the ills from which they suffer, to create a condition of peace and security in which every one can live a full and satisfactory life but they will not. This is because it involves acknowledging that God's way is best, rendering allegiance to Him as Creator. But in the patience and providence of God, and in the day of Christ's kingdom on earth, the lesson will be learned.

The inevitable and utter breakdown of this present world order consequent upon human misuse of all God-given powers and gifts, compared with the peace and order of the Messianic kingdom that succeeds it, will convince at the very least the vast majority of men that God does exist. They will learn that God does care and they will turn to Him in understanding and willing allegiance.

AOH

YEARS THAT THE LOCUSTS HAVE EATEN

A Reflection

"What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten, what the swarming locust left the hopping locust has eaten. What the hopping locust left the destroying locust has eaten" (Joel 1.4 RSV). A sad and sorry tale indeed. To an agricultural and pastoral people such as Israel it was tragedy. All their labours of the past gone for nothing, their crops destroyed, their pastures barren, their flocks and herds perishing for lack of food. These four ruthlessly destructive forces, the Lord's great army that He had sent amongst them, had completed their mission and become the instrument of Divine judgment on Israel. The nation had forsaken the covenant, renounced its belief in the true faith, and gone after other gods. Therefore the Lord had done according to His Word and brought blight, mildew and decay upon all their goods and leanness into their souls. The land that once had been so goodly a land, rich in vines and fig-trees, flowing with milk and honey, had become a sun-scorched and barren waste, offering no sustenance to man or beast. All the work of years and all the achievements of the past were as nothing, for God had hidden His face and the glory of Israel was departed.

It is easy to dismiss all this as the penalty of Israel's unfaithfulness and to leave it so, but the problem is not so simple as that. Israel was not wholly unfaithful and not all her people were apostates. There were many faithful hearts in each generation, men and women who truly loved God and sought, so far as in them lay, to honour and keep the covenant made with their fathers. Even of those who turned aside from the way and served other gods there were many who repented and turned back again to renew their vows to the Lord of hosts. Israel was not wholly bad and the light of God's truth was never entirely extinguished. In even the darkest times there was a Samuel or an Elijah to hold aloft the sacred standards and seven thousand beside who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Yet in spite of all this the calamity was all embracing and complete. The good as well as the bad were included in the common ruin. All alike looked up to the heavens that were as brass and upon an earth that was dry and barren. All alike beheld their enemies invade their land, capture their cities and spoil their goods. All alike at the last went into captivity and saw their land no more. And although the bitterness of loss was no sharper in the

hearts of the righteous than in the hearts of the evil, the righteous did have the added realization that their suffering was not of their own making. Nothing they had done deserved the fate that was theirs and all the work they had done for God in past years was now as though it had never been. The Temple was destroyed and no more would the sweet singers of Israel beautify the holy days with the strains of sacred song and the notes of harp and trumpet. The priests had been slain and no longer would holy sacrifices be offered that the people be cleansed from sin. The young men had been taken into captivity and never again would the schools of the prophets attract the fervour and enthusiasm of youth. No more would pupils sit at the feet of some saintly prophet or teacher that they might in their turn go forth and keep the faith of the one true God alive in the land. All these things had gone and it must have seemed to Joel, as it did to so many of his contemporaries, that God had forsaken His people. That He had made null and void all the glorious things that had been done in His Name and all the triumphs that had been achieved in years that were past. Like a swarm of all-devouring locusts, the judgments of God had visited Israel and left them nothing but desolation and the bitterness of memories.

But God always delivers at the end. His wrath does not endure forever, lest the spirit should fail from before him and the souls that He hath made (Isa. 57.16). In wrath He remembers mercy, as Habakkuk pleaded with Him. So it comes about that Joel was not only a prophet of judgment but also a prophet of deliverance. The dark night would eventually pass and the fair morning would come. They would see the brightness of the day when God would re-gather His people and pour out His spirit upon all flesh. He waits only for the repentance of those that have strayed from Him and so brought His judgment upon themselves. So we have it that when the priests and the people obeyed Joel's fervent summons to assemble before the Lord, to weep between the porch and the altar, to acknowledge their sin and beseech the Lord for the deliverance that only He can give, God delivered. He removed far from them the great army of judgment that had destroyed their land. He promised peace and plenty for the future, and a wiping out of all the sorrows of this time of trouble.

"I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten" He told them. The work and achievement of past years, so ruthlessly destroyed by the invaders, was not lost after all. God would restore it and set all things that are good in their former places. What a heart-cheering message that must have been for those in Israel who had laboured long and faithfully in the Lord's service only to see their life's work vanish like smoke in the troubles and desolation brought about by the judgements that came upon the nation.

A parable for our own times! We too, the Lord's ambassadors in the world, may have seen much of our life's work wither and die in these last times. We look back to earlier days in the way of the Lord, to the fervour and enthusiasm with which we preached the message. Many listened to our presentations and we enjoyed the meetings, the activities, the joyous gathering together for study and worship, the convocations and conventions and the many-sided aspects of our fellowship together. Today we sadly write "Ichabod" across that colourful page of our lives' experience, for the glory has departed. The more thoughtful must surely at times ask themselves "Has it all been wasted? Was it all really so important as we believed? What has become of all that was said and done in those halcyon days? Has it all vanished into oblivion as though those things had never been? Has God made no use of all that was done after all?" To all those questions that thus intrude themselves from time to time, there is one answer, *"I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten."* It matters not that the increasing apathy toward Christian faith and teaching so characteristic of this generation makes a work of the dimensions known in times past quite out of the question. It matters not that increasing age and failure of a younger generation to pick up the flaming torch from failing hands gives small hope of any such work being done again in our time. It matters not that our own failure to measure up to the tremendous concept of a Christian brotherhood, illumined by a knowledge of God's Plan, standing before the world as a living witness to the coming Kingdom, has found us out at the last. We have not done all that we might have done; we have done many things that we ought not to have done; but we have at least tried to manifest the Kingdom in measure. Nothing of all that has been done is wasted. We are living in the time of Divine

judgment on the world for its evil and we cannot help but be involved in those judgments. The locusts are abroad in the earth and our own work must be affected by that fact. But we have the promise, *"I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten"*. In that confidence we can wait quietly for the deliverance that the Lord has promised, knowing that when it comes it will mean the outpouring of the Divine Spirit upon all flesh.

Holy men of old knew this experience. It was the lot of most of the heroes of faith of Old Testament times to see their life's work vanish away and to die in comparative obscurity if not disappointment. Elijah converted the nation and wrought a mighty work in Israel. Kings quailed before him, courtiers and priests were silent in his presence, the common people adored him. Yet at the close of his life, spectacular as it was to Elisha, the only onlooker, the nation had already in great measure relapsed into idolatry. Samuel the uncrowned king, the last of the Judges, at the height of his career went from place to place every year administering justice, and all Israel hung on his words. But the last we see of him is an old man living obscurely in a country village teaching the ways of God to a few young lads while another reigns as king over Israel. Moses led Israel forty years in the wilderness and nurtured a virile and unconquerable generation in the desert preparatory to the victorious assault on the Promised Land which gave Israel a land they could call their own. But Moses was destined not to enter that land himself. He died, alone, upon a mountaintop under conditions of such obscurity that no one knows of his grave to this day. John the Baptist had kings and people paying him court; to his desert retreat there came Jerusalem and Judea, hanging upon his words and being baptized of him. It is probable that his short ministry of six months was more successful outwardly than that of any other of the prophets. Yet he ended his days in prison under the hand of the executioner. Jeremiah strove hard to preserve a remnant who retained faith at a time when the whole nation was going to pieces, but he spent his last days an exile in Egypt. The Apostle Paul, the greatest of them all, and perhaps the man who had done the greatest works for God, suffered more than any for the sake of his mission. He knew that most certainly his work would be corrupted after his death by *"grievous wolves, entering in among you, not sparing the*

flock". When, on that spring morning in A.D.68 he walked out of Rome along the Appian Way to the place of execution to bend his head to the executioner's axe, he knew that the glory of Christianity as he had preached it was already overshadowed by superstition, error, faithlessness and fanatical hatred that was to endure for so many centuries. But to all of these faithful stalwarts the promise holds good "*I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten*". In a time yet to come the real fruitage of all that they have done will be

manifest to the glory of God and the blessing of redeemed humanity. These are our examples and the stories of their lives should give us courage. No matter what discouragement and disappointment this present "day of small things" brings to us, we have always to remember that the day is still to come when God arises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and in that day we ourselves will have restored to us "*the years that the locust hath eaten*".

AOH

SIMON PETER - FISHER OF MEN

7. Pentecost

The room was silent; they had been at prayer for a long time and now they waited quietly for they knew not what. They only knew that something momentous was about to happen. Peter had told them that; Peter, with his strangely new insight into the ways of their Lord; Peter, now calm, confident and resolute, so unlike the old tempestuous and unpredictable fisherman they had known. He had reminded them of the Lord's words and He had said it would happen today. "*Stay in the city,*" Jesus had said "*until you are clothed with power from on high*" (Luke 24.49 RSV). So they had tarried ten days, since the Lord left them to return to heaven from which He had come, and now it was the Day of Pentecost, a Day of solemn religious observance. Jerusalem was full of Jews from all parts of the world, come to join in the ceremonies of this sacred time. This was the Feast of Ingathering, when the first fruits of the harvest were ceremonially presented to God. They also celebrated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai when Israel became the people of God, a first-fruits unto Him. But now that Law had come to an end, for Christ had superseded it, "*nailed it to his cross*". He had formally rejected the people who for fifteen hundred years had been in training to receive Him when He should come to them, but when He came they "*knew not the time of their visitation*", and rejected Him. Where now were God's first fruits, thought the disciples sadly as they sat in the quietness of that upper room? What was to take the place of that Law that had stood as the expression of God's covenant with His people through all their history? Jesus at the Last Supper had spoken of a new covenant sealed by His own death for the remission of sins and He had also told the Pharisees

that the Kingdom of God was being taken from them and given to a people who would bring forth its proper fruits. It was all very dark and mysterious but Peter had told them that today they would understand and the certainty of his tone carried conviction, so they waited in quietness.

A low whisper of sound, just perceptible against the stillness ... the murmur of a summer breeze rustling the trees ... the blowing of a strong wind around the house ... the roar of a mighty tempest invading the room in which they were sitting and filling their ears with noise, yet with no movement of their clothing nor feeling on their faces and hands. Instantly came to each mind words spoken to a teacher in Israel some while back, "*The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone that is born of the Spirit*". (John 3.8 RSV). Were they even at this moment being born of the Spirit? Was this thing that was happening to them a demonstration of Divine power, fulfilling the promise Jesus made to them so little a time ago "*you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*"? (Acts 1.8 RSV). Each head was bowed in reverence but each heart beat fast as they waited to experience the outcome of this wondrous thing.

The room was getting brighter; waves of light seemed to be impinging upon their closed eyelids. First one, and then another, looked up. A golden radiance, vibrating and pulsating as though it had life of its own filled the room above their heads. Even as they watched in awe, the radiance seemed to reach down and rest upon each of them, a fiery aura joining each one to that dazzling light which blotted out the ceiling from their view. And with

those rhythmic tongues of fire came power, a power that filled mind and body, enlightening them to understand things that had been so obscure and perplexing before, vitalizing them so that they felt able to go out and dare all things for Jesus' sake. And when they lifted up their voices to praise God for what had happened they found that they were speaking words that they had never used before and talking of things that they had never understood before.

Peter, a transfigured Peter, was the first to grasp the practical implications of their experience. He led the little company, first in praise, next in prayer, and then, with something of his old impetuosity, motioned them to follow as he made for the street outside.

It was there, to the cosmopolitan crowd, drawn from *"every nation under heaven"*, hastening to the Temple to play their part in the morning ritual of the Day of Pentecost, that the Christian Gospel was first preached. Those men stood and proclaimed the "wonderful works of God", not in their native Aramaic but in the languages and dialects of all the people who were gathered to hear them. Many have been the discussions and arguments as to just what is implied by the power to "speak with other tongues" at this memorable time, but the reaction of the hearers is enough to indicate the impression made upon them. *"Every man heard them speak in his own language" ... "how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?"*. It is sometimes argued that since Greek was a well-nigh universal language throughout the Mediterranean countries at this time these statements have little or no meaning but this view does not take into account all the factors involved. Greek was certainly the customary language with the educated classes, and in the commercial, political, and "upper-class" social worlds, but among the peasantry and workers and slaves the native tongues were to a much greater extent in use. Thus Jesus and his disciples habitually spoke Aramaic and in the same way visitors from Egypt and Libya, and Roman Asia, would be more familiar with their own local *patois*. Those from Parthia and Elam and Arabia would speak entirely different and non-Greek languages.

The conclusion is irresistible that the twelve disciples, on this occasion, whether they realised the matter or not, addressed the people in the tongues and dialects those people best understood.

And the one who took the lead in all this was Peter. The words attributed to the stalwart Galilean on this historic occasion have often been referred to as the first Christian sermon to be preached. It is certainly the first synopsis which has been placed on record. It is probable that Peter said a great deal more than is preserved in the second chapter of Acts, but what is preserved is full of significance. It is very possible that the other disciples said much the same as did Peter but in other tongues; an overruling guidance of the Holy Spirit in the choice of words cannot be ruled out here. Each overseas visitor would naturally gravitate to the speaker whose language he understood best. It might well be that Peter was the one out of all of them who did use his native tongue; in verse 14 he addresses the men of Judea and dwellers in Jerusalem, for whose benefit Aramaic would be the obvious choice. In masterly fashion he connected the phenomena they were witnessing with the words of the prophet Joel. In the last days, said Joel, God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and there would be prophecy and visions and dreams. Added to this there would be signs in the heavens, and the sun darkened. Salvation would be proclaimed for all who will receive it. There is not much doubt that Peter saw in that day's happenings in the upper room the beginning of all that in history is to fulfil Joel's prophecy. He could not, at that moment, have had any idea of the time that was to elapse before the words would have their complete fulfilment. He did see, as Paul saw later on and so expressed himself to the men of Athens (Acts 17), that this Day of Pentecost was the beginning of all that was promised. He saw that there and then God began to pour out His Spirit, admittedly as yet to a strictly limited and small company, and they in consequence were now prophesying as was said of them. He might very reasonably have recalled the darkening of the sun which had occurred on the day of the crucifixion, the earthquake, the rending of the Temple Veil, the coming out of their tombs of certain holy men of old, as a fulfilment of the "signs from heaven" of Joel. With conviction he proclaimed to the people of Jerusalem that the time had come for God to move towards the fulfilment of all that Joel and other prophets had predicted would take place at the appearance of Messiah. It will not be until the coming Age of Christ's reign over the earth that all men without exception will experience their full

and final opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord, in the light of full knowledge and understanding of what is involved, and so be saved. Nevertheless it is true, as Paul, again, said to those philosophers of Athens, that up to Pentecost God had suffered the times of man's ignorance, but from that moment calls upon all men everywhere to repent. So the pouring out of the Spirit and the consequent prophesying, and the outward signs accompanying these things, had a limited fulfilment and application back in AD33. It will have a greater and universal fulfilment in the future day when the Christ, whom Peter preached, takes to Himself His great power and commences His reign over the nations.

This was only the introduction to Peter's real thesis; the essential preliminary, the basis upon which his major message was to be built. Peter had something better than the prophets to talk about; he was going to preach Christ, and all that He was going to do for the sons of men. This reference back to the prophecy of Joel was for two reasons. First, it was to explain the enthusiastic fervour of the preachers and the fact that they were speaking in unusual tongues. Some of the bystanders had put that down to intoxication. Not so, said Peter, so early in the morning; it was now only 9.00 a.m. and the sun had only been up three hours. This, he said, is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit and it is just what the prophet Joel said would happen. Second, it was to awaken the minds of those who listened to a consciousness of the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy in their own day. All the sons of Israel in those times were fully conversant with the predictions of the prophets and most of them believed that they would surely come to pass. What Peter had to insist now was that the day of fulfilment had come and they themselves were the witnesses. There were none in Israel who did not long for deliverance, from the Roman yoke and from the power of Gentile nations, and to be once again a free theocratic nation as in the time of King David. Most of them believed in the coming Age when a son of David's line would sit on the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem and rule with justice and judgment forever. So Peter took them through the magic words of the golden prophecy and brought them to its sublime culmination. *"It shall come to pass, that whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"*.

There he stopped, surveying the multitude for a moment while his listeners waited, tense and expectant. So did he plunge into his real discourse. *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God among you ... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men ... **God raised him up.**"*

The great truth was out! Peter had publicly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus and made that great thing the central feature of all that he was going to say. He did not mince matters. You crucified Christ; **God** has raised Him from the dead. It says a great deal for Peter's sincerity and the impression created by his blazing fervour that apparently no voices were raised in protest and the crowd continued to listen. They listened, while the supremely confident Apostle took them back again to their own Scriptures, our Old Testament, and reminded them of the prophetic words of David describing this very resurrection in all its details. David prophesied of Christ's resurrection; they all knew that well: in a swift transition back to the present Peter connected that prophetic insight with the One of whom he was now talking. *"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses"*. And now, exalted to the heavens, and seated at the right hand of God the Father, He, by His power, has sent this manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon His followers in the sight of all men as a sign and a witness. The outward evidence to all Israel that Jesus of Nazareth had indeed survived death, had risen from the grave and was now possessed of all power in heaven and earth, resided in what they could see and hear in the faces and words of this band of men who had followed Jesus. They had dispersed, panic-stricken, into hiding at the time of His arrest and execution, and had now come out boldly to proclaim "He lives – we have seen and conversed with him". No wonder Peter concluded this appeal to his fellow-countrymen on that memorable day with the stirring assertion *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified"*.

There is perhaps no wonder, either, that his hearers, or at least a great proportion of them, were convinced and conscience-stricken. *"Men and brethren"* they cried, the close relationship in which they all, people and Apostles alike, stood as fellow – *"what shall we do?"* That expression *"men*

and brethren" meant that they invoked heirs of the Law Covenant and joint-participants in the commonwealth of Israel. There was no animosity or resentment for the blunt manner in which Peter laid the blame for the death of Jesus at their doors. They accepted their guilt and by implication assented to the truth of the Apostle's exegesis of their ancient Scriptures. They put themselves unreservedly into the disciples' hands. *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*

The answer, of course, was what it has always been since in similar circumstances. *"Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ"*. That was all. There was to be no exacting of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth as was the standard laid down by their own Law, given by the hand of Moses at Sinai. God asked only repentance and conversion, and the slate was wiped clean. Of course, that repentance and conversion involved the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Messiah, as the One that should come to bring righteousness and peace to a troubled world. It meant interpreting the prophecies in a new and clearer light. No longer were they to think of His coming in terms of a military conqueror who would drive out the Romans and restore Israel to her ancient glory without any thought of what was to happen to anybody else. They were now to think in terms of a worldwide redemptive plan under which the Messiah would eventually come to all men in the endeavour to save as many as could be or willed to be saved. Not only the living but the long-past dead, were to have a place in this fruit of the Resurrection. *"The promise"* Peter told them *"is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call"* and that covers, according to Paul, all men, for God, he says *"now calls all men everywhere to repent"*. For perhaps the first time in their lives those Jews standing there in Jerusalem, listening to the first Christian preacher and first Christian sermon, understood what their own prophet Isaiah had meant when he told their fathers that they as a nation were destined to become a light to the nations, to declare the salvation of God to the ends of the earth.

There were three thousand converts. It was a marvellous sequel to a wonderful day. Many of them must have returned to their home countries during the next few weeks, their Pentecost pilgrimage ended. That fact may have something to

do with the very early establishment of Christianity in so many parts of the Roman Empire. In the meantime and until they departed from Jerusalem, they, with the native converts, *"continued steadfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and of prayers"*. Peter found himself at once, leading a Christian community several thousand strong, a community exhibiting all the zeal and enthusiasm of the newly converted, and all the necessity of instruction in the faith which that new situation involved. In addition to the spirit of prophecy Peter undoubtedly had great need of the spirit of wisdom during the strenuous days which lay immediately ahead.

(To be continued) AOH

FAITH'S TOUCH

Look up! Dear heart, for in thy pain
There's One who knows thy grief.
That lowly One, the Nazarene
Whose garment hem a woman touched,
From Him a healing power went,
A virtue which alone was His,
To heal the body wracked with pain,
And mind, and heart, which needed rest
From care and life's anxiety.
Faith, too, went with outstretched hand
And this it was which clasped His hem,
And when again she did withdraw,
Faith's hand was filled with healing balm,
And health; and peace of mind she knew.
For He who hushed the angry sea
Had given her health, and she was free.
Her eyes no longer filled with tears
Because of Satan's work of years –
For now, from Him whose power held
So many years within his grasp,
A life with sickness overcast
Was changed to one of praise and song
To Him to whom it did belong.
But – if He does not heal thy frame,
Lose not thy faith in His dear Name,
For it has power to give thee life
Beyond the span which now is thine;
And life eternal thou shalt find
If Faith's thy hand which thou dost stretch;
And virtue from His life will flow
To thee as well, and thou shalt know
That this is better far for thee.
A Hope of Life – eternally

WFF

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO ABRAHAM

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed" (Gal. 3.8 RSV). The Gospel preached to Abraham! In what sense was the Gospel preached to the old patriarch, two thousand years before Christ? Jesus said of him *"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad"* (John 8.56 RSV). What did Abraham back there in the middle of human history, see of the future day of Christ that gave him that happiness? We do not know all that God said to him in their hours of communion; we do have a definite statement that is the key to all God's outworking purposes in the realm of human history, *"all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you"* (Gen. 12.3 NIV). That promise runs like a golden thread through all the centuries since Abraham, confirming that at the last, in some sunlit day of the future, the tragedy of Eden will be rectified and all mankind enter into happiness. That implies the abolition of evil and the end of death. It demands that the prospect that stretched before the first man at the beginning, before sin and death entered, will be restored. Man will at the end enter upon the ages of eternity and life everlasting. That was the Gospel preached to Abraham, in outline, obscurely granted, but in sufficient detail to give him a basis for that faith which never left him to his dying day.

It was a long time before God elaborated on His promise. It was passed to Isaac (Gen. 21.12) and then to Jacob (Gen. 35.12) but it was not until Israel stood before God at Mount Sinai on their way to the Promised Land that the light began to shine. By then it was known and accepted that this foretold "seed of blessing" was to come through the line of Jacob (Ex. 19.3-6). Neither Ishmael nor any other of the sons of Abraham, nor Esau the twin brother of Jacob, were included in this aspect of God's plan. Israel, the nation that sprang from the twelve sons of Jacob, was to carry the line on to the seed of blessing. In the meantime they themselves were to represent the things of God in a godless world and preserve His truth and His laws through coming generations. In a sense they were already to be a blessing to the nations and to that extent partake of membership of the promised Seed. *"If you will obey*

my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; ... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." is how the Lord described them, to declare His standards and His salvation to the ends of the earth.

Sadly, they failed at the outset. Despite their initial enthusiasm, *"all that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient"* (Exod. 24.7), they soon tired of the commission and demonstrated their unworthiness. But Moses their leader did not lose heart, and that was because he too, like Abraham six centuries before him, had received intimations of the Lord's future purposes in His talks with him at the top of the Mount. *"The Lord said unto me ... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth ... and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him"* (i.e. call him to account – Deut. 18.15-19 RSV). Where Moses had failed to preserve the nation's loyalty to its commission the new Prophet would succeed, but Israel must pass through a long period of sore travail first.

Fifteen hundred years later the Prophet appeared. Israel had never forgotten Moses' words. They waited and hoped for the promised Leader who would show them how to become the Seed of blessing. When John the Baptist appeared they sent to ask him if he was "that Prophet" who should appear in the Last Days (John 1.21, 25, 45), and John had to tell them he was not; he was only a herald of the One that was to come. But in the halcyon days of preaching immediately following the resurrection of Christ the fulfilment was made known. Peter, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminded his hearers of the prediction of Moses and told them that the promised Prophet had come in the person of the Lord Christ (Acts 3.18-26). Jesus Christ had presented Himself to them, and been rejected by the majority. He had been accepted by the few, and had now returned to His Father until the time was ripe for the full realization of the promised blessing, and would then come to earth as the promised Seed of Abraham for the purpose of blessing all the nations of the earth. The heavens must receive Jesus, said Peter, *"until the*

times of restitution of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." At last and in the fulness of time the one whom Moses had foreseen in prediction and Abraham had beheld in vision had appeared amongst men for their salvation and would yet appear the second time for their eternal blessing.

Meanwhile another aspect of the promise was made known. Five hundred years after Moses came David, king of Israel. David, first of a royal line which the Lord said was to culminate in the promised Messiah, synonymous with the Prophet of whom Moses had spoken. Whereas Moses had spoken of his prophetic and priestly office as a teacher and pastor of the people, David was given a vision of his royal office as leader and King (2 Sam. 7.12-16). Psalm 89 enshrines the Lord's words to David. He is the figurehead named in the Psalm but it is easy to see that the allusions are to the greater David of the future. The first king of Israel, back there a thousand years before Christ, was just a representative or type. This coming King is anointed by God to his commission (vs. 20; see also Psalm 2). He is destined to be known as the first born Son of God and superior to all the kings of the earth. Phil. 2.9-11 reiterates this, that He is supreme over all created things in heaven or on earth, and that to His name shall every knee bow and to His lordship every tongue confess. To the Ephesians Paul declared that He ascends far above all heavens, omnipresent in all things (Eph.4.10). He is to endure forever; his kingship is eternal (Psalm 89.29-37). All this is abundantly confirmed by virtually all the prophets and holy men of old time in their pen-pictures of the coming Millennial reign of Christ over the earth. Then all men will hear the Gospel proclaimed as it has never been proclaimed before, and the consequent blessings follow the conversion and reconciliation to God of those who respond to that Gospel appeal, will make the original promise to Abraham a glorious reality.

In a third sphere of thought this great Prophet and King is also foreshadowed as a Priest. He is not a sacrificing Priest like the Levitical order headed by Aaron, the brother of Moses, but a royal Priest whose office begins after all the suffering and sacrifice is over, one whose mission is to dispense blessing. David, again, foresaw this in Psalm 110 where he pictures Christ as a "*Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek*". Melchizedek was a

combined king and priest "of the Most High God" in Canaan in the days of Abraham. All that is known of him is that in the exercise of his kingly and priestly duty he dispensed gifts to men. Even Abraham acknowledged his superiority. David, and later on the writer of the Book of Hebrews make him on this account a picture of Christ. This was not in His coming to earth to die for man's sin for that was represented in the office of Aaron, but in His resurrection glory when He comes again in the power of His kingdom to bring blessings to mankind. Hence Psalm 110 has to do with the Second Advent and the Millennial reign of Christ, when He will, as the Psalm says, overthrow all His enemies, the forces of evil, and establish justice in the earth. Psalm 72 has a lot to say about this. "*In his days shall the righteous flourish and (there shall be) abundance of peace ... men shall be blessed in him and all nations shall call him blessed ... and let the whole earth be filled with his glory*".

The promised Seed of Abraham that is ultimately to bless all families of the earth, then, is Christ. Christ, at His Second Advent, when He comes to wind up the affairs of earth now under the rule of man, a rule which has brought misery, disaster and finally utter ruin upon the world we know. Christ, at His Second Advent, when He comes to establish what Peter calls "*a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3.13), will bind Satan that he deceives the nations no more (Rev. 20.1-2). He will restrain evil in the earth so that nothing shall hurt nor destroy (Isa. 11.9). He will lead all men to the point of decision, for an option for conversion and acceptance of Christ. They will have the opportunity with the consequent outcome of eternal life or death, so that ultimately the whole creation shall be purged of sin; these are the blessings to be dispensed by the Seed of Abraham, earth's Prophet, Priest and King, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham so many centuries ago. This is the Gospel preached to Abraham. There is a further factor. Paul, writing to the Galatians, showed that Christ is the promised Seed in the words "*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one 'And to your offspring', which is Christ*" (Gal. 3.16). By this he indicated that not all of Abraham's eight or more sons were included in the promise,

but only through one, Isaac, and so through David to Christ. But in Gal. 3.29 (RSV) Paul goes on to say *"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise"*. In that brief sentence Paul uncovers one of the deepest truths of the New Testament, that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is associating with Himself a company comprising those who have been His consecrated and dedicated followers in this life. As a Body to a Head, His Church is to serve with Him in the administration of the promised blessings to all in the age to come. This is what John meant when he saw in vision of the glorified Church reigning with Christ a thousand

years (Rev. 20.4). This is what our Lord Himself meant when He said to His disciples *"Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Matt. 19.28 NRSV). That emphasizes the supreme fact that the call to Christians in this day and Age is to complete dedication of life and talents and possessions to the Lord Jesus Christ and His service, that at the end they may be included in that elect company which shall possess the privilege of bringing blessings to all the families of the earth.

TH

GOD'S SCALE OF VALUES

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with the span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance" (Isa. 40.12 NRSV).

In our daily lives, whatever our vocation may be, we are governed by a scale of values. Deeds and words are comparable with other deeds and words. We judge an action by its results. We adopt one course of conduct in preference to another course and invest it with inherent value. When we become children of God a change takes place. The process is not changed, but the ideal, the standard, is altered. Things that seemed important have lost their importance; things that seemed unattractive become irresistible. We have accepted a different scale of values.

Four instances in the New Testament demonstrate how necessary it is for a man to take the Divine viewpoint if he is to receive the full blessing of God. He must look at things from the holiest viewpoint and accept God's standard to guide his life. The first is described in Mark 10.17-22. This young man had high ideals but he did not feel sure of the eternal life promised to those who kept the Law and because he could not feel sure of living eternally; he thought it must be on account of something he had not done. He was perplexed. Could this new Teacher help him? It was in this frame of mind that he came to Jesus and asked *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* and received the reply in effect, *"If you would enter into life, keep the commandments"*. Having been trying

to do this, he naturally asked, *"What do I lack?"* Jesus knew he had been trying. He knew why he was not satisfied, and He gave him the remedy. **"You lack one thing;** if you would have a mind at rest, go and sell all you have and give to the poor and follow me; lay aside your wealth and take your place with my followers; exchange the relationship of the world for mine." This was the supreme moment in the young man's life, but the answer was unexpected. He found that he valued his wealth above all other things, and above the peace of mind which Jesus promised. In his failure, he went away grieved, but he left behind one who was grieved too. We are privileged to see what he did not see, that Jesus was asking only what the Law asked; he had not realised what was meant by loving the Lord with all his heart, soul, strength and mind. He had made wealth his god and loved it more than the Lord; therefore he was not worthy of that life to which he aspired.

This test is still being applied today. Real consecration demands all. If, when we made our consecration, we withheld something, we shall be lacking when the test comes, and will fail like this young man. We cannot serve two masters, having the smile of the world and the smile of the Lord too. When Jesus said *"He that forsakes not father and mother cannot be my disciple"*. He set a standard that must be maintained.

The second instance is in John 9. This chapter tells the story of a man who had been born blind and to whom Jesus had given sight. Having anointed the man's eyes, He said, *"Go, wash in the*

pool of Siloam". The man said to those who questioned him afterward, "I went, and washed, and I received my sight". This man's gratitude constrained him to become a disciple. It was no good trying to tell him he was dreaming; he knew that once he was blind and that he could now see. Jesus had come to relieve spiritual blindness, but he could only do that to those who realised their need. The Pharisees who questioned the man who was healed said "*We know this man is a sinner*", for Satan had blinded their eyes. The man's reply was "*Whether He is a sinner I do not know, **one thing I know**, that though I was blind now I see*" and he revelled in his new-found light.

We came into the light because we felt we were blind and needed healing. So we have been brought out of darkness into the knowledge of God's Son. A realization of something missing, a conviction of sin, must precede cleansing. That these Pharisees did not know they were spiritually blind is revealed by v.40 "*Are we also blind?*" but the corresponding truth is revealed by the Psalmist in Psalm. 32.1-2 "*Blessed is the man ... whose sin is covered*". Man cannot cover his own sin, God covers it.

The third instance is Luke 10.38-42; 'the one thing needful'. Mary is one who is known as having chosen that part. To get the idea of what Jesus meant we must compare Martha and Mary. Martha thought of the dignity of her house. There was so much to see to; Jesus was such a distinguished guest. Martha's words to Jesus (verse 40) were a direct reproof; but perceive how gently He answered, He said in effect 'you lack a sense of proportion! You have not a proper scale of values. I have come into your house, not because of any need of mine you can supply, but for your sake. I have meat to eat that you know not of; if you had known that, you would have come to me as Mary had done. It is better to partake of my spiritual food than to busy yourself getting a meal for me'. This lesson we can easily apply to life's experiences. The question should be; if we want to entertain the Master, what would He prefer above everything else? But do not let us search our own supplies as Martha did, drawing on our own reserves, without consulting His wishes. Let us first of all find out what He wants us to do. Many have made this mistake in the past, and many do so today; they fret and fume to work out what they think would be to the honour and glory of God, and they find, and

will find, that their work is not approved. There was so much to do that Martha had no time to sit at the Master's feet. Many have tried to convert the world and spend money and energy and life to do that, to prepare a kingdom for Jesus, to prepare a 'feast of fat things' for Him, forgetting that the Lord is going to do all these things Himself in His own due time. **The one thing needful** today is the Lord's approval, and to have this we must adopt His standard of values; but how difficult this is today. The non-essentials are so large, they obscure the more important things. How should we apportion the proper time for providing the necessary things and engage ourselves in witnessing to the Lord and His Kingdom? Have we divided our time in such a way as to win the Lord's approval or have we missed the one thing needful? Are we using the time we are able to give to the study of God's Word to the best advantage? Are we day by day trying to live more closely to the pattern of the Master or are we spending our time in more or less fruitless discussions? We need heavenly wisdom in this matter of reading and studying His Word with a view to our best development. That is the one thing needful. God is guiding His people through His Word; there is in it encouragement in trial, guidance in doubt, promises of help and protection in the dark days of difficulty, disappointment and despair. The food is there on our table, Divinely provided truth! Do not get so busy about other things as to neglect to eat what the Lord has provided, for doing this we shall be starved.

The fourth instance is Phil. 3.13; "**this one thing I do**". Paul had a busy life in the service of the Lord. He was always an ardent follower of God with a zeal that makes us admire him. He could, no doubt, have made a great name for himself, but towards the end of his career he looked backward, reviewed all his advantages and said "*I count all things as loss because of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord*". Why had he taken upon himself a life of privation and suffering? He had seen Jesus, and that made all the difference! In the glory of the heavenly vision, all other objects of attraction faded. He turned from his own efforts to seek that righteousness which is in Christ Jesus. He had a vision of the glorified Christ and learned that only by identifying himself with the death of Christ could he take part in the First Resurrection. It was the moving force in his life from the day he saw

Jesus on the way to Damascus and not all the experiences he suffered could efface the impression made upon him or dim the supreme hope of being found "*in Him*" at the last. He must witness to Jew and Gentile and open blinded eyes and turn men from darkness to light. To know the Divine will was to do it; to have a vision of the Holy One and witness for Him was sufficient explanation of his having been apprehended of Christ Jesus.

We have likewise been apprehended of Christ Jesus for a similar work of witnessing, to tell forth the way of consecration. Paul longed for the Kingdom to be set up; and so do we, but we are much nearer the kingdom than he was. Faithfulness to the call, to the end, is the only way. Paul realised that, although he had preached to others, he might himself become a castaway if he proved unfaithful (Phil. 3.12-13). "*Not that I have already attained, but this one thing I do*". He was willing to give himself for Him who had laid hold on him and bound him to His service with the cords of love. Only so could he be found "*in him*" at the last and attain that honour, glory and immortality that is the reward of faithfulness.

We can now summarize our findings in these four instances.

(1) The young man who could not make the great denial of self. He failed to appreciate heavenly values and he lacked the one thing

necessary. But how good it is to know that if he failed to accept the first invitation he will come back again and ask the same question "what must I do to inherit life?". He will remember the last time he refused the Master's way of life and chose his own way. "*There is a way which seems right to a man but its end is the way to death.*" (Prov. 14.12 RSV). He found it so. It would be a matter of surprise if he again refuses when the offer of life is made to him.

(2) The young man who rejoiced in his new light would not be long in the company of Jesus before he learned more of the Master's scale of values, unlike the Scribes who, blinded by their own pride, were ready tools for Satan. They adopted his methods and were, as the Lord himself called them, children of Satan.

(3) Martha, who, though she loved Jesus dearly, made sad blunders in the values she put on things, setting too great a store on minor things and neglecting the greater. Surely she took the Master's reproof to heart and learned a great lesson.

(4) Paul, who put all earthly wealth, glory and honour on one scale and found it immeasurably outweighed by the peace of God which passes all understanding, the love which passes knowledge, and the fellowship of Jesus. He looked not on the things that are seen, but on the things which are not seen, things lasting and eternal.

BJD

A DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY

or 'Redeeming the Time'

Doors are very useful parts of a house and have been so for a very long time. They keep in the warmth to a building and they keep out unwanted people and animals. They can have quite exciting things behind them and in a sense offer a temptation to be opened. The first reference to a door in the Bible was to Cain allowing sin to be "crouching at the door". It was an opportunity to do wrong. The next door to be shut and opened was that in the side of the ark which was operated at God's command. Again it was like an opportunity; first to be saved from drowning and secondly as Noah and family with the animals stepped through it again, it was stepping out into a new world.

There is possibly much similarity between doors and gates and they serve similar purposes in many ways. The words door and gate could be

interchangeable in some circumstances. When Peter was brought out of prison by an angel he went to a house where disciples were praying and stood knocking at "the door of the gate" or as more recently translated "outer door". Peter got involved with several doors. The two words may have changed their meaning a little over the centuries. A gate into a walled garden is like a door and has been referred to as such in stories. Exciting opportunities and possibilities lie behind such a door.

There were 'doors of opportunities' in Paul's life. On his second great missionary journey Paul passed through Asia Minor (modern Turkey) visiting the churches he had earlier established. He, with Silas and Timothy sought to expand the work in the region but were prevented by the Holy Spirit. It was as if they were pushing at doors which were

shut and at that time not to be opened. God had another door, a door which led to the Gentiles and this was ready to be opened.

Later he was to be at Ephesus, writing to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 16.9 NRSV) he told them of a great or wide door that was opening for them to do "*effective work*". In his second letter the apostle again speaks of a door opened at Troas which at that moment he could not enter because of his concern for Titus. Then when he was in prison Paul wrote to the Colossians requesting their prayers on his behalf so that God would open a door of opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Life is full of opportunities wherever we are and whatever our life style. Prayer itself is a wonderful opportunity even when we are housebound or unable to move alone. It opens for us a door or window upon the world and all that God is doing in it. Our prayers can support and sustain our brothers and sisters in the multitude of activities in which they are engaged for the Lord.

In his book 'Parables and Metaphors of our Lord', Campbell Morgan, when discussing the parable of the 'Pounds' (Luke 19.11-28) refers to Paul's words to the churches at Ephesus (5.16) and Colossae (4.5) about "*redeeming the time*" (AV). He points out that the apostle is really writing about "buying up the opportunity" and several translations support this (Weymouth, the Amplified NT, Living Bible, Williams and NEB/REB). "Our business" writes Dr. Morgan is "to prosecute the commerce of the Kingdom of God with such diligence as characterizes the success of the merchant-men in the market places of the world".

God provides us with a multitude of opportunities to speak of Jesus and His love to all mankind, to express that love in all kinds of ways to all sorts of people. We tend to be choosy. We are governed by our feelings. Is it really true that we do what we like? Is it really true that we are being disobedient to the Master? If we love Him we will do what He wants irrespective of our feelings or personal desires. Is it so hard? So was going to Calvary, but He did it for you and me.

Perhaps our problem lies in seeing and seizing the opportunity when it comes. We think too slowly. We act even slower. There is a solution to the problem. It has already been mentioned. It's called prayer. Paul needed help in this respect. If that giant of an ambassador for Christ needed help,

surely we do. We need to pray that God will show us clearly the opportunity as it's coming and then give us the strength, the courage and the wisdom to act. We need to pray for one another. God will answer those prayers.

There are one or two references to doors in 'The Revelation'. The most well known of these, was captured in a wonderful picture by Holman Hunt. Jesus is standing outside the door of our heart waiting to share every opportunity in life with us. Have we really let Him in? Or are there some rooms within our heart where the door is still kept locked and where we would rather not allow our Lord to enter?

So the Lord gives us a pound or opportunities today to trade with in the market place of life. It may not be worth so much as a pound was worth ten or one hundred years ago. But its full value is 'what it's worth to the Lord today'. We can make ten pounds with it. We may make five. We have a choice. There is no compulsion. Will that little coin still reside alone at the end of the day – one little pound in a napkin? We don't all have the same pound's worth. James died early as a martyr while brother John lived on till the days of Patmos. The other James, Jesus' natural brother spent his life in Jerusalem while brother Paul went nearly to the end of the Empire. Some are like Ananias who opened the eyes of the great apostle. Some are like Tabitha who made garments for the poor. We probably shall not be burned at the stake like Master Cranmer nor stand before thousands like a well known evangelist. He has his pound, and we have ours. My brother and my sister will have different opportunities. It is just as the Lord sees that we can manage.

We stand on the edge of great opportunities – every morning. Father in Heaven is not trying to sort out yesterday's failures or tomorrow's possibilities. He is with us to make the greatest possible use of today's opportunities. He can do it, if we will let Him.

DN

Gone from us

Sister Kathleen Boote (Hitchen)
Brother Don Harris (Yeovil)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

6. King in Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the city of peace; the city of the great king! Rarely a city of peace during its long and turbulent history, but certainly so in the days of David. He was the man who made Jerusalem the capital of Israel, and laid the foundation of the claim that has endured three thousand years to the present day.

Israel did not possess Jerusalem before the days of David. From at least as far back as the time of Abraham, and probably long before that, Jerusalem was the central fortress of the Jebusites, a powerful Canaanite tribe which most likely occupied the countryside for a considerable distance around. They called the city Jebus, but that was not its original name. In the days of Abraham it was Salim, the name of the Babylonian god of peace. This is why it is known as the city of peace; a name that must go back to when Babylonian or Sumerian influence was prominent in Canaan. The later name 'Jerusalem' is in Hebrew 'Uru-salim', 'ur' being a Semitic term for 'city', hence 'city of peace'. David reverted to the original Semitic name, by which it has since been known.

Fully aware of its strategic importance, David's first action upon becoming king of the united nation was to dispossess the Jebusites. The city was a small place but strongly fortified. The Jebusites taunted David with his inability to capture it (2 Sam. 5.6-10; 1 Chron. 11.4-9). But someone in David's forces knew of a possible means of entrance. David made an announcement coupled with a promise. *"Whoso getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, he shall be chief and captain"* (2 Sam. 5.8). Joab, David's nephew, a daring and skilful warrior, did so, and won the coveted honour.

The AV translators did not understand what was meant by this "getting up to the gutter" (Heb. *sinnor*, meaning a channel or shaft) and the precise means by which David captured Jebus was therefore not known. Then in 1867 an Englishman, Captain Warren, engaged in surveying work in Palestine, was standing at the Virgins Fountain, the spring that rises in a cave well below the city walls which feeds the Pool at Siloam, when he noticed a hitherto unknown hole in the roof. His curiosity aroused, he investigated and found what appeared to be a vertical shaft leading upwards. By means of

ropes and other appliances he managed to climb this shaft and found that it led into an underground passage cut in the rock. Following the passage he emerged into a kind of vaulted cave into which a chink of daylight penetrated. Wriggling through a gap in the masonry he found himself standing in a street in Jerusalem inside the city walls. He realised at once that he had solved the mystery of the "gutter". This shaft had been made by the Jebusites to enable them to obtain water from the fountain far below in times of siege, and Captain Warren had repeated the feat accomplished by Joab and his men three millenniums earlier. Taken unawares by warriors emerging from this unexpected gap in their defences, the Jebusites were overpowered and the fortress surrendered to David.

The Jebusites remained, side by side with the Israelites. Araunah, who later on sold David the land on which the Temple was to be built, was a Jebusite. Solomon made them bondmen, a kind of second-class citizens, condemned to the menial tasks of the community, and after that they disappeared from history. But David now was king of Israel in Jerusalem.

Nothing succeeds like success. The growing power and influence of this new king of a now united and virile nation soon attracted the notice of the rulers round about. The first to take overt action was Hiram, king of Tyre (2 Sam. 5.11) who sent 'messengers', evidently an embassy of congratulation on his success, and to establish friendly relations, with presents consisting of cedars of Lebanon and craftsmen to assist David in his building programme.

Hiram was a king of David's stamp, far seeing, courageous and a born organiser. His people, the Phoenicians, were the merchants and the traders of the ancient world and Hiram evidently saw in this rising kingdom of Israel a new and profitable market for his wares. He himself was the founder of a dynasty of Phoenician kings which endured for something like two centuries and under whose administration the Phoenicians attained the peak of their power and influence. Under Hiram and his successors Phoenician ships sailed to India, West Africa, Britain and South America, two thousand years before Columbus! Jezebel, the idolatrous wife of King Ahab of Israel in the time of Elijah,

was a granddaughter of Hiram. Phoenician territory and its seaports extended from Tripolis and Byblos in the north, through Sidon and Tyre to Haifa and Joppa in the south, a coastline two hundred miles long. Behind that coastline lay the new and rapidly expanding nation of Israel, ripe for introduction to the varied products of the wider world which Hiram's merchants would be only too pleased to sell them. No wonder Hiram hastened to make friends with David. But this thing became a snare to David. Up to now Israel had been a pastoral and agricultural people, living on the produce from their farms and pasture lands, simple folk relatively untouched by the glittering prizes this world has to offer. All this was to change. They became aware of the many aids to easier living, to the luxuries and means of indulgence and amusement, which the technology of that age could give them. They were shown articles of utility and works of art that came from far distant lands of which they had never before heard. Rare timbers and costly building stone for their houses, elaborate furnishings and utensils, fine raiment and intricate jewellery, all these could be theirs, at a price. By the time of Solomon the masses of the people were working harder than ever before to produce the foodstuffs and farm products which were to pay for all this. A new class began to emerge in Israel, an 'upper class' of aristocrats who enriched themselves with all this trade at the expense of the working classes below them. It is not always realised that the magnificence of the kingdom of David and Solomon, and the kings who came after them, was built upon the toil and sweat of the people.

Friendship with the Phoenicians brought idolatry, for they were idolaters, worshippers of Baal and Ashtoreth and Dagon. The uncompromising loyalty of David kept it at bay during the forty years of his reign, but it gained a foothold in the days of Solomon and after that Israel was rarely free from its influence. David may have received the ambassadors of Hiram with all sincerity and believed he was acting for the good of his people, but it was a dark day for Israel when he entered into alliance with Hiram the idolater and man of the world. In his enthusiasm he quite forgot the Divine injunction given to his forebears in the early days of their nationhood, "*separate yourselves from the people of the land*".

The Apostle Paul must have had something of the same thing in mind when he advised the Corinthians "*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? ... Therefore come out from them, and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you*" (2 Cor. 6.14-17 NIV). It is so fatally easy for Christians to become entangled with worldly interests and pursuits hostile to their highest spiritual interests only to find too late, that it has brought leanness into their souls. The principle enunciated by Jesus "*seek first his kingdom*" stands for all time as the ideal of the Christian life. Like Abraham of old, we must confess that we are "*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*", seeking another country, a heavenly, in which, when it is attained all our hopes and aspirations will be realised.

The attitude of Hiram king of Tyre was one thing; that of David's old antagonists the Philistines was quite another. Whilst David was king over Judah in Hebron they had left him alone, content with their domination of northern Israel achieved at the death of Saul. Now that David was the acknowledged king over all Israel, north and south, and rapidly organizing his entire realm into a powerful federation, they could not afford to ignore the threat. 1 Chron. 14.8 tells that as soon as the Philistines heard that David had become king over all Israel, they sallied forth and invaded Judah, spreading themselves in the valley of Rephaim to the south-west of Jerusalem in an endeavour to surround and capture the city. This time David was a little more discreet than he had been with Hiram; he went to the Lord with his problem. It is evident that in the face of this threat he was going to trust in the Lord's leading rather than in his own military judgment and skill. "*Go up*" said the Lord "*for I will deliver them into your hand*". The victory must have been a momentous one. The name which David gave to the battlefield, Baal-perazim, the 'breaking of Baal', was immortalized three centuries later by Isaiah (28.21) when searching for a simile to describe the rising up of God to bring the powers of evil to an end at

the close of this present age. He declared that "*the Lord will rise up as in Mount Perazim, he will be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon*" (RSV) to effect His great work. David followed up the victory by burning the idols of the Philistines which they had left behind in the haste of their retreat. It was a kind of poetic justice for their capture of the Ark of the Covenant some eighty years or so earlier. He then met a second invasion by pursuing them all the way from the valley of Gibeon to their own capital city of Gaza. That intervention of the Lord virtually ended the Philistine menace for Israel. Although David and others had to ward off occasional attacks in later years they never again posed a serious threat to Israel's security. As it had been in the days of Samuel, it was God, and only God, who gave Israel true victory over the Philistines. When they attempted to fight the invaders in their own strength the result was always disaster. Here is a lesson for the Christian in every aspect of his war against sin and evil. As Paul exhorts, "*Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day*" (Eph. 6.10-17).

So "*the fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations*" (1 Chron. 14.17 RSV). But these material successes brought their own snares. Secure upon his throne, having the allegiance of all his people, he had nothing to fear from his enemies. Now the products and luxuries, the good things of this world were at his beck and call and there was every incentive for David to use his supreme power as king to sit back and take all that life had to offer.

He was not the first, and by no means the last, to have been weaned away in measure from his first sincerity and idealism by the lure of sudden riches. Nowhere is this better shown than in his matrimonial affairs. His original marriage to Saul's daughter Michal, the bride of his youth, was now some twenty years old. She was still with him, but during that twenty years, he had taken six more wives and an unspecified number of concubines. Now that he was settled in Jerusalem he went on taking more wives. Not surprisingly, he finished up with nineteen sons and probably as many daughters by his wives and unnamed concubines. He reaped the consequences in later life by the jealousies and intrigues, leading to rebellions and murders, which were common to every Eastern potentate who possessed a similar establishment. It was not said of David, as it was of Solomon his son, that "*his wives turned away his heart*". He did at least maintain his faith in God and his abhorrence of pagan idolatry to the end of his days. This is certainly a measure of the steadfastness of his character and loyalty in circumstances that would have wrecked the faith of a lesser man. But the more the history of David is studied the more evident it becomes that nearly all the troubles and disasters of his life were the direct consequence of his many marriages. Had he kept to the Divine ideal first instituted in the Garden of Eden and remained true to his first love, who stood by him so loyally during the dark days of his flight from Saul, he would perhaps have lived, and died, a happier man.

(To be continued) AOH

The Accuracy of Luke

In Luke and in the Acts the writer gives numerous facts, incidental to the main story, which could leave him open to criticism. The suppositions of some scholars have proved groundless. Biblical archaeology continues to uncover evidence to support Luke's statements. Rendle Short in '*Modern discovery and the Bible*' writes of Luke "He constantly, and for no apparent reason gives the names of islands passed, tells on which side the ship sailed by, whether they ran in a straight course before the wind or whether they tacked, whether the wind was favourable or unfavourable, what

ports served inland towns, in which direction the harbour looked and so on." Rendle Short quotes from Bishop Gore "It should, of course, be recognised that modern archaeology has almost forced upon critics of Luke a verdict of remarkable accuracy in all his allusions to secular facts and events. Perhaps the greatest living authority on ancient history, Eduard Meyer, has called the work of Luke, 'one of the most important works which remain to us from antiquity' and Meyer has certainly no prejudices in favour of religious tradition."

THE EVERLASTING FOUNDATION **OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE**

Part 2 of a Conference Discourse

The first part of the discourse appeared in the Nov/Dec issue and it is completed below. It begins with further references to archaeological studies of the Temples at Jerusalem.

Yet another fascinating discovery was also made. Next to the Chief Foundation stone a hole was found cut out of the native rock, one foot across and one foot deep. It was filled with earth, which on being cleared away, one of the excavating engineers discovered a small earthenware jar standing in an upright position that had been placed there for some purpose. It is known that the Hebrews bestowed great care on the Chief Foundation stone, and its laying is mentioned a number of times in Kings and Chronicles (2 Ch. 8.16). A ceremony for the laying of this stone for Solomon's Temple is not given in scripture (one is given for the second Temple) but it is thought that the laying of the foundation stone of Solomon's Temple would be laid in the presence of the king and his court with ceremonies befitting the occasion, as the laying of foundation stones was the occasion for celebration (see Job 38.6, 7; Isa. 48.13; 51.13).

The discovery of the jar and the character of relics found close by led archaeologists to suspect it had something to do with the ceremony of laying the foundation stone. (See Zech. 3.9, and the Jewish Encyclopaedia). The ritual laying of foundation stones is dealt with in the Encyclopaedia Britannica under "cornerstone", where it is noted that, even in the West, receptacles containing various objects are placed within or nearby such a stone. In the Middle Ages foundation stones of church buildings were anointed with chrism (oil used for baptism, confirmation and ordination).

Under the Mosaic Law prophets, priests and kings were set apart for God's service by being anointed with holy oil. The Tabernacle also, and all its furniture, was dedicated to God by being anointed with the holy oil (Ex. 30.26-30; see Genesis 18.19; 31.13; 35.14, 15 where Jacob anoints a stone, and renames the place 'House of God'). The foundation stone of the Temple would also be anointed with holy oil, to indicate that the sacred edifice was set apart for the service of the Living God. This ancient jar, an oil jar, is thought to have contained the holy oil for the consecration of the

foundations, and was subsequently placed by the anointed stone. Of note also are fragments of pottery, one of which bears the stamp of a dove with outspread wings, and although it was used as a symbol of the Phoenician empire, it is also a symbol of the holy spirit that came upon Jesus.

The laying of the foundation stone would undoubtedly be a time of great joy. The laying of the foundation stone for the Second Temple was a time of rejoicing. Ezra writes in chapter 3.10, 11: *"When the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the LORD, the priests in vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph, with cymbals according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, 'for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel'. And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."* (NRSV)

When this second, Zerubbabel's Temple was built it was not erected on the original foundation stones that formed a base for the actual Temple building. A new foundation base was laid. They did not have the resources, or the manpower to build as Solomon had. Because the Second Temple was not built on the original foundation base, uneven spaces and levels came about in the outer courtyard. Historians have noted this fact.

The prophet Zechariah was used to encourage the returned exiles and when speaking of their rebuilding in chapter 4 verses 7-9 he alludes to the joy of seeing another stone brought in and laid, this time as part of the Temple superstructure, above ground: *"What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'. Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you'"* (NRSV).

In this text the spirit of prophecy was also pointing towards the Son of God. It was God's Holy Spirit that guided and brought Jesus Christ

into Jerusalem, just before He was to be placed not only as the everlasting Foundation Rock and Chief Cornerstone, but also the Headstone or Capstone of all of God's promises and prophecies. When He came into Jerusalem for the last time, a great crowd of people welcomed Him and cried out as prophesied: *"Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest heaven"* (Matt. 21.9 NRSV; Luke 19.36-38).

If events went according to the great law of Moses, the High Priest, one of the Aaronic high-priestly line, would also welcome this King and anoint Him with holy oil as King of Israel, with ceremony and occasion that would outshine any other. In fact the High Priest at that time should have been John the Baptist; he qualified to be High Priest as he was the genuine descendant of the high-priestly line. But it was not to be this way and Jesus knowing John's High Priestly position in the eyes of God, had approached him for baptism, but it was God Himself who anointed Jesus.

It is interesting to note here that Zechariah uses the expression "Headstone" which is another type of cornerstone, the topmost and crowning stone of a structure. The psalmist testifies to this when writing of the Messiah in Psalm 118.19-23 (NRSV): *"Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD. The righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."*

It is also interesting to note the time of the bringing in of Jesus into Jerusalem for the last time. Our Lord's public ministry lasted for about three and a half years, this was now His fourth year, when he would lay down His life and become the everlasting foundation of a heavenly Temple and also of a heavenly Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is itself a temple. The city is cubiform like the Holy of Holies in the temple (I Kings 6.20). New Jerusalem and the new temple is one and the same thing. Revelation 3.12 tell us that faithful ones will become pillars in the temple and bear the name of the New Jerusalem. The picture in Revelation is of God as a temple to the faithful, and the faithful as a temple to God, the New Jerusalem being the new temple in its perfected existence.

It was in the fourth year after over 3 years of

preparation that the Chief Foundation stone of Solomon's Temple was laid. In fact, even more astounding, is that in 1 Kings 6.1, 37 and in 2 Chron. 3.2, 3 we are given the exact date when the foundation stone was laid, in the second month, the month of Ziv. Nisan was the first month and began the year; Ziv was the second month of the year.

When was the foundation of the Second Temple laid? Rebuilding of the Second Temple began under Governor Zerubbabel, High Priest Joshua, and prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The faithful scribe Ezra gives a history of rebuilding, and writes of the laying of the foundation stone in the month of Ziv in the second year of their coming out of Babylon, see Ezra 3.7-13, and referring to a letter sent to Darius in 5.16 stating that Sheshbazzar (Babylonian name for Zerubbabel) laid the Temple's foundation. 1 Esdras 5.57 also records *'they began, and laid the foundation of God in the new moon of the second month of the second year of their coming to Judah and Jerusalem.'* (6) Eventually the work stopped, see Ezra 4.24, and then resumed, see Ezra 5.1, 2, and it is then that the rest of the foundation groundwork was completed (see Hag. 2.18; Zech. 7.1; 8.9; Ezra 6.1-3), sixteen years after the original foundation stone was laid. The foundation stone for the Second Temple was laid in the month of Ziv, the groundwork being completed only 16 years later due to delay and opposition. This is no coincidence. When did Jesus Christ ascend into heaven becoming the unshakeable foundation? He ascended, we know, forty days after His resurrection, not 40 days after His death but His resurrection (Acts 1.3). Counting 40 days from His resurrection in the month of Nisan we arrive at the date of the month of Ziv for the time. Jesus ascended into heaven, the time when *'a tried and precious and a sure foundation stone was laid in heavenly Zion'* as Isaiah wrote, placed exactly when the foundation stones of the first and second Temple were laid. It was no coincidence. And Jesus applied Psalm 118, concerning the rejected stone, to His hearers and Himself (Matt. 21.42; Mk. 12.10, 11; Lk. 20.17;) right after giving the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, forming two parables. Those likened to vinedressers who cast the heir out of the vineyard and murdered Him, are now builders throwing the stone aside as useless. But Jesus uses the Psalm to give a glimpse of what is to happen to Him after He is killed. He is to become the head of the corner, (Psa. 118.22 ASV) raised to a place of power, that God's purpose would not be

defeated (see Acts 4.8-12; 1 Pet. 2.4-7; Rom. 9.32, 33). He is the ultimate precious stone, the cornerstone of all things.

Once placed in position **all else was and is certain**. Others knew this also. It seems that fallen elements among God's heavenly sons, demons, united all their efforts to mount an insurrection at that time. They could not crack Jesus' integrity while on Earth; they failed in turning Him aside from faithfulness to His Father. Now they would attempt a direct assault. It appears from the reading of a text in one of Paul's letters (although it is not Paul's main point) that Almighty God Himself had to wield almighty power in raising Jesus from the dead and installing Him above every other thing. (Eph. 1.15-23 Williams) *"This is why I myself since I have heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus and in all His people, never cease to thank God for you when I mention you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may grant you the Spirit to give wisdom and revelation which comes through a growing knowledge of Him; by having the eyes of your heart enlightened, so that you may know what the hope is to which He calls you, how gloriously rich God's portion in His people is and how surpassingly great is His power for us who believe measured by His tremendously mighty power when He raised Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand in heaven, far above every other government, authority, power and dominion, yea far above every other title that can be conferred not only in this world but in the world to come."*

It was as though all the demons were struggling to prevent Christ's resurrection and ascension, being necessary for God to wield Almighty power, verse 19, "infinite might" according to Weymouth; "surpassing greatness of his power", (Moffatt; Wilson); "the supremacy of his strength", Lattimore. It suggests great effort. Once risen and ascended Jesus' trials were over. He became the unshakeable foundation of a Temple of worship that can never be overturned because its foundation is immovable.

One of the qualities a foundation stone must possess is this unshakeability. All structural materials have to undergo what is called stress testing to ensure they can withstand loads and strain greater than those they will be subject to, even when the calculations show they can and especially in order to give the materials a margin of safety.

The testing of Jesus down here was in no way a lack of confidence on God's part, for He had al-

ready, even thousands of years previously, expressed the utmost confidence in Him. Jesus, even before coming to Earth was no novice likely to fail. The writer of Hebrews also informs us in chapter 2:17 that in order to meet the requirements as the Chief Agent of salvation he was "*obliged to become like his brothers in all respects, that he become a merciful and faithful high priest*"; because the writer says he is assisting humans not angels. He must endure hardship and sufferings as a human, that "*he is able to help those who are being tested*" (2.18 NRSV), able to sympathise with others as "*one who in every respect has been tested*" (4.15 NRSV). Like the foundation stone, there must be no hairline fractures, no imperfections.

These tested qualities of Jesus make him a precious stone. When we think of precious stones, precious rock, we think of jewels, very valuable and expensive stones, qualities forged in time and experience, and this is also why the prophet Isaiah says (54.11 NRSV) "*I ... will lay your foundation with sapphires*." The throne in Ezekiel (1.26; 10.1), from which God's Word proceeded is made 'as if of sapphire'. It has a blue colour like the sky depicting a heavenly scene. Sapphire also has a high refractive index, so that when we look at it, it scatters and bends light in every direction giving the impression we are looking at something wonderful, a heavenly being (Is. 9.7).

Another quality that qualifies Jesus Christ to be the everlasting foundation is that he is "*the origin of God's creation*" (Rev. 3.14 NRSV). Deuteronomy 32.18 speaks of "*The Rock who fathered you*" (NIV see also NKJ) and using an eloquent metaphor, God by the prophet Isaiah calls to mind the quarry and its operation, reminding Israel from where they had come (Rom. 4.11; Isa. 51.1 NRSV) "*Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.*"

The "rock" pictured Abraham, and the quarry or 'hollow of the pit' Sarah who bore Isaac. However, since the birth of Isaac was by divine power and a miraculous act, the quarrying out of the Firstborn has its greatest application in that the Son of God was hewn out of God Himself. He was moulded by the Greatest Artisan and Stone Mason. Nothing ever has or ever will displace Him from God's side; nothing will ever be His equal. "*Greater is he that*

is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4.4 Wilson). Paul, imprisoned in a Roman jail, near the end of his life (2 Tim 4.8) writes a final letter to his beloved friend Timothy. It was the time of great tribulation, the Neronian persecution that would see Paul and probably also Timothy martyred (2.3). Encouraging Timothy, Paul wrote: "*God's firm foundation stands*" (2.19 NRSV), in other words, 'you've no need to be anxious, nothing can overturn God's work', "*bearing this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his.'*"

Jesus is not alone in worshipping God; there are many other spiritual stones that are both individually and collectively a Temple that offers praise and sacrifice to the Living God. They both form the Temple, and are individually each a temple. They are all constructed upon Jesus Christ, because the great apostle stated forcefully that "*no man can lay any other foundation than what has been laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor 3.11 NRSV). All of Paul's teaching was based upon Christ Jesus. Paul speaks of the body of Christ as a vast Temple, wherein every Christian is a living stone in the spiritual edifice, and Christians are further reminded, "*You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner-stone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the LORD. In him you also are being built with all the others into a spiritual dwelling for God.*" (Eph 2.20-22 REB; see 1 Pet. 2.4-8).

We are the superstructure, and just as the foundations were tested before being laid (Luke 22.31; Matt. 20.22, 23), it appears that we also will be 'tested' as Paul writes in 1 Cor. 3.12-15. God is preparing us in His quarry down here, amid the noise and tumult of earth. Rugged and shapeless are the stones to begin with, no wonder that the blows of the hammer fall heavily, that the chisel is sharp, and the polishing severe before the stones are ready. As 1 Kings 6.7 states: "*And the house, when it was in the building, was built of stone made ready at the quarry.*" (ASV. See REB)

It is interesting to note that ancient stonemasons in laying a row of stones begin with the corner-stone, and for every 12 feet another stone, a foundation stone, of the same height is also laid. Then the mason's measuring line is stretched tightly over the outer top corner of each. This gives the line of frontage and elevation to all the stones that fill in the space between them. When laying further

courses of stone, the foundation cornerstone is used as a guide, a plummet being dropped to it to align them. And for every seventh course another corner-stone had to be placed in position. A foundation stone every 12 feet, a cornerstone every 7th course, interesting numbers! And not only this, but some of the limestone in building the Temple Mount Platform, and it is thought also the Temple, contained iron within it and is called lodestone or magnetite. When stones of this sort are laid they attract each other and bind together like a magnetic grapple (see Deut. 8.9).

The ancient method still used today, of alternating stones laid across the width of a wall, called headers, with stones laid lengthwise, called stretchers, is another combination, which gives great additional strength. So strong were the foundations of Solomon's Temple that anything, no matter how heavy or how large could stand firm. In fact at the time of Jesus, the outer walls raised on top of the foundation stones by Herod were of colossal dimensions. Josephus informs us that the lowest point of the wall was erected to the height of more than 300 cubits, over 500 feet! And that does not include the foundation.

There are still many stones in the Hands of the Builder and though the stones are cut from earthly rock, and squared that they may enter into an everlasting structure, really the hand of God, or the finger of God that the scriptures tell us represents His spirit (Lk. 11.20; see also Ex. 8.19; 31.18; Deut. 9.10), does not now write on stone, it touches human hearts. We must be of the soft white limestone, of that which was used to build the Temple and its foundations, the 'royal Jerusalem limestone', for then we may be moulded, chiselled, and shaped. The harder limestone variety in Jerusalem was too hard for cutting, and could not be used, it was too brittle.

"Oh for more mouldings of the Hand that works a change so vast!"

KW

(5) Recent Discoveries on the Temple Hill, p71

(6) Esdras is the name of two apocryphal books attributed to Ezra, one preserved in Greek called either 1 Esdras or 3 Esdras; one preserved in Latin and called either 2 Esdras or 4 Esdras. Both were written originally in Hebrew, in Israel: the first probably dates from the fourth century BC, the second from the first century AD.

KHAZARIA

Questions are sometimes asked about a Jewish kingdom said to have existed during the Middle Ages in southern Russia. Although receiving scant attention in the history books it is a fact that such a kingdom did exist. The Russians as a people did not appear until about the 10th century and then only in the north. Prior to that time the southern area, now known as the Ukraine and the Caucasus, was populated by descendants of the ancient Scythians (the Meshech and Tubal of the Old Testament). During the 6th century there developed an infusion of Jews of the Dispersion among these Scythians, and this joint nation under their influence became a powerful commercial and military force in the world. The empire they created stretched from the western end of the Black Sea to the shores of the Caspian and the people were known as the Khazars. By the 8th century it was at the peak of its power. In AD 740 the then ruler, Bulan, embraced Judaism and from then on the empire was ruled by Jews. Their ships traded with every country in Europe and their ambassadors resided at many European courts. One of their kings proposed to the Pope of his day a joint Papal-Jewish crusade to free Jerusalem from the

Moslems, offering to put three hundred thousand warriors in the field as his contribution. The Pope declined the offer. By the end of the 10th century this Jewish empire of Khazaria began to decline before the rising power of Russia and in another two hundred years it had disappeared. The celebrated Rabbi Petachia of Bavaria travelled through the land in AD 1170 visiting his compatriots and recorded his findings in his '*Travels*' but after that they virtually disappear from history.

The present day Jews of Russia and Poland are believed to owe their descent in large measure to the Khazars. To the question whether they have any place in the prophetic Scriptures the answer has to be 'No'. The present population of the area is Russian and to the extent that any true Jews remain, they, like Jews all over the world, can only come into the framework of prophecy if and when they return to the land of their forefathers and share in the experiences of the Holy Nation that will one day come into existence there and fulfil the promises made so long ago by God to their fathers.

AOH

SARAI AND MILCAH

Light on an obscure text

There has always been some uncertainty as to the blood relationship between Abraham and his wife Sarai. Abraham's statement to Abimelech king of Gerar in Gen. 20.12 "*She is my sister: she is the daughter of my father but not of my mother: and she became my wife*" has been taken to mean that Sarah was his half-sister, perhaps by a concubine to Terah, or by a second wife. Josephus, however, says that Sarah was a daughter of Haran, Abraham's eldest brother, and was therefore his niece. He says "... *Abraham had two brothers, Nahor and Haran: of these Haran left a son, Lot, as also Sarai and Milcha his daughters, and died among the Chaldeans ... These married their nieces. Nahor married Milcha, and Abram married Sarai*" ("*Antiquities*" 1.6.5). Abraham's own words quoted above do not conflict with this, since the word for "daughter" is used for any female descendant of the family and what Abraham inferred might well be that Sarai was of his family although not a full sister in the strict sense of the word.

The source of Josephus' statement is unknown. There are many indications in his writings that he had access to a variant Hebrew OT. text which is not now in existence. This might have set out the matter in more detail than does the Received OT Hebrew text on which our Authorised Version and most

modern translations are based. In any case the information must have come in the first place from Gen. 11.27-29 which reads in the AV "... *Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran, and Haran was the father of Lot. Haran died before his father Terah, in the land of his birth in Ur of the Chaldees. And Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and Iscah.*" According to this, Haran's daughters were Milcah and Iscah, but this latter name is not mentioned anywhere else.

In this connection it has been noticed that there is a striking similarity between the Babylonian cuneiform, signs for Sarai and Iscah. It is now well established that the first eleven chapters of Genesis originally existed in cuneiform in something like the 23rd century BC and were translated into Hebrew at the time of Israel's sojourn in Egypt. "Iscah" in Akkadian is e-su-ka, the name of a minor god. It is very possible that the translator, working nearly a thousand years after the chapter was written, misinterpreted the sign for "Sarai" and rendered it "Iscah". The clay tablets in which the inscriptions are written are usually very small and the characters quite minute, so that errors in reading, even by modern decipherers, are quite frequent.

IN THE BEGINNING

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In those few words is enshrined the story of countless ages. Long before man came into being, long before the infinite variety of animal and vegetable life which now inhabits this planet was brought forth, the work of God was going steadily forward. In the mighty crucible of Nature He was moulding and fashioning a fitting home for humanity. He compelled the tremendous forces of the Universe to work together in slow but ceaseless motion until after the lapse of ages upon ages the angels looked down upon this solar system of ours with the parent sun majestic in the centre of its family of circling planets.

The Earth was one of those planets. Long epochs had yet to pass before even the humblest form of life could appear on its troubled surface. Great eruptions of Nature from within, avalanches and floods from above, all combined to keep this new world in a state of perpetual unrest. But eventually there came a time when the tumult was stilled, when the boiling seas subsided and the land had some measure of peace from warring elements, and in that eventful day life was born on earth.

No man saw it come. No human history can go back to those first beginnings when lowly creatures of the seashores were the lords of material creation. Long years afterwards the chronicler wrote "*And God said, Let the waters bring forth the moving creature that hath life ... and it was so.*"

So passed the centuries, the millenniums, the

epochs during which God worked silently, in that orderly development which characterizes all His works, preparing a home for a new creation which He purposed. At length the watching angels saw a new wonder at which they shouted aloud for joy. Beings – intelligent, perfect, capable of love and gratitude, worship and service – made to be the crowning glory of that creation which had taken so long a time to bring to this climax. "*The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*" (Job 38.6).

With what serene pleasure must the Father have gazed upon the first material beings and foreseen the wonders of a future age when the earth shall be fully perfected, and when mankind shall have achieved the Divine ideal and attained to the image and likeness of God. A small thing is a great thing if God is in it. His power creates the tiny flower bud, the opening leaf, the blade of grass. He forms the grain of sand, the tiny globule of water, the glittering crystal of the snowflake. And it is these small things that make up the mighty oceans with their sand-girt shores, that clothe the vast forests, the rolling fields, and the snow-laden landscape.

God uses all His works. The weakest thing has a service of its own. The dewdrop, the little bird upon the tree, the flower of the field, the flitting butterfly, the busy bee. All creatures serve Him, small and great, and He can use us though we are the weakest of them all.

Further thoughts on Psalm 65 and the goodness of our Father

"*Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts. We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple*" (Psa. 65.4 NIV) When David wrote those words he probably would have not thought appropriate to have called God, Father although such an idea was not totally unknown in the psalms (89.26; 103.13). He certainly knew Him as a shepherd, probably from boyhood. But the Scriptures abound with the idea of drawing close to God. In this Psalm 65, there is a wonderful sense that the good things which we enjoy each day are the bounty of God. This is the sense of thanksgiving at harvest. For Israel, the end of one year and the beginning of the next was at harvest time. So the Ingathering and rejoicing was, as it were, a time when God was crowning the year with His goodness. Those of us who are greatly privileged to live in lands of plenty do well to take stock of what God has done in the physical world for us. Sadly, many millions are not able to share our rejoicing. At times of

famine and drought it must seem that God has turned away from His creatures and that He no longer cares.

This Psalm, joyful as it is in the good things of the Earth, is also concerned "with the good things of your house". Jesus told Satan that "man shall not live by bread alone" for He had 'food they knew not what'.

As we turn the page of another year we look back and give thanks for whatever joy in worship and fellowship we have had and for whatever our Father has given in Christian experience. Is there a famine of spiritual things? Do the days seem lonely and uneventful? Is there no occasion to rejoice that God has overruled all things for our eternal welfare. "*In everything give thanks*" (Eph. 5.20). If we are grumbling about anyone or anything, we are being disobedient to God's word. Let us look back, and count our blessings, naming them one by one, and we shall be surprised what the Lord has done.

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

11. Chapter 8

vv.1-15 Jesus now began a preaching tour away from towns and synagogues. It was the time of His greatest popularity. Luke records those who went with Him. Unlike Pharisees, there were women in Jesus' fellowship and service. Joanna appears again in 24.10 and may have been connected with the nobleman of John 4.46-52. No more is heard of Susanna. There is no evidence that Mary of Magdala had an immoral past. There is a place in the church for all types 'to support the Lord and His people'. Comparison between the 3 synoptic gospels is always interesting.

The Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13; Mark 4). Why did Jesus tell parables? What made Jesus tell this story at that moment? Was He near a field being sown or was it being ploughed following sowing as was the custom? Had he been asked a question? Was the only interpretation of the parable about different responses by various groups of people to God's Word? Do we each have the qualities represented in all 4 soils at some time? What does the parable teach about the responsibilities and privileges of Jesus' disciples? Is the Word bearing fruit in our lives? v.10

Mystery (*mysterion*) makes a very interesting study "not the mysterious but ... made known only by Divine revelation" Vine (1). Paul uses it a number of times e.g. 1 Cor. 13.2; 15.51; Eph. 1.9 Phil. 4.12; Col. 1.26.

vv.16-25 Luke's record has a logical order rather than chronological. vv.16, 17 show that the committed Christian has no place to hide. What is the light that shines and where does it come from? Does 2 Cor. 3 help? Those who make the most of what they have spiritually, readily recognize further blessings of Jesus' fellowship; those who fail to appreciate Him lose the privileges already given.

vv.19-21 give a glimpse of His family; there is no evidence to show that His brothers were not Mary's children. They were not allowed to distract Him from doing God's will. Were the disciples closer than Mary?

vv 22-25 Luke's record of the storm is brief and vivid. Jesus was tired and He trusted His disciples. Did they trust Him – enough? The lake was 200 metres below sea level; rivers had cut deep ravines between surrounding hills through which wind funnelled causing sudden squalls. Why did Jesus

'rebuke' the waves? The suddenness of calm was a shock to the fishermen. Does He calm our storms of temptation, passion and sorrow?

"When deep within our swelling hearts

The thoughts of pride and anger rise,

When bitter words are on our tongues

And tears of passion in our eyes,

Then we may stay the angry blow,

Then we may check the hasty word,

Give gentle answer back again,

And fight a battle for our Lord." – quoted by

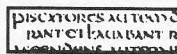
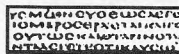
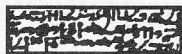
Barclay (2)

vv 26-39 scholars are uncertain where the incident with 'Legion' occurred. Were they 'Gergesenes', 'Gerasenes', or 'Gadarenes'. Gadara was 40 miles away (cynics find the idea of pigs running 40 miles amusing) but the modern village Khersa with its tombs bears witness that this took place close to the lake. A Roman legion was 6000 soldiers. Much has been written about Jesus killing pigs. His Father rules Creation in love and what he wills is right. Perhaps we should revise our ideas of what is 'right', 'good' and 'loving'? Did the spirits drown the pigs? Where did spirits go? Local Gentiles rebuffed Jesus but He had courage to do what they failed to do. Were they afraid like so many in the presence of real holiness and authority? Or did they feel guilty? Jesus changes people and things, a reason for His unpopularity then and now. The healed man found his senses, freedom, rest, social life and a vocation in preaching.

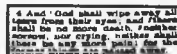
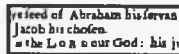
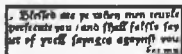
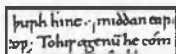
vv. 40-56 Jesus was brave facing worldly attitudes. Jairus defied the attitude of synagogue leaders; the woman defied the crowd's scorn. How was the woman's touch different? She would be despised, solitary and very poor. By bringing the healing into the open Jesus dispelled stigma (note Lev. 15) and the woman's faith was strengthened. Jesus was concerned that Jairus' daughter didn't suffer gaping onlookers and He encouraged parental care. '*Talitha cumi*' is so similar to Peter's words in Acts 9.40. How could the parents avoid telling others? Jesus doesn't label people, He meets their need where they are.

(1) Vine – Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Oliphants)

(2) Daily Study Bible – The Gospel of Luke (St.Andrews Press)



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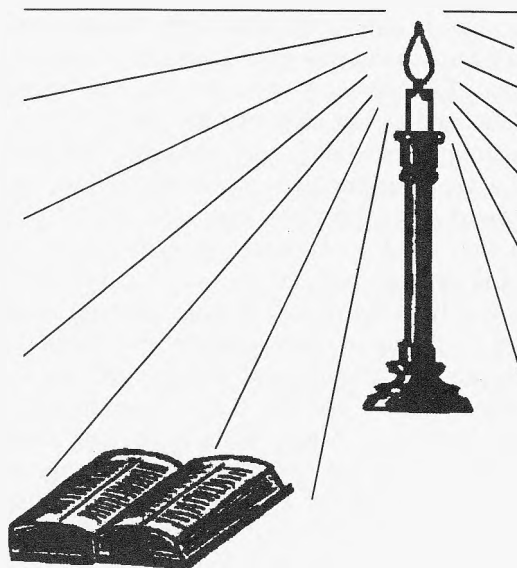
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field: until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land." (Isaiah 5.8 RSV)

The ravaging of the countryside in the interests of urbanisation appeared to be going on even so far back as the days of Isaiah but most certainly not on the scale that it is today. It has been computed that in Great Britain thousands of acres of good agricultural land disappear each year under roads, houses, factories, etc. If anyone protests they are met with 'you can't stand in the way of progress'. Is it progress to disaster? Life depends upon the soil that brings forth plants and as the area available for food production diminishes so difficulty and cost of production for a growing population increase. Those lost thousands of acres, properly managed, would provide enough food to sustain many thousands of people and enough oxygen to meet the breathing needs of nearly as many. It is of little use suggesting that there are plenty of open spaces elsewhere in the world to produce all the food and oxygen we are ever likely to need. Food that comes from overseas has to be paid for. Alarm bells have long been ringing concerning the world's oxygen resources that have been depleted by the fast rate of fuel consumption and other industrial processes. There has been for some time a real danger that we shall suffocate before we starve. Almost every part of the world has become over industrialised. Modern luxury living, indulgent and wasteful, continues to intensify everywhere. There is a general failure on the part of world leaders, political and commercial, to realise how very delicately balanced human life is on Earth. The balance of the ecological system is adjusted to suit the existence of plant and animal life. If the distance to Earth from the Sun varied only slightly the habitable area for mankind would be greatly reduced. The amount of sunlight needed by

plants yet tolerable to mankind is important. To maintain air in satisfactory condition the ratio between land and ocean must be just right. The diameter of the Earth is critical to give right the force of gravity. The orderly life of mankind is possible because the Creator fixed these limits. So also was the balance of materials and products that the Earth provides. It may be that in human endeavours to produce a synthetic environment we are committing slow racial suicide. One day we shall need to return to a more natural way of life. Maybe Isaiah foresaw a time when man will not only build his own house and live in it but will also plant his own vineyard and eat the fruit of it.

Adapted from an article by AOH 1974

Since the above was written there has been growing concern about the sustainability of modern ways of life. Yet in spite of the fact that it is clear to scientists that changes in our life style are vital for the continuance of life on Earth, those with political and industrial power persist in ignoring the warnings and pursue their objectives of power and wealth. Those who put their trust in God, alone can have hope for the future of life on Earth. It is good that He who was first responsible for the making of our Universe can also provide the means of escape from the present ecological disaster. Sin is strangely illogical.

"How many are your works, O Lord; In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things both large and small... These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time." (Psalm 104, 24-29 NIV)

Gone from us

Sister Mildred Morrison (Warrington)

Sister Isabell Thompson (Ballygally, Larne)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away.

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

8. Healing the lame man

The man sat on the ground, his body propped up against the wall, dejectedly surveying the crowds passing and re-passing on their way into and out of the Temple. Now in his early forties, he had lain there every day for as long as he could remember, mutely supplicating passers-by for their charity. He had never walked and he had never worked. All he knew of the world was the little strip of ground between his hovel-home in Jerusalem and this wide pavement in the Gate Beautiful at the eastern approach to the Temple where he habitually solicited alms wherewith to sustain himself in his infirmity. His friends brought him there in the morning and left him, and in the evening they came again to take him home. And that was his life, all of it.

Two men approached, coming into the Temple. He did not know them. They were not regular worshippers. Only in recent weeks had he seen them at all, and then too far away in the crowd to accost them. Now they were here again, and this time on a path that would bring them within a few feet of his recumbent body. His eyes brightened a little and he lifted his head. "Alms, for the love of God; alms" he croaked, voice dry and hard by reason of the constant repetition of his plea.

The men stopped and looked down at him. Hope surged into his eyes and his lean frame quivered in anticipation as he tremblingly extended a skinny hand. But as one of them began to speak his expectations were cruelly dashed. "*I have no silver and gold*" said Peter; as the import of the words sank in, the crippled man subsided back to the flagstones, bitter disappointment showing on his face. "*But what I have I give you*" the voice went on, and he looked up again, a little perplexed, a little hesitant, vaguely wondering if there was some kind of a gift, perhaps of food or clothing, which he was about to receive. He sensed the kindness and compassion in Peter's voice and the understanding sympathy of his companion but he was totally unprepared for the command that came upon him like a thunder-clap: "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk*".

He had never walked. He had never stood upon his feet. From his birth he had always been carried, taken up and put down like a package of goods. He had seen other people walking and going about

their business but it had never entered his head that he himself would ever do any such thing. He had been made as he was by the will of God, and only God could change his state. He looked up into the burning eyes of Peter and suddenly he remembered what he had been told about this same Jesus, how He had healed the handicapped man at the Pool of Bethesda and the blind man at the Pool of Siloam. He had even, they said, raised the dead. He had hoped, when he heard these wonderful stories, that Jesus might come his way one day and he could ask for healing; but Jesus had never come and now, so they said, He had been crucified by the priests and there was no more any hope of healing. And then, his own eyes still held by that compelling gaze, he realised the truth. Jesus still lives, Jesus can save; a swift accession of faith suffused his whole being and he grasped the proffered hand held out towards him and in a moment was standing upon his feet. He had never stood; now he was standing. He took two tentative steps forward. He had never walked; now he was walking. In a sudden outburst of joy he leaped into the air, he who had never leaped, and in a loud voice began to praise God for the wonderful thing that had happened to him. Joining the throng that was pressing forward into the Temple, he went along with Peter and John, voicing his praises in the ears of all the people as he went.

Of course it created a sensation. The man had become so familiar a figure throughout the years and his disability so obviously incurable that people came running from all sides to see and to question. Peter and John found themselves in the middle of a wondering and excited crowd with no chance of escape, while the healed man was clinging tightly to them and declaiming to the onlookers the details of his miraculous cure.

This was Peter's opportunity. The people reacted to this miracle just as they had reacted to Jesus' miracles – they gave praise to God and looked with awe upon the human agent as a special messenger from God akin to the prophets of old. Peter and John must be special favourites with God to be entrusted with so great a power. And Peter straightway disabused their minds of that misapprehension. We have no supernatural powers of our own, he told them; we are not extraordinarily holy men. Thus having disavowed any special

merit of his own in this thing, he began in a masterly fashion to direct their minds to the true source of the miracle and what it portended for them and theirs. He did not say straight away that it was done by the power of the resurrected Christ; he wanted to prepare their minds so that they might properly appreciate the magnitude of that truth. First, the familiar formula, the reverent expression which meant so much to every Israelite and could be depended on always to command their attention. *"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers..."* Here was the source, to Jew and afterwards to Christian, from which all things come and in which all things are maintained. *"... has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected"*. This was a gentle approach to the heart of the matter. The word "glorified" (doxazo) has nothing to do with the resurrection itself: it denotes to magnify, extol, praise, and what Peter is saying here is that God had publicly approved and honoured Jesus of Nazareth during His earthly life but despite that the people had delivered Him up to death. Then came the deeper accusation and the deeper truth. *"You rejected the Holy and Righteous One..., and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."* There was to be no mitigation of their responsibility; they, as a nation, were guilty and solely guilty. Pilate he practically exonerates; *"... he had decided to release him."* and the guilt of the condemnation he places fairly and squarely upon Israel. But their intent was frustrated. God had raised Him from the dead; we know, because we have seen Him! We are witnesses! For the second time Peter staked his all upon the reality of his Lord's resurrection; once again he manifested the certainty of an eyewitness. Now he used the undisputed fact of this miracle that they had all just witnessed as further and incontrovertible evidence in all their eyes; *"And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong ... has given him perfect health in the presence of all of you."* (Acts 3.16 NRSV). The disciples believed in the Resurrection because they had seen Jesus in person. That was not given to other men. The evidence given to the man in the street was the continuation of the works of healing which Jesus had performed while in this life. The power of Jesus to restore to health and life those who had faith in Him reached them even from beyond the grave.

The crowd was silent, and for a very good

reason. They had nothing to say. The evidence could not be gainsaid. Peter, following up his advantage, adopted a more conciliatory tone. *"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers."* God had foreseen that men would react in this way when Christ should come to them and recorded His foreknowledge in the words of the prophets. He would make use of this hardness of man's heart in the furtherance of His great purpose and at the end all would be well. But in the meantime there was a part for man to play; more immediately and importantly, for the men of Israel to play. *"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"*. These "times of refreshing" are literally seasons of cooling, of refrigeration, of mitigation of heat. In using this word Peter indicated that those who did thus repent and come into Christ thereby found relief from the burdens of the Mosaic Law and the stress of the times in which they lived. Now they entered into a new life in which all their burdens were brought to the Lord and He undertook their future welfare. *"Come to me, all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* was the invitation when Jesus was with them; it was no less open to them now that He was gone. It came now from before the Divine presence, where Christ was *"sitting on the right hand of God"*.

But Peter hastened on. There were even greater things he must say. It was not sufficient that he must witness to the resurrection of Christ and the continuing call to believe on Him. He must tell them of the ultimate outcome of that resurrection, of the return of that same Jesus to this earth and to this people where He had been rejected. This time He would come in the glory and majesty of His Divine kingship and reign over all the world for the purpose of eliminating all evil and completing mankind's preparation for its ordained destiny. Jesus had already said He would return. The angels at the site of the Ascension reiterated that promise. Now Peter testifies to his belief and expectation of the same and he connects it with the original promise of God to Abraham that *"in your descendants all families of the earth shall be blessed"*. He went on *"That he may send the Christ who has been appointed for you, even Jesus. He must remain in the heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."* 'Times of restitution';

the word means "restoration" but restoration of what? There are many things buried in the past history of humanity that it would not be good to restore. So the A V should read *"times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets"*. Many good and glorious things had been spoken by the prophets. Israel's own land is to be restored to her; the Lord is to dwell in the midst of her and never depart again. Life, rich, vital, indwelling life, is to be restored to all men. All that has been lost by the influence and power of sin will be restored. The glory and beauty of the fertile earth, spoiled and polluted and ruined by man will be restored. The dead will be restored from the grave. Eden shall bloom again and this time there will be no Tempter, no Evil One. These "times of restitution" of which Peter spoke on this occasion are in fact the wide sweeps of the Millennium, the Messianic era of Christ's presence in the earth, the time when God is said to dwell with man. *"There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away"*. All these things were promised by the Hebrew prophets and all these things will be restored to man.

At this point Peter's eloquence was rudely interrupted. Someone had told the priests about these two itinerant evangelists preaching the resurrection of Jesus within the very confines of the Temple itself and they came out in force to stop it. With them came the 'captain of the Temple', the commander of the Temple police, a body of muscular Levites whose duty it was to deal with troublemakers within the sacred precincts. Without further ado Peter and John were apprehended and locked up for the night, while arrangements were made for a special meeting of the Sanhedrin in the morning to examine them and mete out punishment.

The last time Peter had set eyes upon Annas and Caiaphas, who between them ruled the Sanhedrin, had been at the trial of Jesus not much more than two months before. Then, Peter who had been a frightened man and in fear of his own life had denied his Lord. Now, himself facing that same assemblage of hostile judges, and hearing their angry demand to say by what power he had done this thing, he answered boldly in full disregard of their enmity. There is a wonderful contrast between his respective attitudes on these two occasions. Only the full assurance that his Lord had

indeed survived death and now had all power in heaven and earth could have engendered this fortitude.

"Rulers of the people and elders" was his reply *"know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead that this man stands before you healed"*. (NIV)

This was throwing the gauntlet back at them with a vengeance. **They** had crucified Christ; **God** had raised Him from the dead, and now He possessed and wielded a power that they could neither refute nor resist. *"When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say."* (REB). Evidently that worthy also had suffered arrest and imprisonment for the night with the two apostles. The Sanhedrin was thrown into confusion. They had thought that with the death of Jesus they had put an end to this incipient heresy and this threat to their own positions and authority; now they found it blossoming forth even more strongly than before. They had congratulated themselves on the cessation of the miraculous works of healing and other wonderful acts that characterized Jesus' ministry and now they found that He was continuing these things from beyond the grave where they could not get at Him. No wonder they went into secret session. They had to admit the truth to themselves although they would not do so publicly. *"What are we going to do with these men? they asked. Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle and we cannot deny it?"* If the Sanhedrin had not believed in the resurrection of Jesus and His Divine power before, they believed in it now. But such is the blinding effect of pride and self-interest that they still considered they could defy this new power which was challenging their authority. Even though the power was from heaven, it must still be exerted through men, and men moreover who must claim and invoke the Name of Christ. So they recalled the apostles and commanded them, with threats, neither to speak nor teach in the name of Jesus. The apostles' compliance with that instruction would ensure that there would be no more miracles.

Peter and John both flatly refused. *"Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking what we have seen and heard"*. Unmoved by their

judges' threats, they defied them to do their worst.

At the trial of Jesus, the priests had dominated the situation and Pilate was the weak one who gave way to them. Now the position was reversed; the Sanhedrin, apprehensive and indecisive, had lost the initiative and the apostles were in control. Despite their threats, there was nothing the judges could do beyond reiterating warnings of severe punishment which were known, even to themselves, to be but empty words, and to turn the apostles loose to continue their work.

This was the first of many occasions in the

history of this Age when the Lion and the Lamb met in open conflict, and the Lamb emerged the victor. There was to be many a fight and many a casualty in coming days. But the existence of the Christian Church and its ultimate triumph was ensured on that day when two resolute disciples faced a tribunal of seventy outwardly enraged but inwardly very frightened men and made that historic declaration.

(To be continued)

AOH

THE OPEN HAND

'A study in giving'

"These all look to you ... you open your hand, they are filled with good things" (Psalm 104.27-28 NRSV).

One of the most persistently reiterated themes of Holy Writ is man's utter helplessness to direct his life without God. At every turn of life man comes up against his need, though it is but rarely that he realizes the extent of that need. The absoluteness of this **need** is not brought home to the heart or mind of man, because of the universal generosity of Almighty God. Only if God withdrew His activities from this planet entirely would man come face to face with the absoluteness and universality of his needs. If God kept back the rains which fall impartially upon the just and the unjust, if He withheld the fruitful seasons (Acts 14.17) with their bounteous harvests; if He locked up His winds in their treasuries; then man would realise the utter helplessness of his position in this scheme of things. The effects of local famines have been serious and have brought ruin and destruction to man and beast. But these famines have usually been relatively local: there has mostly been abundance elsewhere, and relief has often been despatched from the region of the abundance to the place of want. God has never withheld His gifts worldwide. He has never caused the universal harvest to fail. So unfailingly, yet naturally, has the bountiful God bestowed His gifts, that men sow, doubting not for a moment but that they will reap, and call the sowing and reaping Nature's common round. But should God withhold His hand, their sowing would be vain – man may plant, and man may water but without God there would be no increase.

The other side of the question, obverse to man's need, is God's ability and disposition to **give**. These

two factors in universal life are complementary to each other. God is the source of unfailing abundance, man the creature of unending need (Psalm 104). Not less is this so in the religious life of man. Here again the persistently reiterated theme of Holy Writ is man's utter helplessness and universal need. Again the other side of the question obverse to man's need, is God's ability and disposition to give. The beginning of God's generosity to fallen men dates from Eden days, when in the act of imposing the sentence required by His broken Law, God promised Mother Eve that her seed should eventually bruise the Serpent's head. God gave her there a promise; His gift. This form of gift He repeated to Noah, in that He promised summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. To Abraham, God gave that most wonderful promise that is the basic feature of the whole plan of redemption. By the gift of His promises God gave hope to fallen man. God had promised blessing that gave man hope and expectancy.

God gave Abraham a son, then a nation. To that nation God gave His Word and His Law; those "*living oracles*" (Acts 7.38) that Moses received at Sinai. That Law was the most advanced moral standard of its day, and had it been obeyed would have raised Israel high above the nations around. That sacred gift from Sinai, forms an important section of the Holy Book that we treasure as the Word of Life. He gave Israel a Tabernacle so that He might give them the benefit of His presence in their midst. He gave them the good land on which the eye of God rests with holy delight (Exodus 3.8; Deut. 11.12). He gave them judges and deliverers when they fell into captivity. He gave them

reformers who led them back to their "oracles", and "seers" who carried their minds forward to higher expectations. God gave them advancement and prominence among the nations, under David and Solomon, when the fame of Israel's king spread to the distant quarters of the world. The two nations of later days were given the benefit of God's patience and long-suffering, though they fast became 'vessels fit only for destruction'. They became inveterately idolatrous so first Israel and then Judah were given the spirit of slumber (Rom. 11.8). Under the conditions this was a boon to them; for the blindness which came minimized the degree of their responsibility. So because God thus concluded them all in unbelief He will be able in His Kingdom to have mercy upon all, *"and so all Israel will be saved"*. Isaiah, commissioned to deliver the message of rejection said *"... the Lord has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes..."* (Isa. 29.10-16) yet he concludes his denunciation with the statement *"Is it not yet a little while and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field?"* (v.17). The gift of slumber, while it deprived the two nations of their land for centuries will have kept the national spirit in a state of hunger for the appearance of Messiah as an exalted king.

In due course God gave to the returned remnant nation in Jerusalem His greatest and best gift, His well-beloved Son. This was the gift that lay dearest to His own heart. Jesus came to earth bearing the tidings of the Almighty's great love for men, especially for those who were children of God's friend (Jas. 2.23, Isa. 41.8). What tremendous possibilities God set before that generation in Jerusalem when Messiah came to them! (Dan. 9.25). In the first place God purposed to give *repentance* for their national sins to Israel through His Son (Luke 1.68-79, Acts 5.31). God desired to touch the deeper springs of their hearts by the ministry of His well-beloved son, and thus to lead them to repentance.

Again, Jesus was destined to be a bearer of light to His people. God wanted to give understanding to that generation, so that it might comprehend what His higher purposes were; that heavenly things were about to begin. To those who were responsive to the new teachings God gave an understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom (Matt. 13.11, Mark 4.11). *"To you it is given to know"* what was "hidden" from other ages.

God gave Jesus to that people, to be to them as

Bread of Life. In manner similar to wilderness days when God strewed the earth morning by morning with manna, so again God provided **Living Bread** for the children of Abraham (John 6.27-65). In some supernatural way the words of the Lord would have sustained their deeper life (John 6.63) and led to eternal life. In some special way His flesh would sustain the life of the world. God *gave Living Bread* to those who could eat. (John 6.32). Again (to vary the "sustenance" figure of speech) God gave Jesus as the Water of Life of which, if one should drink, it should satisfy his thirst forever. (John 4.10-15).

God gave Israel a shepherd, who would have guided and pastured the flock of God in paths of righteousness (John 10.1-16). But there was no beauty about Him that they desired Him. They wanted a King, a conquering Messiah; He came to suffer, a Man of sorrows, an offering for sin. The nation rejected Him, but to as many as did receive Him God gave the privilege to become His own sons (John 1.2). To those whose hands were open to take, God gave many other gifts along with and through His beloved Son! Giving, Giving, **GIVING** all the time, to those who knew their need.

Even after they had despised and crucified His Son, God still kept the door of opportunity open for such as needed more than the ritual and ceremonial of the Temple sacrifice. To many among them the words of Jesus had opened a new world of possibilities. He told of opportunities and privileges, of which their fathers had never heard (Matt. 13.35). He set new longings rising in their hearts, but because they had been powerless against the Sanhedrin and Priests, and had not been able to stop their schemes nor their fearful deed, He had been slain. How readily they listened on that wonderful morn when "Peter stood up with the eleven" and told the people that God had raised Him from the dead, and again desired through Him to "give repentance to Israel" (Acts 5.31).

Only a remnant desired that gift of repentance, so God turned to the nations to take out of them a people for His Name. To these also God gave repentance unto salvation. *"If then God gave them the same gift that He gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"* said Peter in defence (Acts 11.17). *"Then God has given also to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life"* was the brethren's response. Is repentance the gift of God? It certainly is! They

who receive the Word into good hearts are such as are "opened" by the Lord (Acts 16.14). No one comes to the Son except those whom the Father draws (John 6.65). The "faith" that saves is God's gift (Eph. 2.8) through the operation of His word (Rom. 10.13-17) and of His Spirit in their hearts. The "peace" that garrisons their hearts comes from God too (Phil. 4.7, John 14.27). This is a precious gift to those who dwell in a tempestuous world. Perfect peace is bestowed upon all who dwell upon the Rock of Ages (Isa. 26.3-4).

Is love, that most desirable God-like trait a gift from Him? It is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He gives us (Rom. 5.5). We cannot add so little as one inch to our spiritual stature by taking thought. It is not impossible to spend too much time talking over the necessity for our growth in love and be all the time forgetful of the fact that Love is a fruitage (Gal. 5.22-23). It is more a matter of the husbandman's concern than that of the branch in the vine itself. God is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him than any earthly father is ready to give his children food (Matt. 7.11). The more Holy Spirit power in the heart, the more love to shed abroad in the life. This Love also is a gift from God, for we love because He first loved.

Again, not only is the giving of the Holy Spirit the basis of character development (2 Cor. 3.18) but it is also God's pledge of the inheritance we hope to receive. It is the token that God has taken us into His service, and that the final reward will be sure, if we discharge our duty faithfully, "... *God ... hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the spirit in our hearts*" (2 Cor. 1.22, 2 Cor. 5.5). Moreover, the Holy Spirit is an energizing and stabilizing power. It is not a spirit of fear, but of cool reasoned courage, and of a sound mind. It produces the spirit of sanctity blended with sanity in our minds, a well-balanced properly ordered sanctification of life. This too is a gift of God and is by no means the outcome of psychological self-effort. It is God who has prepared for us our resurrection change (2 Cor. 5.5). The transformation is wrought by His Spirit (2 Cor. 3.18). Then in the day-to-day struggle "*He giveth grace*" to such as go to His Throne of Grace, humbly beseeching assistance in their time of need

(Heb. 4.16, Jas. 4.6, 1 Pet. 5.5). Thus the whole range of the Christian's life and experience is called into being and sustained by His gracious gifts, but it does not end even at that, for He will give the complete victory over death, and over the grave. When that which is mortal is swallowed up in victory, the faithful footstep follower of the Lord will see Him and be with Him for evermore. "*Thanks be unto God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Cor. 15.57).

From first to last, the Christian's life is one of receiving; for what has he, that he has not received? It is a life of faith with an open hand, with courage to ask and take. It is the story of a great need which grows as it feeds, and which is more pronounced at the end of the way than at the beginning. Thank God, even its deepest need does not exhaust the capacity of the bounteous Giver. Though its demands are presented every day, and yes, many times a day, the riches of His grace are of ample store for each and all that call upon Him.

The story of Divine grace is the record of One who has been disposed to "give," and "give," and "give" again, because it pleases Him to dispense of His fulness to helpless needy men. He created man with a great "need" so that He might play the part of a great giver. Man has but to open his hand to take of that bountiful fulness which God opens His hand to give (Psalm 104.27-28). If God withheld not His well-beloved Son "*shall He not also with him freely give us all things?*" (Rom. 8.32). Christian experience of this and other days shows without fail that they who are most developed in grace are the ones most conscious of their need. The more one has grown in the things of the Lord, and the more tender and sensitive the heart has become, the more such saints become persuaded of their need for God. The ultimate end of every quest of the more mature heart, is not merely to accept the gifts of God, but to receive with open heart the Giver too.

It is good to accept with open hand the gifts of God; it is better far with open heart to accept the Giver Himself. No wealth of earth is so desirable as the gifts of God; the whole world itself is but refuse indeed in comparison with possessing God.

TH

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind by the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of

God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

(Dr Temple)

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

7. The Ark comes to Jerusalem

Many things happened in the first three or four years of David's reign and then he began to think out the details of a plan that probably had been forming in his mind for a considerable time. It was nothing less than the transfer of the Tabernacle with all its ceremonies to Jerusalem, which would then by virtue of this association become a hallowed city to all Israel. The Ark of the Covenant had been lying in the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-jearim in Judah for nearly a century and the Leviticus ceremonies, including the annual sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, had fallen into disarray (1 Chron. 13.3). Without the Ark they could not be performed acceptably to God. David, with his zeal for God and the full observance of the Mosaic Covenant by Israel, obviously felt that this was a step he must take as soon as he had established peace and security in the land, and this was the time. So he went to his counsellors and captains and to all the people of Israel with his proposal, a proposal that was enthusiastically endorsed. "*The thing was right in the eyes of all the people*" (1 Chron. 13.4). A great crowd of delegates or representatives from every part of the empire, from the borders of Egypt to those of Syria, gathered together to accompany the project with all ceremony and rejoicing. And so they went to Kiriath-jearim.

Eighty years earlier, in the days of Eli, the Ark of the Covenant had been captured in battle by the Philistines and the town of Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood, had been completely destroyed. The magnitude of that destruction is indicated by the Lord's words to Jeremiah five hundred years later. "*Go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel*" (Jer. 7.14). The Psalmist also referred to this tragic catastrophe in Psa. 78.60 "*He forsook the Tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men, and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand*". The same Psalm declares that it was then that God formally declared Judah the royal tribe; although that had been foreseen and prophesied by Jacob many centuries earlier. Now David was about to crown his royalty by re-establishing the sacred

ritual of the covenant.

The Tabernacle had suffered a chequered history since the destruction of Shiloh. It is evident that after the capture of the Ark by the Philistines the remaining Levites had hurriedly dismantled and removed the structure and its furniture before the victors had reached and destroyed the town. It is probable that it was re-erected at Gilgal, where it first stood at the entry to the land, by Samuel, continuing thus during the time of Samuel's supremacy. Later on in Saul's reign it is found at Nob, with Ahimelech the great-grandson of Eli officiating, not as High Priest, but as a kind of Priest-in-charge. Saul in his jealousy of David then had the entire priestly fraternity at Nob murdered, Abiathar son of Ahimelech alone escaping, and apparently removed the Tabernacle to Gibeon, his home town which he evidently wanted to make the capital of his kingdom. Zadok of the legal High Priestly line of Eleazar was appointed by Saul to preside over the Tabernacle, which then remained at Gibeon throughout David's reign and into the reign of Solomon until the Temple had been built. There were thus two centres of worship in Israel during David's reign; the original Tabernacle constructed by Moses, without the Ark but with the altar of sacrifice, at Gibeon presided over by Zadok, and the new "tent" or tabernacle erected by David at Jerusalem as repository for the Ark which he was now about to bring to the city, presided over by Ahimelech.

This was to be the great moment of David's life, the day that he brought the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred symbol of God's abiding presence with His people, back into the sanctuary. Eli had lost the Ark, Saul had chosen to ignore it, and now he, David, was to restore it to its rightful place in the city of God's royalty. But in all his enthusiasm and zeal David quite overlooked some ritual considerations. The tent in which he proposed to place the Ark was not the one made by Moses in which God had placed His name. The great brassen Altar of Moses, on which alone the sin-offerings could be consumed, was away at Gibeon. The priest of David's choosing, Abiathar of the line of Ithamar, was not the legal High Priest. Perhaps greatest of all, the method chosen by David to

transport the sacred object from its resting place in Kiriath-jearim, mounted upon an ox cart in full view of the cheering multitude. It was drawn by men who were not of the tribe of Levi and all this ran directly against the ritual laid down by the Lord and hallowed in Israel since the days of Moses. Instead of treating this whole operation as a sacred religious festival carried out with due reverence to the Lord, David made of it a political demonstration and a public holiday to enhance his own popularity with the people. Is it at all surprising that the whole thing went terribly wrong? The procession moved off, the king at its head, surrounded by musicians playing on every kind of instrument, followed by the militia and the nobility of the land. Then came representatives of the priestly fraternity and behind them the ox-cart bearing its precious load, led by Ahiah and Uzza, the sons of Abinadab in whose house it had lain for so many years. Finally came the shouting multitude of Israel.

The distance was not far; about fifteen miles of winding track climbing the rather precipitous ascent of about two thousand feet to the summit of the hills on which Jerusalem is built. The going was sure to be rather rough and the cart probably swayed a little from side to side under its load. Then one of the oxen stumbled. Instinctively Uzza, who was nearest, put out his hand to steady the Ark, which looked ready to topple over. He touched it, staggered backwards, and fell to the ground, lying motionless. Men rushed to his assistance. He was dead! The procession halted in confusion. The music stopped. The shouting died down to a deathly silence. David came rushing back, his face ashen. The Levites, from their allotted place farther along the procession, looked at him accusingly. The enormity of what he had done came home to him. He buried his face in his hands and groaned.

They waited in silence. The king lifted his head; his countenance was haggard. He looked round him; when he spoke his voice was low. "Where is there a home of a Levite near this place" he asked of the watching crowd. A hand pointed. "Obed-edom the Levite lives in yonder house" he was told. The king looked at the watching group of Levites. "The Lord has shown his displeasure with me that I allowed His sacred Ark to be carried on a cart made with men's hands and to be touched by unhallowed men not of Levi. Now take up the Ark

and carry it into the house of Obed-edom the Levite that it may stay there until the Lord shall reveal to me his good pleasure." Silently, reverently, they obeyed. The chronicler of these events says that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza and He smote him because he put his hand to the Ark; so he died before God. Everyone knew that only the Levites were allowed to handle and carry the Ark. But the man the Lord was angry with was David. Whoever loaded the Ark on the cart at the start must have touched it; they were not struck dead. Had Uzza not acted as he did the Ark would have toppled on to the road and someone then would have had to pick it up. Uzza reacted instinctively to the apparent danger, realised suddenly in the moment his hand touched the Ark that he was committing sacrilege, and in the horror and fear of that moment, his heart stopped, and so he died. In any event, what had been intended and expected to be a joyful and triumphal celebration was turned in an instant to stark tragedy; David realised that he could not touch Divine things in other than the Divine way, and he returned to Jerusalem a dispirited and broken man.

It is not uncommon in this our day to find the things of God and the trappings of religion used as aids to secular or political advancement. The powers of this world are not above enlisting the help and support of the Church when their interests can be served thereby. The history of the Christian Era furnishes abundant evidence of the disastrous results to Christians of complicity in any such partnership. There can be no fellowship between Christ and Belial. The mission of the church lies in a completely separate province from that in which the world operates and in which its standards operate. "*Separate yourselves, says the Lord; touch nothing unclean.*" In so many spheres today there is the manifest tendency to water down Christian ideals, practices and doctrines to accommodate what is claimed to be the 'advanced thinking' of contemporary generations. But they are in no way qualified to adjudicate or pronounce on Christian ethics but need rather to be instructed in such things. The dividing line between secular and sacred needs to be clearly defined and sharply drawn for it is a boundary that may not be crossed. One day all men will be on the sacred side of that boundary, but that will only be when the power of the returned and reigning Christ over the earth shall

have put down all opposing rule and authority and power. Then the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Three months later David was ready for a second attempt. He had probably done some very deep thinking in the interim. Perhaps he had spent some time in quiet communion with God. At any rate, according to the detailed account in 1 Chron. 15 he was meticulously careful that the proceeding was carried out with the utmost propriety and in full accord with the sacred laws. David himself stepped down from the oversight; the direction of affairs was in the hands of the two chief priests, Zadok and Abiathar, and all the minute detail of the procession was undertaken by the various classes of Levites who were ordained to the relevant services. So the procession moved off as before, with David in the lead, and this time arrived safely in Jerusalem and to the enclosing tent that David had erected for the reception of the Ark.

That was a great day for Israel. Many a devout heart must have swelled with pride on reflection that the tragedy of the loss of the Ark two generations earlier had been rectified and that the God of Israel might now be truthfully said to be dwelling in the midst of His people. The days of idolatry were in the past and under the influence of a king who, despite his shortcomings in some directions, was nevertheless a man of sterling faith and loyalty to God. There must have been many who felt that the old bad days had gone and the fulfilment of all God's promises to His people Israel was at hand. It was at this time that the 132nd Psalm was composed by David and used in the celebrations, and in addition the 96th and 105th, the latter two being recorded in full in the account in 1 Chron. 16. "*The Lord has chosen Zion, desired her for his home.*" sang David exultantly, "*This is my resting place forever; here I shall make my home, for that is what I want.*" (Psa. 132.13-14). In a sense, which perhaps had not been so true since

the stirring days of the Covenant at Sinai, Israel was in truth the people of God, and God was dwelling among them.

There was one discordant note. Michal, his wife, daughter of Saul, viewed from her window the triumphal procession entering Jerusalem, and watched David in his wild enthusiasm leaping and dancing among the players in reckless abandon, "*and she despised him in her heart*". As David returned to his house when the ceremonies were over she came out to meet him and sarcastically taunted him with his demeaning himself among the riff-raff of the people in a manner unbefitting Israel's king. Apparently irritated by her words, the king replied sharply, telling Michal that what he did was for the glory of God, and that if he could give more glory by still further demeaning himself he would do so. The chronicler adds "*And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.*" "Therefore" as in the AV implies that David, in his resentment, saw to it that his wife remained childless, a sore grief to any Hebrew woman but it is incorrect. Michal must have been about forty years of age at the time and had been married to David for something over twenty years. If by this time she was not a mother, it was most unlikely that she would become one now. The most likely explanation of the remark is, not that David was punishing her for her sarcasm and failure to appreciate the significance of the day's events. Rather, in the view of the writer of 2 Samuel, David's zeal for the Lord contrasted with Saul's religious failure. This marked the fact that of all David's sons, one of whom must succeed him as king, none would be of the ancestry of the rejected Saul. This, in the opinion of the historian, was a good and sufficient reason for Michal's childlessness. So David settled down to enjoy the fruits of his endeavours in the hope of a long and prosperous reign over the people of the Lord.

(To be continued)

The world around us is in dire distress today. Its sorrows deepen like a flood. The sluice gates of evil are unlocked. The universal groan goes up from all the earth, louder and deeper each passing day. "Who will break our bonds? Who will smash our chains? Who can set us free?" what child of God can hear this cry and not feel his pulse-beat quicken, or his heart-strings quiver? What

"hopeful" saint can see the "hopeless" mass, and not yearn for its release. When hearts are fraught with pain as humanity mourns, there may rise a prayer for God's Kingdom to come, without the breathing of a word and as we pray thus for God's will to prevail, the depth of sigh or groan will be the measure of our transformation into the image of God's dear Son.

(Selected)

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAST SUPPER

The sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, as it is variously called, has its origin in our Lord's words at the Last Supper, "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (Luke 22.19). Although its significance lies in the realm of our relationship to the Lord and His sacrifice on our behalf, the ceremony as such is one of remembrance or a memorial. The fact that its institution arose out of the celebration of the Jewish Passover is a further pointer in this direction. The Last Supper stands in relation to the Christian very much as the Passover does to the Jew, and is also a festival of remembrance.

The annual celebration of the Passover is itself called a Memorial. In giving Moses His instructions for the institution of the Passover the Lord commanded that the day in which it occurred should be remembered or memorialized throughout all subsequent generations. "*This day shall be for you a memorial day; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever*" (Exodus 12.14 RSV). When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into what we call the Septuagint, they used the Greek word that appears as "remembrance" in Luke 22.19 and 1 Cor. 11.24-25 to translate the Hebrew word appearing as "memorial" in Ex. 12. 14. In other words, "memorial" in the OT and "remembrance" in the NT have the same meaning. When Jesus said "*this do in remembrance of me*" as a memorial of me, He was saying just what God had said to Moses fifteen centuries previously.

Unlike Passover, the Christian celebration of the Last Supper is practiced by most communities at varied and irregular intervals – monthly, weekly, upon special occasions, and so on. It tends to lose sight of the element of commemoration and expression of faith in an event that happened two thousand years ago, stressing more the aspect of personal communion with God and with Christ and the reaffirmation of union with Christ and dedication to His service. Even this latter factor appears to be increasingly overlooked in these prosaic days and this may be one side effect of the customary comparative frequency of celebration. The solemnity and significance of a sacrament is likely to be blurred by frequent repetition.

The New Testament does not give much

guidance on the frequency of observance. The story of the Last Supper is narrated by the three synoptic evangelists. Paul refers to it twice in his first letter to the Corinthians. Nowhere else is there any mention of the subject. Luke's preservation of the Lord's request "*this do in remembrance of me*" indicates His wish that the simple ceremony of shared bread and wine which He had instituted following the Passover meal was to be repeated periodically, after He had left them. It was to be celebrated to re-invigorate their faith and hope, to preserve in their minds and hearts the meaning and implication of the broken body and shed blood, and to keep alive the consciousness of their living union with Him. All these things had their birth around that table that night and each subsequent celebration was intended to revive their memory and confirm their faith in the things that were said and done then. Paul offers the only attempt to define the repetition of the Supper. Writing to the Corinthians, he says, "*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said this is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup also, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me*". Paul's record of Jesus' words is more complete than that of Luke, and Luke's is more complete than that of the other two evangelists. After Paul quoted the Lord's words, he concludes "*for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim (demonstrate, witness to) the Lord's death till he comes*" (1 Cor. 11.23-26 (NRSV).

This introduces another purpose in the celebration. It is not intended solely for the inward stimulus and communion of the celebrant but also as an outward witness to others of the reality of the faith. This continual repetition of the original Supper is a lasting demonstration of faith in our Lord's promised Second Coming at the end of the Age to receive His own to Himself and to convert the world. No matter how long the time, each successive celebration of the ceremony, in whatever place and in whatever circumstances, is an additional testimony that His own are waiting and watching.

"As often as you drink it" does not define any particular interval between successive celebrations. It could apply equally well to once a week or once a year. It could also be argued that the matter is left quite open so that every Christian and every Christian community may order the matter according to their sense of what is fitting and what it means to them. It could well be that this is one of the provinces in which Paul's dictum "let every man be persuaded in his own mind" can be held to apply. There is no instance of any particular celebration by any particular church of the Apostolic Age recorded in the Book of Acts, or alluded to in any part of the New Testament, from which the original practice could be discerned. In Christian literature of the first two centuries the subject is somewhat beclouded, since the Early Church instituted a number of different festivals commemorating various aspects of the faith and happenings connected therewith, and nothing definite can be gleaned. Additionally it was a long time before observance of the purely Jewish festivals such as Passover died out in the Jewish section of the Church. Not until much later does the evidence of monthly or weekly celebrations emerge, and by then it is fairly obvious that remembering our Lord's death had become confused and identified with a completely different custom of the Early Church, the *Agape* or "Love-feast".

The beginning of this custom was in Apostolic days and was called by the early believers the "breaking of bread". One reference is in Acts 2.42-46 and the other in Acts 20.7. The custom was to meet early on the Lord's day and share a simple meal together, with prayer and praise, in symbol of their fellowship and brotherhood in Christ. The expression "love feast" occurs in Jude 12 and an evident allusion to the same in 2 Pet. 2.13. This custom persisted for several centuries and is still to be found in some Christian communions today. Despite the impression of some to the contrary, it has nothing to do with the ceremonial of the Last Supper. One very clear description of the procedure is left on record by Tertullian, (AD. 217) in his "*Apologia*", ch. 39, where he says "its object is evident from its name, which signifies love, in these testify our love towards our poorer brethren, by relieving their wants. We commence the entertainment" (this word has the sense of hospitality in this context) "by offering up a prayer

to God, and after eating and drinking in moderation, we wash our hands, and lights being introduced. Each individual is invited to address God in a Psalm, either taken from the Scriptures or the produce of his own meditations. The feast concludes as it began, with prayer". This ceremonial feast has nothing in common with the celebration of the Lord's death as represented in the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. In other places Tertullian refers to the "Eucharist" or the "Sacrament of the Eucharist" in terms which leave no doubt that here he is talking about an entirely different thing although even so he gives no clear lead as to the frequency of its celebration.

The meeting addressed by Paul at Troas (Acts 20.7-12) was commenced by a "love-feast", and from the description it would appear that this was a weekly celebration at Troas. In the face of this total absence of information as to how often the Apostolic Church celebrated the Memorial we can only put ourselves in the place of those first believers and ask ourselves what would we have done in like circumstances. All their lives they had been accustomed to keep the Passover, once every year, on the precise anniversary of the night of the Exodus, the 14th day of the first month, Nisan. That celebration was a memorial of a past event, looking backward over the centuries to a great deliverance. That ceremony, so far as they were concerned, was at an end, to be replaced by another ceremonial which was also a memorial, one not only looking back to the central principle of their faith but also forward to another and greater deliverance. Israel had kept Passover year by year continually in witness to their faith in the past deliverance that made them the covenant nation, the chosen people of God. So now Christians keep this Supper in witness to their faith in that salvation which came to them at the Cross and in that deliverance for all the world which is yet future. As with Israel the essence of the ceremony was the slain lamb whose blood delivered them from death when the destroying angel passed over the land, so in this later one the essence is the slain Lamb by whose blood all who believe and participate are redeemed from death. In the Passover ritual Israel recognized their utter separation from the rest of the world and their consecration to, and union with, God. So now the occasion of the Lord's Supper is a time of more than usual recognition of our dedication to God and our union with Him. It is

truly a time of holy communion. To some it is natural to celebrate such a ceremony once every year, like the Passover it has superseded. The Apostolic Church quite spontaneously and naturally may have accepted the habit of annual observance and no one would question it. Its infrequency may be a partial explanation of the fact that so little reference is made to it in Early Church records.

Our Lord enjoined only two ceremonies upon His followers; baptism and the supper remembering His death. The fact that He commanded these, testifies to the importance that He placed upon both. Baptism is a solemn and uplifting experience for the participant; it occurs only once in a lifetime but its influence remains

throughout life. Baptism repeated more frequently would lose its solemn significance. So in remembering His death, it may well be that those who observe the ceremony less frequently find it a more deeply spiritual and life-enriching experience than if it were observed often. Yet there are many for whom their personal communion with the Lord in this service means so much more than the remembrance of the event that is past that to lose this weekly time of intimate union with Him would be a loss indeed. Perhaps Jesus knew all this, and in His wisdom and compassion left the mandate wide open to suit the varied spiritual needs of all who in after days would become His. *"As often as you drink it"* He said *"do it in remembrance of Me"*.

AOH

BECOMING

"And are become such as have need of milk and not of solid food" (Heb. 5.12). The Christian life is one of "becoming". It is not static or stationary. Either there is growth and progression, or there is decay and retrogression. In the text the Apostle addresses some who had "become" such as had need of milk again and not the more solid food. And for this he felt it needful to administer words of reproof, for by that time they to whom he wrote ought to have become teachers of the Word. Instead of having progressed to that more favourable state they had retrogressed from an intermediate stage of development until now they were back at the point where their Christian growth began.

Naturally in the first phases of the Christian life milk is the proper food for all believers. And the more developed and mature rejoice exceedingly to see the new beginner imbibing and absorbing milk, but it must be cause for much concern and regret for them to see believers who have had the Word for years retrogressing and becoming such as have need of milk again.

It would be cause of considerable concern and alarm in our domestic life if our boys and girls of "teen-age" growth were becoming such as had need of milk again. We hold it right that they should have milk – good milk indeed – in the first few months of life. They need good supplies of milk along with solid foods for the first few years, but should they have reached adolescence and puberty and then begin to retrogress and become in

need of an all milk diet, this would be a very serious matter indeed.

That is exactly what had happened, in a spiritual sense, with the brethren of this text.

A considerable period of time had elapsed since they first believed and were fed with milk, but now by reason of that stretch of time they ought to have developed as teachers. Instead, there had been malnutrition and decay, and they were neither able to be of service to others in the teaching capacity, nor could they be taught the deeper things which a Christian needs to know. If these Christian brethren were of the "first" generation of believers some thirty years would have elapsed since they began to receive the milk of the Word.

In that span of time (or even in one-third that span), they surely ought to have grown up to teacher level and have been able to pass on the milk to other new believers, every day of their lives! They ought to have been teachers of the Word! God counts the time from when we first believe, and rightly expects to see progression and development in the way of the Lord, and if, as the years go by, there is no such development, He may want to know the reason why!

The brethren in the text had become "dull of hearing", apathetic, sluggish and somewhat indifferent to the Word in its deeper, wider fulness. Teachings that the Apostle wished to impart were to them "hard of interpretation". Not that they ought to have been hard to impart had the brethren been alert, with their senses spiritually exercised.

They were "hard of interpretation" – hard to put over by the teacher solely because the brethren had become dull of hearing, and could not exercise their senses enough to discern the good things of the Word, and the evil nature of their lethargy.

That was the tragic side of their Christian life, for while they drifted backwards and became as babes again, the deeply flowing currents of their day and nation were sweeping onwards towards the crisis-hour of their national and religious overthrow. Every day and month was carrying them nearer to that national catastrophe concerning which the deeper truth they could not learn would have been deeply instructive. In the vortex of the swiftly moving current they were likely to be as helpless and useless as children caught in the rapids of a river in spate.

Perhaps nothing is so pitiable in human experience as the decline into a second childhood. In the first childhood – the infant childhood – the vital powers are expanding and developing; the days of milk are followed by the days of "the crust", and then of "meat". Here the days of milk are temporary and in proper season – and indeed this is Nature's way; but in the second childhood the vital powers are spent. Degeneration and decay become paramount, and senility and death loom ahead.

So also with those who, after juvenile growth spiritually "become" such as have need again of spiritual milk. They are "becoming" old, decrepit, senile, old-age babes. There are certain marks that are indicative of babyhood that becomes accentuated in a second spiritual childhood. First, it is right and proper for an infant babe to be carried about from place to place, and even to be tossed about in parental hands. Correspondingly it is a sign of immaturity to be tossed about by any and every wind of doctrine that blows about (Eph. 4.14). This is often seen after some long-trusted teacher is removed by death or other circumstance. Such growth as there may have been is arrested and the reverse procedure begins. Uncertainty and insecurity replace conviction and trust, former beliefs are relinquished and new ones take their place with every shift of wind.

Secondly, the babe tends to "belong" – as a baby claims to have its crib, its toys, etc. The religious babe has its sect, its church, its fellowship and is very careful to "belong". And this becomes very obvious as its inner helplessness becomes

complete.

Babes in spiritual things tend to glory in men, to enthuse over Brother X's preaching or ideas. Like the Corinthians, they can say "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos", or in more modern terms "I am of Wesley" or "I am of Calvin" or "I am of Brother Y". Paul had to treat the Corinthians as babes in Christ, whom he had to feed with milk, because they had turned aside from deeper things. "Are you not of the flesh and behaving according to human inclinations?" he asks them. These are Christians who had become worldly. They are not necessarily wicked Christians but Christians living only on the human level. These are Christians dividing up into groups just as politicians do, professing preference for this or that leader. When seen at work this attitude always indicates the great central truth of the Church's oneness in Christ is either lost or obscured.

Babes need much sleep. So do some decadent and relaxed Christians. The vigour of youth is spent, the fires of enthusiasm are dying or have died, and a spirit of slumber and lethargy creeps slowly over the mind. The sense of ambassadorship is lost, the spur of the ministry of reconciliation is spent, and the tired one lies down to vegetate till senility damps out the fires.

It is an inescapable fact that every one of us is "becoming" this or that. Either we are "becoming" strong in the Lord and in the power of His might with all the senses rightly exercised to discern both good and evil, or we are "becoming" weak and need only milk for our sustenance. There is nothing today exactly as it was yesterday, nor will it be tomorrow exactly as it is today. It is either growth or decay, vigour or wasting away, health or disease, a matter of daily change, for good or ill. We must all give attention to this matter of "becoming", for

To sow an act is to reap a tendency;
To sow a tendency is to reap a habit;
To sow a habit is to reap a character;
To sow a character is to reap a destiny.

God grant us to be among those who are being changed from glory unto glory with every passing day, and so "becoming" Christ-like in consequence.

TH

QUESTION TIME

What does the expression "*heap burning coals upon his head*" in Romans 12.20 mean?

Paul almost appears to be telling the Church at Rome to get their own back by doing something good. This is a quotation from Proverbs 25.21 where it says if you heap coals of fire on your enemy the Lord will reward you.

F.F. Bruce says that "the original force of the admonition may have been 'Treat your enemy kindly, for that will increase his guilt; you will then ensure for him a more terrible judgment, and for yourself a better reward'. An alternative view is that the proverb refers to an Egyptian ritual in which a man gave public evidence of his penitence by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on his head. In any case, by placing the proverb in this context and omitting the last clause, Paul gives it a nobler meaning: 'Treat your enemy kindly, for this may make him ashamed and lead to his repentance.' In other words, the best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him into a friend, and so 'overcome evil with good' (verse 21)." (1)

Agar Beet says that 'coals of fire' is "an Eastern metaphor for severe and overwhelming punishment. We cannot punish a man who is doing us harm more severely than by trying to do him good: and this kind of punishment is the most likely to lead him to repentance and salvation." (2)

H.C.G.Moule gives three possible explanations: "(1) of burning shame produced by requital of good for evil; (2) of the melting of the evil-doer's heart by such conduct, as of metal by fire; (3) of the result of a spirit of love as producing at length the 'incense' of prayer and praise (as from a censor of coals) from the conquered heart." (3)

William Barclay agrees with the first of these; "Vengeance may break his spirit; but kindness will break his heart. 'If we are kind to our enemies,' says Paul, 'it will heap coals of fire on their heads.' That means, not that it will store up further punishment for them, but that it will, as we ourselves say, move them to burning shame." (4) With this last phrase

Moffatt's translation also agrees.

Schonfield translates "*for by so doing you will fill him with remorse.*"

Campbell Morgan has a final exhortation for the whole passage "How often are we tempted to say with a sigh of relief, Yes thank God, vengeance does belong to the Lord! Thus although active reprisals are prevented, the heart rejoices in the thought that at last the punishment of God will be meted out to the wrong-doer. This thought is entirely out of harmony with the will of God for His child, and therefore the believer is called to such action as will demonstrate the existence of true and unfeigned love. The hungry man is to be fed and the thirsty one supplied with water." (5)

We cannot study this passage without reference to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5.38-48. The reason that we must not retaliate, must not even have it in our heart to want any kind of vengeance, is because we are to be like our Father in Heaven.

During the second world war a Christian couple who were pacifists lived next door to a very patriotic family. In the first year or so of hostilities the elderly father of this family was particularly abusive and unkind towards the Conscientious Objectors. Then one night a bomb fell on the land between the neighbours and the patriots' home was partly demolished. Homeless they were grateful to be received into the 'home next door' where they appreciated refreshment and rest as the air-raid continued. Next morning, those same neighbours who had been so abused sorted out clothing and found accommodation for the old couple. The middle aged daughter shed tears as she turned to her neighbour and said "Now I know what kind of Christianity yours is".

DN

(1) Tyndale NT Commentaries IVP 1974

(2) A commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. H & S 1900

(3) Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, CUP 1892

(4) Daily Study Bible; the Letter to the Romans St. Andrews Press 1972

(5) The Analysed Bible, the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans H & S 1909

"The God who created the world and everything in it, and who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, for he is himself the universal giver of life and breath – indeed of everything. He created from one stock every nation of men to inherit the whole earth's

surface. He determined their eras in history and the limits of their territory. They were to seek God in the hope that, groping after him, they might find him; though indeed he is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move, in him we exist."

(Acts 17.24-28 REB)

Believing the Gospel

Thoughts on a well known text.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3.16 NRSV) This is possibly the most well known text in the Bible. It is simple yet profound. Its words have been put to music for songs and choruses. It has been recited in countless Sunday School anniversaries in past generations. It has been the subject text for many sermons; and it is said that Spurgeon preached on this text on 7 consecutive nights.

So what is it about this text that attracts popular interest. Is it the simplicity with which it states the most profound truth? The search for some form of everlasting life has certainly affected very many people over many hundreds of years. Some have searched on a human level to extend life, as we know it on Earth for as long as possible. Others take a more spiritual view in that they look for a different form of life in another sphere.

The text in John 3.16 doesn't define the kind of everlasting life but it states the important principle of believing in Jesus. Modern commentators are quick to point out that references to 'eternal life' in the Gospels generally refer to the quality of life rather than a time scale. Several attempts were made to extract from Jesus a magic formula that if applied would provide eternal life. A rich young ruler and a lawyer were among these. Such a formula was not forthcoming except that the enquirers were told to express the kind of love that could be seen in Jesus' words and action that reflect of God Himself. And that is where we begin **"For God so loved the world that He gave..."**

In a sense this is a staggering thought, that the Almighty Creator of the whole Universe – one who is much bigger and greater than the Universe itself, should give what is dearest and best – His only Son. Yet knowing that God is love, that everything that He has ever done is the embodiment of love, could we expect less than that He should provide a way of escape for mankind from its slavery to sin by such sacrificial love. We are at once caught up in an awed silence by the magnitude of the gift, yet we are driven to an explosion of praise and thanksgiving for the wonder of that love.

"God so loved the world." Firstly, God shows us the way in matters of love. He is not like some

medieval teacher or priest who seeks to instil lessons by rote learning. In good Hebrew fashion, He shows us practically how to love by giving His son in sacrifice. All that Jesus suffered here on Earth until He breathed His last and gave up His spirit to God, the Father suffered with Him. While God retained complete control over what was happening yet in some mysterious way sinful men were able to choose to do their worst, their most devilish to destroy Him. They did that to one who was all loving and in doing so gave Jesus the opportunity to express the very highest form of love. God loves in a manner that no one in the Universe can equal.

Whatever ideas mankind had about their Maker, when the Son of God came to Earth He demonstrated love in a way never before seen on Earth. This was a love that sought only the highest welfare of the one loved; that never ever sought to return evil for evil or to retaliate to get its own back. This was a love that was prepared to go to the utmost extreme in order by love to win back rebellious hearts. God so loved; He set the pattern, He offers the lesson that sinful man may copy and learn.

"God so loved the **world**". It's an extraordinary statement in the light of all the other things which John was going to write about the world before he finally laid down his pen. This is the world that rebelled against its Maker. This world has denied Him, ignored Him, worshipped gods of its own making and broken every rule in His book. It blames Him for the trouble it brings upon itself by refusing to live by the principles that He has laid down. It has killed millions of its own kind as well as many thousands of those who seek to obey Him. This is the world that He loved – not the sin of the world but those human beings once made in His image.

He has expressed His love in such a way that there can be no misunderstanding. Yet this world talks about 'love' and sings about 'love' without having the vaguest idea of what love is. Its brand of love and indeed its whole way of life has neither logic nor the slightest possible chance of ever being successful, of reaching any kind of goal, or of freeing mankind from its chains of sin and death.

In spite of all that, God so loved the world that

He gave and that is the essence of the love of God. It is the wonderful self-giving which gives in pure joy of helping mankind to reach a richer, fuller life. Unlike human 'love' there are no strings attached, no underlying selfish motive for expressing love. Sometimes this love can be seen in ordinary human form because faint reflections of the original 'image' of the Creator linger still in those so created. There is no end to His giving; He never grows weary of giving, nor does he resent the rebuffs and rebellion of those to whom He gives. He just waits to bless.

God so loved that He gave His only Son. He could have given no greater gift. This was the Son that had been with Him in all His creative work. This was the Son who shared everything with Him and was His companion. By His words and works, Jesus was able to demonstrate just what the Father was really like. A few lonely souls like Moses, Hosea and Jeremiah had given one small glimpse of what He was like but gentile peoples, apart from those who imitated Israel, could only guess at the supreme being of the universe; and mostly the guesses were not very good. Now all mankind, beyond the borders of Israel, could see the "reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Heb. 1.3 NRSV) before their eyes. But when the light came darkness could not bear it and therefore tried to destroy it. God knew the consequences of placing the image of His own love in this world. Whatever protestations of morality and goodness human society make, it was inevitable that the forces of darkness and evil of mankind would seek to destroy the goodness of Christ. God knew this and He gave His dearest and best. Jesus too made it clear that He knew that there

could be no other end to His life. Yet in the wisdom and loving purpose of God, this is the only way to recover that which was lost in Eden; the only means of restoring Paradise on Earth.

That **whoever believes in Him** is the challenge to reach Earth's millions. 'Whoever' goes beyond one small nation or one tiny Christian church. It seeks the rich and poor, or perhaps the poor and rich, in that order. It seeks the unlearned as well as the wise. It seeks those of every race and nation, of every social class and grouping, it seeks the religious 'good' people, and those who hardly know their left hand from their right in matters of morality. It seeks those who have claimed to be Christ's but really have gone their own way; it seeks those who have never known Him. In the resurrection those who have died in the affluence of western cities will not be ahead of those who they allowed to die by famine and disease in the desert. The slave ship, the gas chamber, the firing squad have each in their turn claimed millions of human lives but God gave His son so they might all have an opportunity to believe.

That belief is not a goal or end in itself; it is only the beginning, but it is the first step in salvation as a man hanging on a cross discovered from the lips of Jesus. But belief must be much more than accepting the truth of a fact or the first step in trusting in Jesus as personal Saviour. Belief is just the beginning of discovery that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Discovery of who Jesus is, compels the believer to go on until life in Christ brings transformation from the rebellious human nature to the surrendered life moving from one stage of beauty of character to another until we are totally like Him. DN

GOD SPEAKS

Reflections in the letter to the Hebrews

God speaks! So begins the letter to the Hebrews; and without the customary greeting; and properly so, for the writer's qualifications and his blessing on his readers must be left unmentioned while God is speaking. He speaks to a people whose first great leader exceedingly feared and quaked when the voice of God once shook the earth and from whose ranks arose those mighty men of word and deed of whom the world was not worthy. He speaks to a people who had heard His voice through many centuries; to a nation which could rightly claim that to them was committed the Word of God. The

prophecies had not come by the will of man for often the will of man was contrary; nor did the prophets proclaim together, but spoke at different times when the burden of the Lord was upon them. As descendants of Adam they died like their hearers; yet their words have not died, and they still speak to those who listen, and appropriate quotations are made in this letter from their writings. The passage of time has by fulfilment of their prophecies revealed that for all their frailty they are truthfully referred to as holy men of God who spoke as moved by the Holy Spirit.

But a great change of procedure is announced at the opening of this letter. God is speaking again, and the new channel of truth is the greatest He could use. We all know through whom He now speaks, but the writer, apart from speaking of Him as the Son of God, does not immediately announce His name. He first mentions some of His glories and greatness, and when he has thus prepared the minds of his Hebrew readers, he declares Him, in chapter two, to be Jesus. He is not of sinful stock as the early prophets, yet His words do not abrogate the prophecies of his predecessors, for all spoke by the Spirit's direction. But this will emerge from the comparison; that if God had of old spoken through several faithful men and is now speaking through one, His Son, then He must possess outstanding qualifications and virtues. He has, and the first seven chapters of Hebrews tell, among other things, how much better, how much greater is this faithful and true witness than the stalwarts of the past. Note how, in those chapters, the faithful servants of old (the very ones revered in Israel) are one by one surpassed by Jesus the Son of God.

Early in the first chapter we see the close association of the Son and His Father, so complete that He is spoken of as the reflection of the power, the character, the voice of God. But there are two facts in which the Son must necessarily differ from the Father, yet they also prove how glorious is the union of Father and Son. It is the Son who purges our sin, and having done that great work sits down on the right hand of the majesty on high. This is the channel through whom the message of God now comes, and it will be noticed that this new prophet is also priest and king. He excels all previous holders of these offices in that He possesses the power of an endless life, enough to fit Him for all the many needs of Israel and the world. That He holds this immortality is seen in this chapter by Him gaining an inheritance of more excellent name than the angels.

The remainder of the first chapter has as its theme the proving of the Son's superiority to the angels. Ample quotation is given from the voices of the past, which look forward to His coming and faithful performance of His Divine mission. These in turn seal the old writers as prophets of God. This writer propounds the question: "*To which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you?*" No answer is given, for there

is none. His superiority to angels is so marked that the apostle uses that strong figure of speech, where the unanswered question is more telling than any reply. Further quotations show the Son's work in the beginning of laying the foundations of the universe. Some of the work erected on those foundations will perish, but the founder will endure and bear a righteous sceptre in the coming kingdom.

Chapter 2 affirms that the great work of subduing the future habitable is not assigned to angels. Yet it reasons that if the word once spoken by angels was accompanied by severe penalties, we ought to give more earnest heed to the words which first began to be spoken by this new voice of God which He confirmed by gifts of the Holy Spirit. Great indeed must be the responsibility of the hearers now that the last and greatest voice from God is speaking! Leaving the subject of angels, the writer mentions the superiority of the Son to man. This may be an obvious truth. Yet if we recall that the Son was once with the Father and became a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death so that He might redeem man by dying for him, then His superiority to man can never be called in question. And His superiority to the Devil is apparent, for by the same act of death He will render him powerless.

Then the comparison changes. Though superior to angels and man in general, He is shown as better than man in particular from ch. 3 onward. The first great man in the list of worthies is Moses, one of the faithful voices of the past. It will be remembered that Moses the servant of God and of the house of God, Israel, prophesied that he would be succeeded by another to whom they would hearken without fail. Thus he became a testimony or illustration of those things which were to be spoken concerning Jesus the Son. But though Moses heard the voice of God and faithfully served the words to Israel, it was necessary for the house of God to be constantly prompted to loyalty by the insistent words, "*Today if you will hear his voice*". The word preached did not profit, for the hearers did not combine what they heard with faith. Then are mentioned two more leaders in Israel, Joshua and David; yet both failed to give rest to Israel. The word of God had come to Israel through such as these at various times and in many ways with but little result, and the word of God being quick and powerful spoke again and said, "*They shall not*

enter into my rest".

It will then be reasoned that now that God is speaking by His Son, who surpasses Moses, Joshua and David, we ought to give the more earnest heed. It is as though the writer was saying, *"Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation, and how shall we escape if we neglect?"* Yet, the warning notes of chapters three and four are tempered by the announcement of the new voice of God being a faithful high priest who was, apart from sin, tempted in all points like as we. So we may come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help. But we must listen to the voice.

The mention of high priest will remind the Hebrews of the first and greatest, Aaron. He did not take the honour to himself, but was specially called for the post, as was Moses called to his service. In fact, each of these leaders of old time was called to his service, and it was proper that Israel should heed them in those days when they spoke from God; but their superior has come, the princely leader of salvation, the Son, and they must listen to Him. They had looked on Aaron as the model high priest even as they saw Moses as the great prophet, but both are succeeded by One, in whom combines each office held by Moses, Aaron, Joshua and David. When the writer has compared one by one the leaders of the past with their one successor they must perforce accept Messiah. The writer points out their responsibility (in chapter 6), but again he has comforting words to speak, for he is confident of better things of them, even though he must speak strongly.

There seems to be only one more name in Israel to which they would cling now that each of their leaders has been superseded by Jesus, and he is the father of them all, Abraham in whom are the

promises. As we expect, the writer shows how he too is superseded by the same one. Yet none of them is discarded by God, but the new channel of God's word and promise and deed is so much better than they, great though they were, and most worthy to be revered in Israel. Abraham received blessing from one of unknown descent and whose appointment as high priest came not in the manner to which Israel was accustomed. Abraham gave him tithes in acknowledgment of his honour. Consider how great this man was in receiving tithes from Abraham and therefore from Levi and the whole house of Aaron, who in their turn received tithes from all Israel. Of such rank is Jesus the Son of God.

Chapter 8 begins as though the previous seven chapters have described the glories of this one high Priest, for he says, *"the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest."* greater than angels, greater than man, than Moses, Joshua, David, and Aaron, and greater even than Abraham. He it is through whom God now speaks, and we must give heed, for no better can ever be found.

Make no mistake, Satan is no fool and he's been around a lot longer than we have. He knows how to clothe evil in a garment of righteousness and present it at just the right time; perhaps when you're spiritually down or at a point when your earthly appetites are particularly sharp, or when you have allowed bitterness to disarm you. If you believe that you can handle him by yourself without the Lord's help, think again! He has and is destroying stronger and more intelligent people than we are and he uses a built-in weapon to do it, human weaknesses! Let us therefore listen to the voice of God through His Son.

BJD

The beloved Apostle tells us in that text which we all love to quote (John 3.16) that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" for our sakes. Yes, the great Creator of everything, perfect and pure and lovely, loved the fallen race so much that even while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5.8) and we also, as we become imbued with His spirit become deeply interested in all that affects the human family, and desire fervently that their eyes may be opened and that they may be led to the only sure way in which their desire, the desire of all nations, may be brought about. Love is in its very nature, an extrovert

quality. It cannot continue to exist where the one who wishes to cultivate it is solely concerned about self, not even when that concern is in reference to so laudable a matter as spiritual self-interest. The Christian who fears the bestowing of some of his care and attention upon the perplexities and worries of a world that is desperately striving to find some way out of its difficulties, lest that attention should interfere in some small measure with what he conceives to be his spiritual progress is, we believe, defeating his own purpose in life.

(The Herald of Christ's Kingdom)

SCHEMER TO SAINT

Contrasting Jacob and Esau

The characters of Jacob and Esau were entirely different. Esau was a skilful hunter and man of the field. Generous and warm-hearted, he attracts our sympathy. He cared only for the pleasures of the moment; was worldly, irreligious, indifferent to parents' wishes, uninterested in the Divine Covenant and unmindful of its privileges and responsibilities. Heb. 12.16 says he was profane and Weymouth renders this 'ungodly'. Esau was the favourite with Isaac.

Jacob was 'mother's darling'. He stayed at home, followed domestic occupations and busied himself with flocks and cattle. His interests centred in his home. Although crafty, subtle, mean and deceitful he showed strength of character, patient endurance and warmth of affection. Long years of discipline and suffering were needed to purify him and make him worthy of the Divine Covenant and Blessing and to turn him from a schemer into a saint. He believed in and sought after his father's God and held spiritual things in reverence. At Bethel, Haran and Peniel he showed his conviction that God was with him to guide and bless. He conquered himself at last and proved himself a "Prince with God".

Esau was in some respects the better man; a fine country gentleman popular with all. But he never prayed. He was a secular soul who never built an altar and never felt the need of one. He was just a man of the world. Jacob on the other hand was a bargainer and incites our contempt, but he had a redeeming feature; deep down in that clever calculating heart there was devotion. Wherever he went he seems to have built an altar and prayed to God. The result was that Jacob grew finer and better while Esau grew coarser and sank into obscurity. Jacob became one of the outstanding figures in Jewish history. The passion for spiritual things proved to be Jacob's salvation. All lives to be successful must be lives of one desire; the greatest desire of all is worship and service.

One day, weary after the chase and faint with hunger, Esau found Jacob preparing a pottage of lentils. He cried, "*Give me a helping of that red broth*". The verb expresses extreme eagerness (Gen. 25.30 REB). Verse 34 says, "*he ate and drank and went his way; Esau showed by this how little he valued his birthright*". These words describe graphically Esau's complete indifference to spiritual privileges. There was no regret, no sad feeling that he had prolonged his life at too high a

cost. If Jacob was cunning and mean in taking advantage still it must be said he valued the privileges which Esau despised.

God had marked out Jacob as the heir to the promises but Isaac struggled against God's will and his assent was obtained by craft. Is there any excuse for Jacob's subtlety? Jacob sought no earthly good; it was not the elder brother's share of the father's wealth that he wanted. All that was Isaac's he resigned to Esau and went away penniless. But Rebekah and Jacob should have trusted God to bring about what He had predetermined. Had Rebekah's faith been pure and exalted she would have known that God would somehow fulfil His word without her help, but the fault began with Isaac and Rebekah probably considered she was preventing a grievous wrong.

In order to obtain Isaac's blessing Jacob impersonated Esau, but he did not keep up his acting well for when Isaac asked how he had obtained the venison so quickly he replied, "*Because the Lord your God put it in my way*". It was not Esau's character to see anything providential in his success in hunting and this as well as the short delay, may have aroused Isaac's suspicions.

When, later, Esau revealed what Jacob had done, we read (Gen. 27.33) Isaac was "*greatly agitated*." This was not mere vexation at having been deceived but he felt he had been resisting God. He persisted no longer in his sin; acknowledging the Divine purpose he had no word of blame for Rebekah and Jacob but confirmed to him the blessing.

"*He is not called Jacob for nothing said Esau, This is the second time he has supplanted me*" and in thus playing upon his brother's name Esau has had a lasting revenge, for the bad sense which he put upon the name has clung to it. Originally the name "Jacob" meant one who follows at another's heels (Gen. 25.26).

Rebekah, advising Jacob to flee to Laban at Haran, said, "*stay with him for a while until your brother's anger cools*" but she saw Jacob no more for he was away forty years. Evidently on the way Jacob's thoughts were very full. Would God confirm him in the possession of that which he had secured by fraud and cunning? Thus meditating he had drawn near to God. Then he had a dream that assured him that though in distress and fleeing for his life yet he was the object of God's love and care.

He was to learn that all that was to happen was a part of the working out of Divine Providence. One object of the dream was to show that God watches over the whole earth and that messengers come from Him and return to Him, to and fro. Jacob vowed a vow (Gen. 28.20 REB), *"If God will be with me, if he will protect me on my journey and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, so that I come back safely to my father's house, then the Lord shall be my God; and this stone which I have set up as a sacred pillar shall be a house of God. And of all that you give me, I shall allot a tenth part to you."* Surely a vow of gratitude!

The Divine care and blessing promised at Bethel are shown in the account of his sojourn at Haran, whence Jacob returned blessed with numerous family and rich in goods. Equally marked is the severe discipline in order that the darker features of his character might be purified and that he might learn to put his reliance not in unworthy scheming but in simple faith in the love and blessing of God. While at Haran, Jacob the deceiver was deceived; he served fourteen years for his wives and stayed another long period without any settled hire. At the end of this period Jacob's trust and faith in God are seen in Gen. 31.5, *"The God of my father has been with me"*.

On the homeward journey God gave Jacob another vision of angels (Gen. 32.1). What a sense of protection they must have afforded; yet when approaching Esau he took all reasonable precautions and prayed. His message to Esau was humble; he called Esau his lord and himself a servant and enumerated his wealth and thus showed he required no aid nor need claim even a share in Isaac's property, but Esau made no answer. Jacob's extreme distress in spite of Divine encouragement repeatedly given him shows his faith was very feeble, but it was real, and he sought refuge in prayer.

His prayer was a pattern of humility, earnestness and faith and shows grateful acknowledgment of past mercies, confessions of unworthiness, believing and pleading of God's promises and a plea for protection. Having quieted his mind by prayer he used his best judgment. Gen. 32.14 says that he sent five hundred and fifty head of cattle in five droves as a present.

A crisis in his life was approaching. Jacob was to receive the final lesson which humbled him, broke down his self will and convinced him that he could not snatch the blessing from God's hand but

must accept it as a gift of grace. Jacob was alone and there wrestled a man with him. (Gen. 32.34.) A man, such he seemed to be to Jacob but Hosea (12.4) calls him an angel and in verse 30 Jacob recognised in him a manifestation of God.

We often speak of Jacob wrestling with God but this is only a half truth; at the outset it was God wrestling with Jacob. He had come to the land God had covenanted to give him and was about to enter into possession. All his life long Jacob had leaned on his own cleverness; his quick mind had already planned how best Esau's wrath might be appeased. Suddenly he was caught by an antagonist, someone he did not know but who evidently meant to humble him. God could not allow Jacob to think that his cunning was winning the land; God must resist Jacob till he was willing to receive the land as a gift. The angel disabled Jacob by touching the hollow of his thigh (the socket into which the end of the thigh bone is inserted). Probably the muscle was strained but Jacob had a persistent nature and fought on doggedly though he was practically defeated.

We cannot doubt that the angel who had the advantage could have hurried away from the man he had humbled but God does not act that way. Jacob, emptied of self, clung to his antagonist and God took pleasure in Jacob and lingered in his presence. So long as Jacob in self satisfaction demanded the surrender of Canaan, God barred his progress but as soon as Jacob acknowledged his powerlessness and became a lowly suppliant God stayed in his company. His sole quarrel had been with Jacob's arrogance which would seize as a prize what could only be bestowed as a gift, but when arrogance was smitten the Victor remained to bless. Jacob's wrestling began where God's finished but it was no more the wrestling of self confidence. Jacob would not let Him go without obtaining from Him a blessing. He who was beaten back in his wealth now carried all before him in his poverty. The old name which commemorated his crooked dealing was changed to Israel, "Perseverer with God". *"As a prince have you prevailed."*

As he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him. Why this small detail? It was bright full day within and without. To Jacob, nature had a radiance it never had before because the breach was healed between himself and God. The shadows had fled and there was sunlight in nature and sunlight in his soul.

AOH

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

12. Chapter 10

Ch. 10.1-23 Jesus sends out the '70'. It was a significant number for Jews: Moses' elders in the wilderness (Num. 11.16) and the Sanhedrin; also symbolic for 'nations'. The disciples' equipment was simple, nothing to clutter or side track. Jesus gave instructions and they worked in Trans-Jordan. More Gentiles were there so Jews were less particular about the Law but see Matt. 10.5. 'Son of Peace' is a Hebraism referring to someone dominated by peace (1) an important quality in Jesus' ministry and of his disciples. It contrasts in every way with Satan's kingdom. Their mission was hazardous, but they could expect hospitality (1 Cor. 9.7; 1 Tim. 5.18; 1 Cor. 10.27; Matt. 15.10-20) 'Woe' is not a call for vengeance but an expression of deep regret or pity. What did Jesus mean by it being more tolerable for Sodom than for Capernaum? These towns are now a heap of rubble. On their return the disciples and Jesus rejoiced in triumph over evil and Jesus spoke to His Father in exultation. He directed the disciples to what is really important (v.20). The disciples' victory contrasts with the Pharisees 'self exaltation'. We glimpse oneness with the Father showing His Messiahship and in some special way shared with the disciples; John enlarges in chapters 14-17.

Verses 25-37 Parable of the Good Samaritan: Was the lawyer testing Jesus? He referred him to the Law (Deut. 6.5; Lev. 19.18). Jews were their only neighbours, all others were enemies. Did the man suspect that there was something other than the Law? Did Jesus tell of a real occurrence? It is a unique story and only Luke tells it. It describes the Greek word 'agape' which Paul reshaped to express Christ's love. The story reflects the quality of His life. The Jerusalem-Jericho road is described by Robinson and Winward (2) "The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is one of the most remarkable in the world, descending from 2,300 feet above sea level at Jerusalem to 1,300 feet below sea level at

Jericho ... this highway winds and bends like a serpent, Passing through desolate mountains and narrow rocky defiles, ... many sudden turnings and hairpin bends" – a robber's paradise! Those who kept the spirit of the law and obeyed the prophets (Hos. 6.6; Micah 6.8) would know what to do upon seeing the stricken man. Yet how many of us really keep those laws? That a Samaritan is the 'hero' is surprising (Matt. 10.5; Luke 9.51-56). Jews hated them. Priests and Levites were the healers and carers in Jewish society. The Samaritan does much more than might be expected of anyone helping. Wine was an antiseptic and oil would soothe and heal. It's worth looking at the many characteristics of the Samaritan. This parable has been given a modern setting many times. Have we gone and done likewise or do we still pass by on the other side?

Verses 38-42 Bethany 2 miles east of Jerusalem. Does this moving devotional study follow the Good Samaritan to guard against 'salvation by works'? Does Jesus disapprove of Martha's service or attitude? The 'one thing needed' is not a particular dish or course but that which Jesus needed just before His suffering and Mary understood that need as spiritual communion. Martha, anxious and agitated, was getting upset. Jesus' repetition of her name 'indicates affection and concern' and he loved both sisters.(3) Barclay says that Luke's description is vivid with an economy of words showing the clash of temperaments. (3) One sister was a human dynamo the other quietly reflective and there was no cause for one to look down upon another for all types are needed in the smooth running of a Christian community.

(1) Geldenhuys Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Marshall Morgan & Scott 1950)

(2) Godfrey Robinson & Stephen Winward 'In the Holy Land' (SU 1963 pp58, 59)

(3) William Barclay The Gospel of Luke (St. Andrews Press)

Live to give the world a true conception of the unseen Lord. Put away self-indulgence, whether of the sense or thought for this will undermine the better qualities of the heart. Carefully check impatience, uncharity, insincerity of speech and manner. Embody in heart and life the meekness and gentleness, the purity and the truth of the Lord Jesus. Do

the commonest and smallest things beneath His eye. Are you beset with chafing irritations and annoyances? Bear them as the martyrs the pillory and the torture chamber. You may do all these things by the grace of God and without brilliant talent.

(F. B. Meyer)

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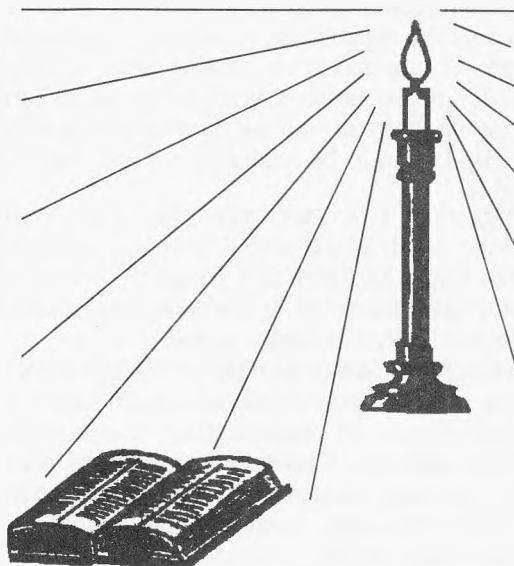
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Gone from us

Harry Beswick (*Manchester*)

Leslie Pegg (*Nuneaton*)

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

YOUR BREAD AND WATER SHALL BE SURE

The thirty third chapter of Isaiah was called forth at a time when outward circumstances were very similar to the conditions in Europe twenty years ago. Isaiah's people, Israel, dwelt in shuddering fear of their greatest scourge, the hosts of Assyria under the leadership of Sennacherib. A gifted leader to his own people, who did much for their benefit in the building of cities and vast irrigation works, he was nevertheless a ruthless and merciless conqueror to his enemies or those he plundered. 2 Kings 18 and 19 and Isaiah 36 and 37 describe in detail his Palestine campaigns. Now in the time when this thirty third chapter opens, the children of Israel, having unwisely entered into a treaty with Egypt upon which they had relied for protection, were awaiting in terror the coming of their dreaded foe.

But Isaiah is not at this moment concerned with the possible fortunes of war. In point of fact the story ended happily for Israel, for after desolating the Judean countryside and setting his armies to besiege Jerusalem, Sennacherib suffered that mysterious destruction recorded in 2 Kings 19 which wiped out the invading host in one night and delivered Israel from the oppressor.

The theme upon which Isaiah is dwelling in the chapter under consideration is the attitude to be adopted by those who had put their trust in God. These had not "*gone down to Egypt for help*" (Isa. 31.1) nor relied upon human weapons and the arm of flesh to be their protection, but had looked up to the God of Heaven who promised that while they trusted Him, He would ever be their defence. So in 33.14 Isaiah cries a challenge. "*The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless (hypocrites Heb. Chaneph – profane). Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?*" (RSV). A heart searching question indeed, for who, seeing the rapid sweep of the devouring Assyrian host across their fair land, could hope to abide in peace when all their world was being swept away and consumed before their very eyes? Isaiah answers his own question. "*He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon*

evil." These are they who, though caught up in the tide of battle and perchance suffering as would all men, are yet enabled to rise above the tribulations of the moment. This is because they have embraced the standards of another world and put their trust in One who is more powerful than all this world's armies. Although still subject to the trials and tribulations of the flesh, these are promised that they "*shall dwell on the heights; His place of defence shall be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him; his water will be sure.*" Precious promise, the inheritance of all who in every age have put their trust in their God when the wrath of man had raged against them. The Apostle Paul tells us that we are "seated with Christ in the heavenlies". Constant is the exhortation to "*look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*" (2 Cor. 4.17-18). "*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty*" (Psa. 91.1). In that hallowed sanctum of the Rock of Ages shall he find sustenance, the bread of life and the water of life indeed. "*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*" said Jesus "*and all these things shall be yours as well.*" At a time when the advent of abnormal conditions of life amongst us threatens in so many cases the loss of a normal livelihood, good it is to remember the Divine promise "*his bread will be given him, his water will be sure.*"

Now comes a word of assurance. In the midst of this troubled time let the believer but trust in his God and rest secure in that confidence, and (verse 17) "*Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches afar*" (RSV). Critical scholars render the latter phrase "the land of far distances". Who is there among us whose heart does not thrill at the prospect of even now, by faith, seeing our King in His beauty; "*the chief among ten thousand; the one altogether lovely*"? (Song of Solomon 5.10, 16), and gazing entranced at the glorious vision of the land of tomorrow, a good land, a spacious land, one stretching into all eternity, truly "*the land of far distances*?" It is only when the thoughts are turned to the eternal promises of God and the heart relies fully upon Him that this glorious prospect of future ages, both for the Church and the world, can be seen stretching into the illimitable future. Why focus our

eyes and thoughts upon the black clouds of trouble to the exclusion of that fair land which awaits all men on the other side?

Now in verse 18 the prophet turns for a moment from his lofty station and brings his thoughts back to the present. *"Your mind will muse of the terror"* (RSV); most translators agree that this is the true sense of the Hebrew. The believer in God, after having firmly established his faith in the unseen things and in the promises of God, looks around him as it were, and asks *"Where is the scribe? Where is the receiver? Where is he that counts the towers?"* The "scribe" was an Assyrian official accompanying the conquering armies whose duty it was to decide the nature and amount of tribute to be paid by each conquered village or community. The "receiver" (more properly "weigher") was a companion official who received the tribute as it was paid. The *"counter of towers"* was a reference to a military officer who surveyed the countryside as hostilities proceeded and laid plans for the capture of villages and the siege of walled towns. They are still in the land, still executing their dread work, but for the faithful child of God they are shorn of their terrors. Fresh from the vision of Divine overruling power he looks around and asks "where are they? What power have these man-made forces in face of the protecting care of my God?" Clear from heaven the answer comes, as in Leiser's vivid translation of verse 19 *"The barbarous people shall you not see any more, the people of a speech too obscure to be understood; of a stammering tongue, without meaning."* To the Hebrews the Assyrians were barbarians, a people notorious for their ruthlessness and cruelty, men of a foreign and unintelligible speech. But here they were in the land of Israel, ravaging its gardens and vineyards and destroying its villages and towns. How then could it be said *"the barbarous people you shall see no more?"* What use uttering such words when the sad fact was only too obvious to those who looked on things around them. Ah, therein lay the answer. *"We look"* says Paul, *"not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are not seen."* So with us, if in the midst of our troubles and perplexities we fix our gaze upon the unseen things of the Spirit, and our hopes upon the promises of God, the glorious vision of "things to come" will blot out the fear and terror of present distresses from our minds. It will leave us in calm and undisturbed possession of that peace which

passes all understanding, that peace which converts the wildest storm into the calm of a placid lake, which takes full account of all that the wrath of man can do and finds it of no account in comparison with the overruling power of God. That is why Isaiah, in a fine flight of prophetic vision, exhorted his fellows to turn away from the contemplation of present troubles. *"Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up nor will any of its cords be broken."* Here is a picture of the New Jerusalem, the city of God that shall indeed fulfil the meaning of the archaic name, *Urusalim*, the City of Peace. The old Tabernacle in the wilderness was often taken down and moved from place to place. In very truth the children of Israel had here no abiding place, and no continuing city. Time and oft their enemies destroyed and defiled their sanctuaries and in all its forty-odd centuries of history that city set in the tops of the Judean hills has never been a city of peace. Yet the time is to come when both literally and spiritually Jerusalem shall speak peace to the nations, and many people shall go up unto its walls to learn of the law of the Lord (Isa. 2.3). A tabernacle that is at last a permanent dwelling place for the Lord God of Hosts; a sanctuary whose posts and cords shall not be removed any more for ever. *"But there"* cries the prophet exultantly (vs. 21) *"the Lord in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, nor stately ship can pass."* It is said that the 46th and 48th Psalms were composed at this time of national stress. How fittingly they mirrored the situation is proven by the constant appeal to those same Psalms when, as at the present time, the storm clouds of trouble loom more darkly and threateningly than is usual. But there is one great difference between the rivers of the city of God and those streams that Isaiah had in mind. *"No galley with oars, neither gallant ship shall pass."* What is the meaning of such seemingly out of place allusions?

The prophet was thinking of the rivers and canals (mistranslated "streams") which were in that day such a feature of their enemy's country. Mesopotamia is today largely a desert but that is only because the gigantic irrigation system which had been constructed and maintained from earliest times was destroyed and laid waste in the early centuries of this Christian era. The land is flat, and

the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, bring down great quantities of water which at certain seasons of the year overflow the banks and turn the whole countryside into a vast inland sea. At other times the rivers are shrunken and the land is dried and parched by the heat of a tropical sun. In the days of Sennacherib these flood waters were controlled by a marvellous system of canals, dams and reservoirs which stored the water and made it available all the year round, in consequence the entire land was covered with wheat fields and fruit trees – almost a Paradise on earth. To those who lived in the mountainous country of Judah such a land of "broad rivers and canals" was a most fitting example of the earthly prosperity promised to the faithful of God. So the force of the promise that the Lord Himself should be to them a "place of broad rivers and canals".

Now with Assyria in the height of her glory and power it was inevitable that the two great rivers should play their part in the conduct of military operations. Through the peaceful countryside ever and anon the war vessels of the Assyrians came ploughing their way along the waters – galleys rowed by slaves or larger ships with sails. The expression "gallant ship" is from a Hebrew word that is applied in the Scriptures to war vessels rather than merchant ships. This was used in this connection in Numbers 24.24; Ezekiel 30.9 and Daniel 11.30 where war vessels are referred to. It was almost at the time when Isaiah penned these words that Sennacherib, desiring to consolidate his power to the south of his dominions, built a great war fleet at Nineveh. He then sailed down the River Tigris to a point where it flowed near the canal system of the Euphrates, along the great Babylonian canals into the Euphrates and down that river to the Persian Gulf whence he successfully attacked the Elamites and eventually returned to Nineveh. The news of these naval operations would reach the ears of the Israelites and cause them to reflect that whilst vessels of war sailed the rivers of Babylon those smiling fields and sparkling waters could know no true peace. Hence the force of the promise which declared that no warships or galleys would ever sail on the rivers of the city of God. To us in this day comes the same cheering reflection. The instruments of the wrath of man will perish with the downfall of man's power – they will find no place in the coming

kingdom of righteousness.

"For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us." There is the answer of supreme faith. We are the servants of the Most High God, *"the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity"* (Isa. 57.15). We have devoted ourselves and our lives to His glad service. We are His ambassadors, His representatives to a world in which we move as aliens; for it is true that *"here have we no continuing city"* (Heb. 13.14). Surely then we can have confidence that whatever happens to us is known to Him and in fullest harmony with His Will. When the three Hebrew men were threatened with the fiery furnace they made this stirring reply to the Babylonian monarch *"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us ... But if not, (if He does not so deliver) be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up"* (Dan. 3.17-18 RSV). The young man with Elisha was terrified at the apparent certainty of death at the hands of the Syrian armies. When however Elisha prayed and the young man's eyes were opened he saw the hosts of the Lord – horsemen and chariots of fire encompassing them in the mountains round about. So it is with us. The invisible legions of God are fully able to divert from us all the dangers and distresses which it is not His will should come our way. As for the rest, as for those disasters and trials which **are** permitted to come, shall we not say with Job, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him"* (Job 13.15).

Let our consideration of this eloquent passage in Isaiah's prophecy be a source of strength and comfort in the coming days. Though darkness encompass the land and fears are on every side, though there are the terrors that fly by night and the arrows that fly by day, the pestilence walking in darkness and destruction wasting at noonday (Psa. 91. 5-6) let it always be true of us that *"I have made the Lord my refuge, the Most High my habitation"* and in so doing, we shall not be greatly moved.

AOH

The above article has been slightly abridged and reprinted here because it was felt so applicable to current events. May this meditation upon Scripture help to hold firm our trust in the living God, in uncertain days when leaders of the nations rage against each other and evil men stalk the Earth. – Editor

RESPECT OF PERSONS

*Practical Christian counsel
from James 2.1-5*

Owing to the unequal distribution of wealth and its advantages this evil of partiality has always been very common in the world. The social world, like the physical Earth, is composed of different layers or "strata". The lower classes have deferred to the higher and the higher have despised the lower. We are living now in a great levelling time when, as the Bible foretold, the valleys are being exalted and the mountains and hills being made low. This has occasioned great social upheavals, symbolic earthquakes, which we know from Scripture will get yet more intense. This evil, so prevalent in the world, had found entry into the church in the time of James. It has been present in the church of Christ ever since, and was one of the main causes of the great apostasy. When the church began to lose her first love she began to pander to the great and to despise the poor. There followed a lowering of spiritual standards and the wheat field became overrun with tares.

In James 2.2, 3 the writer calls the attention of the brethren to what was taking place in their midst. He presents a hypothetical case that the context shows may well have been founded on fact. *"If a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say 'Have a seat here please' while to the one who is poor you say 'Stand there' or 'sit at my feet,' have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"* (RSV) The word for assembly is in fact 'synagogue' and is the only place in the New Testament where that word is applied to a Christian church. James is writing to Jewish Christians who had been accustomed to meeting in the synagogue and had carried the name with them into their Christian fellowship. The word 'synagogue' means "assembly", and the Christian equivalent 'church' or 'ecclesia' means "called out assembly". The distinction is quite significant, as the synagogue or assembly was associated with natural Israel, while the church or called out assembly is associated with the spiritual Israel.

The two different characters which James pictures coming into their assembly were evidently visitors, just as we might have strangers dropping into our services. One is rich and the other poor,

and for no other reason than the mere circumstances of outward dress the one is treated with great respect and the other with scant courtesy. What would be the motives behind such conduct? Would it be that the former was at once regarded as an asset to the meeting and the other perhaps a liability? How would we feel in similar circumstances? While none of us would go to the length of showing such respect of persons as James pictures here, is it not true that we all have to fight against the almost innate tendency to defer to wealth and worldly position?

In verses 1, 4 and 5 James mentions three considerations which should help to keep us free from the evil of respect of persons. Verse 1. *"My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."* (RSV) The New Testament speaks of faith sometimes as a principle like hope and love. It also speaks of faith as the whole system of belief centring in Christ, as when we are exhorted to *'contend earnestly for the faith'*. Thus we can have faith in the faith. The brethren to whom James was writing had come out of the Jewish faith, centring in Moses, into the faith of Christ. This faith was wholly incompatible with respect of persons. Had Jesus been born in the palace of kings, consorted with the rich and the great of this world, and died in honour and esteem of all men, then there might be some room for respect of persons. There is good reason to believe that James was the brother of the Lord, and none knew better than he the lowly life of the Son of God. Following the birth in the stable of the overcrowded inn there was the humble peasant's home at Nazareth. Following the long years of patient toil in the carpenter's shop there were the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. From the very beginning of this ministry, so far as the great and rich and wise were concerned, He was despised and rejected. It was the common people who heard Him gladly. Publicans and sinners were drawn to Him; even His apostles were ignorant and unlearned men. Yet so far from being disappointed Jesus had prayed *"I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes."* (Luke 10.21 RSV)

It was not because Jesus was not great that He

associated with humble people, but because He was so great. As the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, had chosen the humble, so James reminds us in this verse that Jesus, although the friend of publicans and sinners, was nevertheless the Lord of glory. Against the background of the example of the Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus how ashamed we should feel of any taint in us of this evil of respect of persons.

In Verse 4 we have another helpful consideration. *"Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts?"* Weymouth's translation makes this verse clear. It reads *"is it not plain that in your hearts you have little faith seeing that you have become judges full of wrong thoughts?"* It is a very serious thing to sit in judgment upon anyone, for *"with what judgment you judge you shall be judged"*, our Lord declares, if our judgment of others is just and based upon right principles and tempered with mercy it reflects credit on us. If, however, we who are being trained to be the judges of the world are so deficient in discernment that we base our judgment on externals such as differences associated with the possessions or other material things we condemn ourselves as unfit for the position. It indicates that we cannot judge properly because we ourselves do not have the proper sense of true values. As Weymouth says *"In our hearts we have little faith"*. As a speaker said on 'Thought for the Day' some years ago, 'we are living in a world of make believe, almost like Alice in Wonderland'. The most valueless things fetch the highest prices and the most valuable and precious things are least esteemed and cost the least. Things like worldly fame, power, prestige, riches, learning, were all eagerly sought for and the highest prices paid even to the spending of life itself in their attainment. On the other hand the things that God highly esteems, such as love, peace, kindness, goodness, self-control, faithfulness are lightly valued. Surely the representatives of the Heavenly Kingdom should demonstrate what the true values are in this 'world of make believe'.

In Verse 5, James gives us the third consideration why we should beware of respect of persons. *"Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?"* James feels this

danger of respect of persons to be so great that he asks them to "listen" to him further in the matter. He calls them "his beloved brethren" to assure them that he has a deep concern for their spiritual welfare. In this he reminds us of what we may already have noted in other parts of the New Testament. It is not a matter of chance accident that it is the poor who are attracted to our worship. This is the result of God's choice in the matter. Mary expressed this principle even before Jesus was born. *"...he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted them of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away."* Luke 1.51-53 RSV). No flesh may glory in God's presence; meekness and humility are essential in those whom He causes to approach to Himself. It is not, however, that no great or rich or noble are called, but not **many**. There are a few, but only a few, and the reason for this is illustrated in the case of the rich young ruler. He went away sadly for he had great possessions, and when he had gone Jesus said, *"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter to the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* (Luke 18.24, 25 RSV). In this, as in so many other things, we see God's compensating grace. He is no respecter of persons, choosing the poor simply because they are poor. But it is amongst the common people that there exists those conditions which are most fitted for the development of the essential qualities of faith, meekness and humility. If we are tempted to feel envious of those better off than ourselves let us remember that "God has chosen" the poor of this world to be His heirs and there can be no greater honour than this.

To be poor, however, is not the only requisite, for not **all** the poor are chosen by God. James mentions another qualification. *"Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith?"* Luther is said to have called this letter of James 'an epistle of straw' because of its emphasis on works. It is very evident, however, that James had a proper realization of the need for and value of faith. In saying that God has chosen the poor, rich in faith, he does not mean that they were rich in faith before being chosen, for a rich faith can only be produced by the operation of the grace of God.

There must have been an initial faith making them prepared like Abraham to leave their own people and their father's house. Richness of faith comes afterwards as a result of God's training. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. As illustrated in Pilgrim's Progress, it is sometimes very dim at first. The Evangelist points Christian to the wicket gate and says "Do you see yon wicket gate?" But Christian cannot see it, only the shining light which is beside it and which he takes as his guide to it. After he enters the way his faith becomes rich as a result of his experiences.

Continuing, James says *"Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world, to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love him?"* Paul says the heir, when a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all. This is the position with regard to God's heirs. We are waiting for our coming of age, our adoption, as it is put in Romans 8. So great is our inheritance that it embraces **all things**, as Paul declares *"For all things are yours, whether the world or life, or death, or present, or the future, all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God"* (1 Cor. 3.22, 23). Respect of persons arising from existing social inequalities affects us sometimes by inducing in us a feeling of inferiority when in contact with others

whose dress, or house, or education or social position is much superior to our own. If we could only realize a fraction of what it means to be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ how paltry and insignificant these differences would appear to be!

Besides being rich in faith the poor must also be rich in **love**. The Kingdom is promised to those that love God and love for Him is inseparable from love for our fellows. In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats the King says *"Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 25.34). The reason given is because of their love for Him as expressed in their love for His brethren. If this is true of those who shall inherit the earthly phase of the kingdom, how much more so with the heirs of the spiritual phase. Love is the great leveler. Where it exists there is no room for class distinction or feelings of inferiority and superiority. In the Kingdom of the future, in the glory by and by, there will be the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men. Meantime as heirs and representatives of the kingdom we have a responsibility for demonstrating its principles here and now and this we can do only as the **love** of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which He has given to us. BJD

CONTENTMENT

Contentment is a virtue in danger of extinction in this restless age. The material world is glutted with things. Science, progress and civilisation have produced, for the use and pleasure of man, commodities which have become the badges of pride, the insignia of social position. Man's needs are few but his wants are many. No sooner is one thing obtained than the markets offer some new object which catches the eye and that also must be added to the accumulated possessions; displayed with pride often to the discomfort or envy of neighbours who feel inferior without this latest gadget or piece of luxury.

Few dare be poor, out of fashion, gadgetless in an age of affluence, of bright outward show and scientific progress. Things may bring a fleeting pleasure, a temporary satisfaction, a glow of pride to their owners but they do not bring that serenity of mind that is above the fret and strain of the competitive life endeavouring to keep up

appearance or aiming to amass more and more goods and money.

Poets and philosophers in every age have cherished the ideal of the simple life, with few possessions and few cares. Freedom from worry and anxiety, leisure to loiter and enjoy, to savour the beauty of Nature, of noble living and lofty thought are the real luxuries of life, prized by a discerning few.

"I swear 'tis better", wrote Shakespeare, "to be lowly born and range with humble livers in content, than to be perked up in a glistening grief and wear a golden sorrow".

To be contented with little is sometimes difficult, with much almost impossible. They are the happiest who find their joys outside of things.

*My Lord how full of sweet content
My years of pilgrimage are spent
Where 'ere I dwell, I dwell with Thee
In heaven, in earth, or on the sea.*

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

9. Desire for a Temple

King David was at rest in his palace. The Lord had given him victory over all his enemies and Israel was at peace and secure. That is what the chronicler of 2. Sam. 7 declared, and the outward facts appear to establish the justice of his claim. The traditional enemies of Israel, the Philistines, had been effectually overcome and expelled from the land. They were now back over the border and confined to their own land. There had probably not been such a happy state of affairs since the early days of Samuel and the reason is not far to seek. Once again, as in those early days of Samuel, the ruler of the land was God-fearing and righteously inclined and the people in general followed his lead. "*Happy is that people whose God is the Lord*" was David's own testimony (Psa. 144.15) uttered perhaps at just about this time. If the rulers of the nations today would but take God as their Lord, ruling by principle rather than expediency, dealing justly without fear or favour, the peoples of earth would be far happier than they are. But that desirable condition of things cannot be until the One whom David foreshadowed comes in the fulness of Divine power to rule with righteousness and wisdom, establishing justice and equity in the earth, in the days of His promised Messianic reign. Meanwhile the world must wait.

During this period David built himself a magnificent palace at Jerusalem. His alliance with Hiram, king of the Phoenicians at Tyre, gave him access to all the materials he needed, costly stones and timbers, precious metals for ornamentation, and luxurious furniture. He probably travelled to Tyre to see these things for himself. It is likely that the friendship that is known to have grown up between these two men involved a succession of visits to each others' capitals. When David saw with his own eyes the richness and luxuriance of all which this world had to offer he straightway, it would seem, fell in with the idea of a palace befitting the Jerusalem he intended to create out of the old Jebusite fortress. So Hiram named his price, for the Tyrians were traders and merchants first and last, and David became a willing customer. Before long Phoenician ships were sailing down the coast from Tyre to Joppa, there to have their cargoes unloaded and transported by Israelite labourers

forty miles up the steep ascent to Jerusalem, and soon the dream palace had become reality. King David the monarch, with his many wives and concubines and numerous progeny, had come a long way from the guileless shepherd boy of the Judean hillsides. But despite all this his heart was still towards God. He sat on his ornate throne and he thought. The fruit of his meditations began to take shape in the form of a dream, a dream of something grander and even more glorious than the splendid palace he had built for himself. So he sent for his spiritual counsellor, Nathan the prophet.

Not much is known about Nathan the prophet. He must have been a very young man at this time for he was still alive at the end of Solomon's reign seventy years later. According to 1 Chron. 27.29 he recorded the history of David's reign, and 2 Chron. 9.29 the history of Solomon's reign, in the "Book of Nathan the prophet". He was a historian and probably, like Isaiah, a statesman and an influence in the royal court. The Book of Nathan has not survived but would have covered much of the same ground as the existing second Book of Samuel, which was of course written long after Samuel's death. So the youthful prophet came into the presence of his king.

David came to the point. "I am dwelling in a luxury palace, he told Nathan, but the Ark of God, the sacred symbol of His presence with us, is still housed in a flimsy tent of curtains. I want to build a magnificent temple here in Jerusalem, one that will give glory to God and excite the wonder and admiration of the surrounding nations. The Tabernacle in the wilderness made by Moses at Sinai was adequate enough when the people made their way here from Egypt, and in the days when they were getting themselves established in this land. Now we are a great nation, looking forward to a glorious future, and I want to create a Temple that will be a fitting sanctuary for the God of all the earth, a building to which all men can come to worship." Nathan, listening, felt the same enthusiasm rising in his own heart, and impetuously he replied, "*Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you*" (2 Sam. 7.3 RSV).

But that night the Lord came to Nathan and shattered the rosy dream. "*Go and tell my servant*

David, ... You shall not build me a house for me to dwell in". (1 Chron. 17.4 and is the correct translation of 2 Sam. 7.5 also). He went on to tell the prophet that He had been content to dwell with His people in a tent of curtains and never at any time had sought anything more ambitious. Far more important than the erection of a material edifice in the city that would inevitably suffer the ravages of time and be no more, was the creation of an enduring kingdom that would last for all time as the means of Divine blessing to the whole world. That is what the Lord purposed to do. He would establish the descendants of David to be a royal dynasty that would endure forever. A son of David, yet unborn, would finish the work begun by David and build the house and royalty of David so that it would eventually be for the glory of God's Name. We know now that in His foreknowledge God was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity of the royal line of David, in His Divinity the only-begotten Son of God. In the fulness of time He will establish that earthly kingdom which will abolish evil and bring about universal righteousness. David could hardly be expected to understand all that in his time. However his later utterances show that he did appreciate in measure the purpose of the Lord and realised that in later times there would be One who would be both his son and his Lord. Through Him the ancient Abrahamic promise "in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed" would at last have its fulfilment. Here, at this time, as recorded in 2. Sam. 7 the Messianic hope had its birth and its first proclamation. From now on the true aim and hope of Israel was to be the coming of the Messiah.

There was another reason why David was not permitted by the Lord to build the Temple which was so much upon his heart, a reason which was not so much to David's credit. That reason is stated in 1 Chron. 22.8. It was because David had been a man of war and had "*shed blood abundantly*" in God's sight. The Temple of the city of peace must be built by a man of peace, and David had not been a man of peace. His warlike propensities led him into many a course of action that exceeded by far the commissions given him by the Lord. The honour he coveted would, therefore, be gained by his more peaceable son, Solomon. David seems to have accepted the Lord's decision with submissiveness and loyalty. In later years he began

to get together the materials for the construction of the Temple but he abode by the Lord's decision that Solomon should build it. So, for the present, he put the dream aside and continued with his task of governing Israel in the reverence and service of God.

But not for long for his restless spirit yearned for the field of battle and soon he was out in the field with his men against his old foes the Philistines. The accounts of his wars at this period of his life are a little disjointed and difficult to fit into a consecutive framework. However, it appears that he reigned peacefully in Jerusalem only about six years before he embarked again upon a series of campaigns against neighbouring peoples which was to occupy his time more or less for another seven years. First it was the Philistines (2 Sam. 8.1) whom he defeated yet again. They were probably the aggressors and he treated them as he had done before. Next it was the turn of Moab, east of Jordan. His brutality to them would seem to be quite indefensible. As the NEB has it (2 Sam. 8.2) "*he made them lie along the ground and measured them with a length of cord*" (a measuring line) "*for every two lengths that were to be put to death, one full length was spared*". In other words, two-thirds of the fighting men taken prisoners were massacred in cold blood. "*So the Moabites became his servants, and brought gifts,*" i.e. tribute. The land of Moab was, in effect, added to David's dominions. Next he turned his attention to the north of Israel, where existed a number of petty Aramean states of which Syria with its capital at Damascus was chief. David conquered them all and extended his borders to the Euphrates, slaying many thousands and exacting tribute of precious metals and articles of value, all of which he brought to Jerusalem. Then it was the turn, successively, of Amalek and Edom, and finally Ammon. Every one of the surrounding nations was compelled to submit to the conqueror. From the borders of Egypt to the Euphrates, David ruled supreme and none dared to challenge him. It might well be that, intoxicated by success, he began to partake more and more of the character of a ruthless Eastern despot rather than a benevolent and justice-loving man of God. His loyalty to the God of Israel was unquestioned: his passionate conviction that he had been called of God and empowered by God to lead Israel into a position of supremacy over the nations

was fixed and unshakeable. But the God he worshipped was the God of battles, benevolent to his own people but a terrible destroyer of his enemies. David was in the line of Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Samson, men who interpreted the Spirit that was in them as a spirit of destruction, beating down the enemies of God in the power of their own right arms. It could hardly have been otherwise, in the then state of Israel's development. It was an early stage of human history and mankind was still very immature. They could only visualize the promised kingdom of righteousness of the future in terms of the kingdoms around them, the only ones they had known, organized and maintained by brute force and the shedding of much blood. The promised eternal kingdom of David and his seed was necessarily pictured in such terms, with the proviso that it was to be David and his kingdom which was to be on top, and the other nations sternly repressed. A kingdom of love and peace was still far from their comprehension and the idea of the brotherhood of man and universal fatherhood of God quite absent from their thoughts.

It was Solomon, the man of peace, the son of David, who first glimpsed the sublime majesty of One who could not be contained even in the heaven of heavens and yet could bend down to hear, and heed, the cry of the most insignificant of his creatures. It was Solomon who first spoke of love, and mercy, and judgment, and peace, in the dealings of the Most High with erring men, and of His readiness to forgive. David never reached that height. He was the last of an old school of stalwarts for God who took their inspiration from Sinai. After him came men, kings and prophets, who began to see God and the ways of God in a different and softer light, taking one more step on the road which was eventually to lead to Christ. "*He has showed you, O man, what is good;*" cried Micah two centuries later "*and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*" (Micah 6.8).

(To be continued)

AOH

THINGS THAT ARE BROKEN

God uses most for His glory those people and things which are most perfectly broken. The sacrifices He accepts are broken and contrite hearts. It was the thorough breaking down of Jacob's natural strength at Peniel that got him where God could clothe him with spiritual power. It was by breaking the surface of the rock at Horeb by the stroke of Moses rod, that it let out the cool waters to thirsty people. It was when the three hundred elect soldiers under Gideon broke their pitchers, a type of breaking themselves, that the hidden lights shone forth to the consternation of their adversaries. It was when the poor widow broke the seal of the little pot of oil, and poured it forth, that God multiplied it to pay her debts and supply means of support. It was when Esther risked her life and broke through the rigid etiquette of a heathen court that she obtained favour to rescue her people from death. It was when Jesus took the five loaves and broke them that the bread was multiplied in the very act of breaking, sufficient to feed five thousand. It was when Mary

broke her beautiful alabaster box, rendering it henceforth useless, that the pent-up perfume filled the whole house. It was when Jesus allowed His body to be broken to pieces by thorns and nails and spear, that his inner life was poured out like a crystal ocean for thirsty sinners to drink and live.

It is when a beautiful grain of corn is broken up in the earth by death, that its inner heart sprouts forth and bears hundreds of other grains. And thus on and on, through all history and all biography, and all vegetation, and all spiritual life, God must have "Broken Things".

Those who are broken in wealth, in self-will and in ambitions, broken in beautiful ideals and in worldly reputation; oft-times in health, despised, utterly helpless and forlorn, God seizes upon them and uses for His glory. It is the "lame that take the prey" Isaiah tells us. It is the weak that overcome the Devil. God is waiting to take hold of our failures and nothingness and shine through them.

(Selected from an old BSM).

GOING ON WITH THE LORD

*What does it cost
to be a Christian?*

God has provided a quite simple way to free us from the power of wrongdoing. Religions of the world teach that we must earn our freedom from sin. Jesus taught that belief in Him is the way to be saved from disobedience of God's law and so open the way to friendship with God. He freely forgives those who repent and willingly turn their lives around. Paul wrote the theory of this in the first 11 chapters of Romans. In chapter 12, beginning with 'therefore', he showed that the next step in receiving new life from God is total surrender. The life and sufferings of Jesus compel us to commit our lives to Him in total contrition. God invites us, as an act of worship, to give our lives in sacrifice. He consecrates our lives to His service. Our Father does not require us to learn academic knowledge but to make a complete and unconditional surrender of absolutely everything in our lives. This springs from a pure love and deep thankfulness for what He has done for us which is more important than how little we have to offer.

From then on God works within us to cleanse, purify, refine and bring us to that condition of holiness that will prepare us to enter the glory of His presence. We do not need to concern ourselves about our own unworthiness. No one needs to fear that they are too ignorant or too low on the moral scale. Our part is to trust and obey. God is able to take us through every experience so that we will be transformed into His likeness. There will be many times when we fail to trust Him and to obey His will. There will be times when we feel we cannot make the spiritual grade, when the road is too hard, when we seem to do all the wrong things. Then is the time to rest in His loving forgiveness and know that He will not let us go.

When Noah went into the Ark he left behind a world that was destroying itself in sin. He left behind friends and relatives. He had to make a decision to be totally obedient to God's command or totally disobedient. There was no middle course of action (Genesis 7). The same applied to Abram except the immediate consequences would not appear quite so drastic. With him it was either staying in his old home and surroundings or leaving them behind forever. Again it was not easy to leave family and friends behind with all their fond memories (Genesis 12.1). The full reward of

his decision would not be apparent in this life. Others would inherit and enjoy benefits but his life could be hazardous and hard. Thus might we examine the lives of all the men and women of old who gave themselves to God. They had to make a decision, they had to 'nail their colours to the mast' and they had to leave behind an easier life of material gain (Hebrews 11.37-39).

Jesus made it clear that it was no different for those who follow Him. Huge crowds went with Him through Galilee and eventually to Jerusalem. Not everyone in those crowds was keen to walk in His steps, to give up everything so that they could follow Him to the cross (Matthew 11.37, 38). There came a dividing of the ways, a time when they would need to make up their minds because there is a way of the Lord and a way of the world and their goals are not the same. That's why he told the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13.1-23). Why didn't everyone accept Christ's way of life? Jesus made it clear in that story that there were different types of people and they received His teaching in different ways. Some didn't follow Him at all for the Devil quickly persuaded them that it was all an illusion and that there were much nicer ways of living. Some followed a short distance but the Devil made life difficult and they didn't possess the staying power. Some followed for quite a long time but there were so many other things to do in life in the pursuit of this world, its riches and interests. But some caught a vision of Jesus and what He could really do, not only with them but with the whole world. They were prepared to pursue the vision at whatever the cost. They were prepared to follow Jesus through poverty and suffering and to put up with discomforts and irritations. They saw how Jesus had left everything that He had in His heavenly home with His Father in order that He might come to Earth and save the whole human race (2 Corinthians 8.9). They saw what it had cost Him in suffering and death while on Earth so that they might have new life. They were prepared to share His ideals and principles of total obedience to God in every department of their lives so that they could go where He would send them and do what He commanded.

Those ideals and principles would lead to moral uprightness of character such as the world laughs

at. Their choices and decisions were unlikely to bring this world's top jobs. Instead of expecting the rest of the world to serve them, they would find themselves serving those around them, including possibly street beggars and chronically sick.

But the life of faith in Christ is not all difficulties and problems. While folk in the world wear themselves out in useless and often mindless pursuits, followers of Jesus are at peace. As they walk with their Lord they find He directs them into the right paths (Proverbs 3.5, 6). They see and enjoy more fully the beauty and wonder of the Earth in which we live. They are learning the lessons of love and gentleness, patience and perseverance. They become aware that some temptations to which unbelievers fall are not temptations to them at all. Followers of the Lord Jesus don't want to ruin their bodies with habits that destroy health. They don't want to break up family life or destroy society by violence. This is not 'pie in the sky' nor is it just being 'goodie goodie'. It's logical 'to follow the manufacturer's instructions' and accept the rules which the great Creator of the Universe has provided. In whatever way we explain the origin of temptation, yielding to temptation to do what is clearly wrong is not funny or clever and it doesn't lead to a happy and fulfilling life. Then why don't the majority of people on the planet follow the way of the Lord? For some 'strange' reason most people prefer to rebel against God who gave them life. Like the camel in the Zoo, they quite happily bite the hand that feeds them. Is it really so strange? (Ephesians 6.12; 1 Peter 5.8; Gal. 5.17)

Following the Lord Jesus Christ is not easy and requires the kind of discipline that most people are not prepared to accept because they want their own way. They fail to realise that God not only shows the way of life but also gives strength and courage to endure what may be hardship and pain. A Christian does not always see the way ahead or even where the next meal is coming from but such are prepared to trust God that He will not leave or forsake and will bring them through every experience triumphant, learning lessons all the way.

Total surrender of 'self' to Christ is sometimes hard. Many, who regard themselves as Christians, never yield every part of their life to Him. They become part of a Christian community and sometimes making remarkable sacrifices for Him,

yet there are departments of their lives which they never seriously give up to Christ's control. One of these concerns money matters. Control of income and expenditure is Christ's province. How we get our money and how we use it, is part of our training for the Kingdom of Heaven. Is the job we do morally acceptable to the Lord? Does the occasional 'flutter on the gee-gees' or entry in a prize draw demonstrate a real dependence in faith upon Him? Another problem, as James shows in his letter, is our tongue. Fully surrendered to Christ it can do a power of good. But allowed even a little 'freedom of speech' it can do a power of harm. Lip service to a set of doctrines is no substitute for 'speaking the truth in love'. God has given us the gift of time, and the moments, days and years just fly by. What are we doing with God's time that we said we surrendered to Him – or did we? We are either doing God's will or we are having our own way. God has given us gifts to use for Him.

We have also picked up some bad habits on the way. Of course we cannot help the inheritance of our genes – at least not immediately after we are born. But God has made provision for weaknesses – and there is only one way to get rid of them. Is there something in our lives which we would rather not have – a little deceit here or love of gold there, a readiness to utter the unkind word or tendency to go off the deep end in bad temper? Tut-tut surely not! But yes, Christians have been doing it for two thousand years and history testifies to their cruelty to fellow Christians and to others. So what do we do, and what is God's provision for such characteristics? There is only one way; such traits of personality must be surrendered to God at the foot of the cross. We must ask Him to take them from us and He will do so, dramatically sometimes. There can be no excuses, no way round such difficulties. They must be faced for what they are and honestly brought to God in prayer. He will not fail us.

The reason for total surrender to Christ is so that we can walk and talk with Him all the remaining days of our life but that is another story. And the ultimate achievement of total surrender and walking with Him is that those who share everything they have now with Christ, will share with Him in a Kingdom that will bring the unsaved millions of this world into life as it should be lived – for Him and Him alone.

IN THE LAND OF BEGINNING AGAIN

*A Parable of
the Kingdom*

1. The dead shall live again

"I have finished Sheila's awakening robe!"

Absorbed in his painting, he did not reply immediately. As his brush completed the last few deft strokes his eyes left the canvas and looked out across the trim lawn with its borders of attractive flowers. His lips framed a question.

"How shall we explain her mother's absence to her?"

His companion had risen and was draping the beautifully embroidered blue robe over her deck chair. It lay there, shimmering in the afternoon sun as though waiting for its destined wearer to slip straight into it.

"I do not know, John. This is a new experience for us, to await the awakening of one whose mother has gone to be with the Lord in the heavens. We ourselves have not been back long enough to know just how her mother will commune with her. But I am sure of one thing." She picked up a basket of coloured silks and turned to go into the house. "It is written *'He opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing.'* Sheila's happiness will not be complete if she fails to be reunited with her mother. Others whose loved ones have been translated to reign with the Lord Jesus tell us, they have talked with them although we have not been able to understand their explanations. Perhaps when Sheila awakens we shall see for ourselves and understand what we now see only as through a glass, darkly. She was twenty five when she died, John, thin and wasted by disease. Now she will take up life where she left it, healthy in body and mind, ready to hear the message of the Gospel and make her decision for Jesus."

John followed his sister into the house, carrying his easel and canvas. Two kittens gambolled happily on the lawn. Inside, the two knelt in prayer. The man's deep voice came faintly through the open window.

"O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, look down from your habitation on high and behold the preparation we have made for one whose friendship was dear to us in days gone by. We believe and are sure that you can bring her back, that the young life so soon cut short in all the bloom of youth can be revived and rejoice in this your wonderful Earth, and that with gladness she will come into harmony with the laws of your righteous kingdom. Bring her

back to us, that we may tend her as one of your little ones, we ask you, in the holy Name of our Master and our King, Jesus." Two voices united in a softly reverent "Amen".

The kittens had ceased their play and were lying still, as though waiting. The hum of bees and insects took on a lower note, waned and died away altogether. The singing of the birds in the trees faded into quietness. A strange peace seemed to have closed in upon that sheltered garden. The sun slid behind a fleecy cloud, a solitary cricket chirped once, and then all was still.

A soft whisper in the tree-tops, a gentle breeze sweeping down, stirring the quiet air, billowing through that blue robe lying in the deck chair, giving it almost the appearance of reality, a graceful reality that moved slightly, rhythmically, as though breathing ... the sun shone out warmly and birds and insects burst out together in triumphant chorus. The girl in the deck chair lay, dreamy eyes half open, puzzled wonderment slowly dawning as she sought to take in the details of the scene before her. She turned her head slightly and followed the course of a butterfly over the flower tops. Her gaze fell upon one slender hand and she raised it hesitatingly, almost as though she expected the movement to be accompanied by pain. The blue sleeve slid back, revealing a delicately moulded arm without flaw or blemish. A little frown of perplexity puckered her forehead and she closed her eyes as memory began to return.

The thin, wasted arm; the white bedclothes; the grave-faced doctor just over there; the tearful face of her mother; the fast gathering greyness coming down before her eyes and blotting out everything from sight; the slow fading of sound into silence, and now, this! She opened her eyes and looked at the golden mass of mimosa blooming where the doctor had been standing only a moment ago. Realization came, swift and sudden. "Oh mother, you were right, after all. This is the kingdom you used to tell me about, and I have been dead and have come back. Mother, where are you?". Her arms were outstretched, beseeching. A soft voice spoke behind her.

"I am here, Sheila."

There was something in the timbre of that voice which checked the girl's first impulse to turn round

toward the speaker. "It is true then? I have come back, fit and well, and never to suffer again?"

"Never again, my child. The tears are all over now "

"And you? Did you attain ..., your hope, mother?"

"Yes, dear. It was hard to let you go, but I knew my Lord had you in His safekeeping. And in His own due time He took me also, and brought me into the glorious assembly of the Church of the First-born in Heaven."

"It sounds like old times to hear you talk like that. " The girl's eyes were shining.

"I want to turn round and see if you are really there, and yet I feel quite content to lie here and listen to your voice. I don't understand it at all; it is all wonderful to me."

"You will come to understand, Sheila. We shall be able to meet and talk with each other often, even although the old relationship has passed away. We have each entered into a greater family, I in Heaven and you on Earth, and in those families we shall find new companionships and friendships, and spheres of service for the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. And you will learn in time to talk with me even when we are not together, for distance will no longer be a barrier to our communion with each other."

Sheila's eyes were serious. "Your life will be spent in the heavens, and mine on the earth, and yet I can always have you to myself when I want you?"

"That is so, dear."

She sighed happily. "Then there is nothing more I want. I shall try and remember everything you ever told me about the Kingdom and give my life

to serve the Lord Jesus and do my best to progress along the – what do you call it? ... The Highway of Holiness, just as fast as ever I can."

The soft voice seemed to be coming from a great distance now. "Remember the words we used to read together, Sheila. *'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'* You are one of those ransomed, and life, rich, glorious, never-ending life lies before you. Your old childhood's friends, John and Mary, are in the house. Go to them and they will tell you much more about this wonderful world into which you have come. I go now, but I shall come again and come to you often."

Sheila stood up and looked around, quivering with eagerness. A puzzled look came into her eyes, and then a dawning understanding. For a long minute she stood, and then, "Come soon, my dear," she breathed softly. Thoughtfully she turned again and went into the house.

This is the kind of incident that will be common in the Millennial Age. Christians who have loved and served the Lord Jesus in full consecration of life to His service will experience the change to heavenly conditions of which Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 15, and so "reign with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20.4). All others of humanity will enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom on Earth during which the Father makes His final plea for repentance and allegiance. It is to that new world the dead will return, in the resurrection, restored to conscious life by the power of God, in the new bodies which He gives to them "as it has pleased him."

See Psalms 145:16; Matthew 25:40; Isaiah 33:24; Revelation 21:4; Hebrews 12:22-23, 1 Corinthians 15:50-53; Psalm 87:5-6; 1 Corinthians 15:38-40; Isaiah 35:8-10.

AOH

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." This expresses adoration and appreciation of Divine goodness, and a corresponding reverence. In addressing our petitions to the Lord our first thought is to be, not a selfish one respecting the interests of others precious to us, but God is to be first of all in our thoughts and aims and calculations. We are to pray for nothing that would not be in accord with the honour of our Heavenly Father's name; we are to wish for nothing for ourselves, or for our dear ones, that He would not fully approve and commission us to pray for.

CTR

In a remarkable statement, Paul tells us that experience produces hope. Perhaps only a Christian Apostle could have made such a statement. In the case of the unconverted, it is probably true to suggest that experience, far from producing hope, leads to little more than despair. Those who are living without Christ in this world can find little in their experience to stimulate a sense of hope. The wages of sin is death and a life that is committed to evil can know little joy, and certainly nothing of eager anticipation of the glories that are yet to be revealed.

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

9. Ananias and Sapphira

They came, in a long line extending to the end of the spacious room, one by one stepping up to the waiting Apostles and depositing their gifts of money in the large earthenware vessel standing there on the floor. The room was filled with singing, songs of praise ascending on high to God, interrupted by an occasional pause whilst some one or another in the assembly raised his voice in impassioned prayer. This was a meeting of the church, a meeting characterized by all the fresh zeal and enthusiasm of the newly converted. The mood was one of jubilation at the outcome of the abortive Sanhedrin trial of Peter and John. With this evidence that the power of Christ from beyond the grave was working on their behalf and preparing the way for the mission of evangelization which was their privilege, the brethren had come together in this spontaneous exhibition of fraternal love and wholehearted dedication to Divine service. None of them now looked upon what they possessed of this world's goods as for their personal enjoyment; all was held as a stewardship from God to be used for the welfare of the believers and for the preaching of the Gospel. So the needs of each became the concern of the many; they sold houses and lands and possessions of all kinds, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to everyone according as they had need. The prevalent atmosphere was of expectation that their resurrected Lord would very soon be with them again to establish His promised Kingdom of righteousness. They would recall, no doubt, His predictions concerning the very imminent destruction of Jerusalem and disruption of the nation and they must have felt that houses and lands were best disposed of and the proceeds put to immediate good use in promoting the interests of the coming Kingdom. So they sang their praises and said their prayers, while those who had something to contribute waited their turn to appear before Peter and the others and offer their gifts.

Heads were turned; eyes followed a stalwart figure who strode through the doorway and attached himself to the end of the line. Barnabas of Cyprus had become a well-known and much loved character during these past weeks. Visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, he had

become a convinced believer in Christ at the very first preaching and had very quickly manifested the depth and sincerity of his newfound allegiance to Christ. A comparatively prosperous farmer, he had decided to throw in his lot with the disciples and devote his life to the proclamation of the faith he had espoused. He had sold his farm and now appeared in the midst of the assembly to hand over the proceeds to be added to the gifts already given. In after days Barnabas was to be used mightily in the work of the Gospel, first at Jerusalem, then at Antioch, and in later times as a missionary to the wider world. For the present he was content to offer his gift and take his place among the rest of the brethren assembled.

Another stir at the doorway as a second newcomer entered. Ananias and his wife Sapphira were relatively new converts and not yet well known to the brethren in general but they had participated in all that was being done and had been received into full fellowship. Now Ananias came forward, looking to left and right as he did so, carrying a small bag of money that he swung carelessly so that all could see it. As Barnabas stepped aside, Ananias proffered his bag to Peter: "we got this for the land we sold. Take it for the Cause" he said in a voice loud enough to be heard by the assembly. Peter's warm, friendly eyes suddenly clouded over and became sombre. "*Ananias*", he responded in a voice that was infinitely reproachful and infinitely sad "*why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God!*" (vv 3, 4 RSV)

The singing had stopped; dead silence reigned in the room. Ananias, the complacent smile suddenly gone, stood ashen-faced. Peter knew! Peter had seen through his subterfuge. He had done what he had done in order to gain glory from his fellows for an act of self-sacrifice, while retaining some of the money for his own use, and he had not thought anyone would ever know anything about it. But Peter had known! How could he have known? Suddenly the shattering realization came. Of

course, God knew! There was a reality about God that he had not fully understood or believed but now it came to him that his petty deceit had been open to the eyes of God all the time. He felt the eyes of the assembly upon him, accusing eyes, wondering eyes, curious eyes, and he looked up in desperation to the group of apostles before him, all with faces turned towards Peter awaiting such action as he felt compelled to take. He saw Peter's eyes too, shadowed and sad. Like Moses, thought Ananias, about to pass judgment upon some man of Israel who had transgressed the covenant; he suddenly remembered Achan who had committed much the same kind of deceit that he had himself and had brought defilement upon Israel in consequence. Now, he had brought defilement upon the assembly that had received him as a brother. He was guilty as had been Achan and merited the same punishment. With a strangled cry he sank to the ground, lying there a crumpled heap.

One of the apostles took three quick steps and knelt down beside the recumbent body. A quick examination and he looked up to Peter, watching. "Dead!" he exclaimed. Peter's face was serious. "It is of the Lord" he said gravely. "Our brother erred, but his judgment has been taken out of our hands. He is in the care of the Righteous Judge".

It must have come as a shock to Peter to realize that there could be enemies within the circle of the faithful as well as outside. The animosity of the priests and Pharisees, the hostility of the people, all this he was prepared for and ready to combat. The outcome of his recent appearance before the Sanhedrin had given him confidence that by the name of Jesus and faith in His Divine power there was no external enemy that could harm them. So far as that factor was concerned he could expect the work of the Gospel to continue without let or hindrance. But now he became suddenly conscious of a new and more insidious enemy, the traitor from within. The evangelical power engendered by the sincerity and wholehearted dedication of the disciples could easily be sullied and weakened by treason among their own number; perhaps for the first time Peter realised that he must henceforth be prepared to fight a battle on two fronts.

It is noteworthy that he did not condemn Ananias. He pointed out the gravity of his offence but the man's death was not brought about by Peter; its cause must be sought in other fields. The witnesses would take the view that it was a Divine

judgment, a visitation from God: according to Acts a most salutary impression was created. It is probable that everyone who had been there or heard about it was a little more careful from then on.

It would seem that the meeting continued, albeit almost certainly on a more subdued note. The tragedy which had occurred in their midst must have made them all the much more conscious of the gravity of their position before God. They had been called to a standard higher than that of the world around them, a standard that made no allowance for divided loyalties or the service of two masters. Their service was to God and God alone; He required absolute sincerity and complete dedication of life and talents and possessions, their all. Even though that life and those talents and possessions were handed back to the person making the offering to be used as a stewardship, the fact still remained that all belonged to God. Some of them began to realize the principle that underlay Peter's words. Ananias had every right to apportion his money in whatever fashion seemed good to him in the exercise of such a stewardship; it was the element of insincerity, of deception, of hypocrisy, which was obnoxious in the sight of God.

Three hours later, the assembly was still in session when Sapphira walked in, knowing nothing of what had happened. Peter's words to her have been branded as callous and brutal, but this may be doing the Apostle an injustice. The printed page cannot convey the tone in which the words were spoken nor the attitude of the speaker; in this instance they may well have been uttered in tones of deep sorrow and sadness. First of all Peter gave her the opportunity to confess the truth about the unhappy matter, to put herself right with God, but she, not aware that Peter already knew the truth, adhered to the story upon which she and her husband had agreed. It might well have been that at this point Peter, by the inward inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the possession of which he manifested in a number of incidents in his life, knew within himself what the outcome of this matter was going to be. So he uttered the fateful words which both told the unfortunate woman of the untimely death of her husband and also predicted her own. "Hark, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out" (v. 9 RSV). It is much more likely that the words were uttered sadly, and with gentleness, than brusquely and with severity. Peter must have been bitterly grieved at

this, the first example of sub-normal Christian behaviour amongst the faithful. In later days he would become more accustomed to such things. Now, in the first flush of exhilaration at the rapid growth of the Church and the spontaneous sincerity

of its fellowship, it must have been a bitter blow to find that even here the evils of the outside world could find lodgment. It is much more likely that he spoke in sorrow and not in anger.

(To be continued) AOH

EBLA KINGDOM OF THE PAST

*Archaeological
Survey*

A certain amount of excitement and considerable discussion in Christian journals was occasioned by the discovery in 1976 and 1977, on an excavation site in North Syria called Tel Mardih, of many inscribed tablets indicating that an important city, perhaps the capital of an extensive empire, once stood here. The discovery is of intense interest to students of the Bible since the people who dwelt there were of the same race as Abraham, Semitic. It was several generations before his day and they used a language closely akin to Hebrew that may in fact have been the precursor of the Hebrew language itself. Deciphering the tablets, some 18,000, has taken many years and even now the full importance of the find and the light it throws upon the Old Testament is not properly known.

Pending this, all that is being said and can be said about the discovery has to be accepted with a certain amount of reserve. A number of sensational and unscholarly statements were widely circulated, without the endorsement of the archaeologists who made the discovery, such as that one Ibrum recorded as being the King of Ebla was probably Eber the patriarch, progenitor of the Hebrews and an ancestor of Abraham. But aside from these irrelevancies there is no doubt that this discovery is of inestimable value in throwing further light on Old Testament history and adding confirmatory evidence to the accuracy and the antiquity of the Genesis records.

Tel Mardikh is a mound fifty feet high not far from the city of Aleppo in Northern Syria. Its nearest Biblical connection is the town of Antioch (now Antakya) some seventy-five miles away, where Paul served and the early disciples were first called "Christians". One of hundreds of such mounds in the Middle East, each one concealing the remains of some ancient settlement, no one had any idea of its importance until Italian archaeologists began excavating it in 1964. The first few years yielded evidences that the site had

been inhabited up to about the time of the Exodus but since then left desolate and gradually covered with sand and earth. As the diggers went deeper they found signs of an increasingly important and more civilized centre until in 1968 there was discovered a statue bearing the name of a king of Ebla. Now Ebla hitherto had only been known in archaic Sumerian inscriptions of the pre-2,000 B.C. period as a powerful city-state situated somewhere in Syria; nothing more was known about it. The fact that Tel Mardih was thus shown to be the capital of this ancient city-state ranked therefore as a discovery of the first importance.

By 1973 the excavators found themselves digging out city remains which they tentatively dated at about 3,000 B.C. (this has since been amended to something like 700 years later). The highlight came in October 1976 when they broke into the royal palace and found in the palace library thousands of baked clay tablets stored on shelves which had collapsed, leaving the tablets lying in heaps, a position in which they had remained undisturbed for more than four thousand years. To date some 18,000 of them have been removed for examination and decipherment; many more remain, and no one yet knows what the rest of the palace may contain.

Of course there are many cuneiform tablets in the hands of scholars and museums – the British Museum has more than 250,000, many still undeciphered although they have been there for sixty years or more. In the main, these Ebla tablets are written, or rather inscribed, in the Sumerian language (that of the sons of Ham), Akkadian or Assyrian (sons of Shem) and sometimes Hittite (of Japheth). Although all these languages are represented on the tablets found at Tel Mardih the scholars were amazed to find that many were in a hitherto unknown tongue, one that was Semitic (of Shem) and strongly resembling a kind of archaic Hebrew. Fortunately for the scholars some of the tablets are "bilingual" texts, i.e. containing parallel

passages in the unknown language and in Sumerian or Akkadian. Thus by comparison the unknown language might begin to be understood – something like comparing the Greek and English in a New Testament such as Marshall's Interlinear Greek-English New Testament. Various grammatical lists have also been found so that the structure of the language can be understood.

There have been wild assertions that this proves that Abraham and Israel originated, not from Mesopotamia as indicated by Genesis, but from Syria, and that here in Ebla is the source of the Hebrew language and people. All of this can be dismissed as fanciful. This is not the first time that such proto-Hebrew texts have been found in Syria. In 1929 the world was electrified by the discovery at Ras Shamra, on the coast of North Syria, only fifty miles from Tel Mardih, of a similar hoard of tablets, dating roughly to the time of the Exodus, in a very similar form of Canaanite-Hebrew tongue and throwing a flood of light upon conditions in Canaan just before the conquest under Joshua. Then in the period 1936-39 there was found the centre of another important city-state at Alalakh, forty miles from Tel Mardih, with more inscribed tablets covering roughly the same period as these now found. The group of languages applicable to the peoples of Syria and Canaan is called West Semitic in contrast to those spoken and written by the Semitic people of Mesopotamia, the Assyrians and Babylonians, and their predecessors the Akkadians, which is termed East Semitic. It seems probable that the language of Ebla will prove to be of the West Semitic group and perhaps the earliest form of that group. But this is no evidence that the Hebrew people originated here; when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and took up residence in Canaan he and his descendants would naturally increasingly adopt the language of their adopted country. In just the same way the Jews went into the Babylonian captivity speaking pure Hebrew; they came back seventy years later speaking Aramaic.

One tablet mentions the town called "Ur" (now Urfa in Southern Turkey) and this has revived an ancient idea that the Ur from which God called Abraham was not the famous city near the Persian Gulf but this northern one so much nearer to Canaan. A little reflection disposes of this. The Genesis definition is "Ur of the Chaldees" which defines it as a Sumerian city and not a Semitic one.

Then when Terah and his family set out, ostensibly for Canaan, they stayed at Haran in Aram-naharaim for a few years until Terah died and Abraham moved on. The northern Ur (Urfa) is only twenty-five miles from Haran; they were not likely to interrupt their pilgrimage after so short a trek. From Ur of the Chaldees to Haran is little under 600 miles and Canaan 400 miles more; Haran was a likely place for a halt. Most important of all, the first eleven chapters of Genesis, outlining the history up to Abraham's departure from Ur, is replete with Sumerian and Akkadian words. The geographical setting and terms of Genesis 2-10 are those of Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium B.C. and could only have been written by a dweller in that land. The evidence is conclusive that Abraham was born and lived in the Sumerian city of Ur on the Euphrates. God called him to make the thousand mile journey to the "land which I will show thee".

One noticeable aspect of the tablets is the similarity of many of the proper names to those of early Bible characters. Names such as Abram, Ishmael, Michael, Israel, Esau, and so on, occur. Here again some enthusiasts are eager to trace a vital connection, such as suggesting that the Biblical Abraham came from these people, but there is really no basis for this. It stands to reason that a great many people over many generations must have borne the same name, such as George, say, in English. Great play is made of the alleged fact that the name of the king of Ebla most mentioned in the tablets, Ibrum, is the same as Eber the patriarch of Gen. 10.24, suggesting that the Biblical Eber was in fact the king of Ebla so that Abraham was of royal decent, even though Ibrum's father in the tablets, Risi, is not the same name as that of Eber's father in Genesis. In fact all the Semitic peoples used names similar to those found in the O.T. – the Arabic nations do to this day – and so to some extent did the Sumerians. Abram is a Sumerian name and often found on Sumerian inscriptions. It is of interest though that many Biblical place-names occur; in particular the mention of Jerusalem is the earliest mention of that city yet discovered, by several centuries.

On the more positive side, the contribution to Old Testament knowledge that will be made when these tablets are fully deciphered, will without doubt be enormous. Particularly is this true in the

realm of writing. Not so many generations ago nearly every theologian solemnly averred that writing was unknown before about the 8th century B.C. Since then earlier and still earlier examples have turned up so that at the present time it is usually admitted and held that writing was known in Egypt and in Mesopotamia by about 2500 B.C. and this is roughly about the probable date of the newly discovered tablets. It is being claimed in some quarters that this, together with the very full historical details of the pre-Abrahamic period given in the tablets, a period on which Genesis is virtually silent, infers the probability that language and writing developed in Syria in post-Flood days and not in Mesopotamia as usually believed. This position cannot be maintained without affecting the authenticity of Genesis. It is based on the same principle as the now discredited belief that writing was invented only in the 8th century B.C. on the ground that nothing earlier had been discovered. There is no guarantee that at some future time tablets even earlier than those found at Ebla will appear.

There is an element which has not been taken into account by the proponents of the "Eblawriting-the-first" hypothesis. In the days of Ebla and Sargon of Agade cuneiform writing, in half a dozen languages, Sumerian and Semitic, was already an established art, and must have had at least several centuries of development behind it. But there is a point in Sumerian history prior to which it does not appear and it has been assumed in the past that this point was where cuneiform writing was invented. Ebla has shown that this was not so; it did exist earlier. Now this point does coincide with the last of the three disastrous floods of Sumerian history which over a period of some two centuries devastated the land of the two rivers and swept away much of its culture. The population was extremely small at this early time and it is very possible that most of the written records then existing were destroyed with other property by the floods and any that did survive have not as yet been discovered. This could account for tablets existing in Syria when tablets of the same period in Sumer are unknown. This supposition is reinforced by the

fact that prior to cuneiform and prior to the floods, a pictographic script existed of which only a very few examples have been found, at Kish and Uruk. They are sufficient to show that the knowledge of writing existed in Mesopotamia long before the days of Ebla.

The history of the ancient Bible nations will not have to be re-written in the light of these new tablets, as has been somewhat rashly claimed, but it will without doubt be tremendously supplemented by what they will reveal. Particularly there might be a filling up of that tantalizing gap in Genesis, covering the twelve hundred years between the Flood and Abraham, of which Genesis records only one incident, that of the Tower of Babel. There must have been some faithful men of God during that long period and one is tempted to wonder why some records of their lives' work was not included with those of Noah, Abraham, Isaac and so on. Perhaps the man who first compiled Genesis 10 and 11 found himself confronted with this situation; the historical records of his nation were destroyed and he had perforce to content himself with the bare recapitulation of his ancestors throughout the period. It must follow, though, that had detailed knowledge of those days been necessary to the faith and practice of either Jew or Christian during these later centuries, the power of the Holy Spirit of God, overruling all that was written, would certainly have ensured that it was included.

But it will certainly be interesting to read, in due course, what these ancient historical tablets have to say about happenings in those far off days when Eber, the patriarch of all the Israelis and all the Arabs, begat two sons, whose progeny, more than any other of the Sons of Shem, have made the Israeli-Arab world what it is today.

AOH

This article was written 20 years ago. It has been slightly amended to bring it up to date and checked for basic detail against the IVP Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Any more recent authoritative information concerning the above would be appreciated. — Editor

It is in the family alone that the one thing we call affection or love is divided and spread out like a sunbeam into the rainbow's sevenfold hues, there to display itself in all the rich tints of hidden beauty.

So it is in the church alone that the love of God is fully seen, not merely in all its intensity, but in all its varied riches.

THE BUNDLE OF LIFE

"If men rise up to pursue you, and to seek your life, the life of my Lord shall be bound up in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies shall he sling out as from the hollow of a sling." (1 Sam. 25.29 RSV).

The "bundle of life"; rather a strange phrase! What does it mean? The story tells how Abigail, wife of the boorish Israelite Nabal, came with urgency to David, not yet king of Israel; only a free-booting chieftain of outlaws, to dissuade him from his purpose of revenge for Nabal's discourtesy and enmity. The gist of her plea was that since David was avowedly a man trusting in God he could well leave the question of vengeance to God rather than embroil his own hands in blood. David listened to her entreaty, accepted her advice and turned from his purpose. Eventually, Nabal died from natural causes and later on Abigail became the wife of David.

This verse is the core of Abigail's assurance. *"The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God"*. Leeser translates *"the bond of life"*. The RSV (above) points more clearly to Abigail's meaning than the AV. The life of David was bound up in the purposes of the Most High and therefore in His care and supervision. The word "bundle" is *tseror*, which means something bound up or enclosed in a bag for safety. *"A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me"* sings the bride in Song of Solomon 1.13; an object of love and devotion to be clasped and held closely. Jacob's sons had "bundles" or "bags" of money in their sacks. The same word is translated "bag" on occasion. The good man *"has taken a bag of money"* with him on his journey (Proverbs 7.20). The transgression of Job *"is sealed up in a bag"* (Job 14.17) and God *"binds up the waters in the thick clouds"* (Job 26.8). The 'testimony' of God is said to be *"bound up"* among the disciples in Isa. 8.16. From these and other occurrences it is plain that the meaning of "bundle of life" is that of a thing most precious to God which He is preserving carefully and holding close to Himself.

Ignoring Saul, who was deposed for disobedience, David was the first of a long line of Israelite kings who *"sat upon the throne of the Lord"*. Taking no account of their personal failings

and misdemeanours, David himself was far from an ideal character, they symbolized the Divine rule of the Most High over the Sons of men. God made a covenant, a formal compact, with David to the effect that of his seed would come the king that should fulfil the original promise made to Abraham, that all nations of the earth should ultimately be blessed. In a rudimentary kind of way this was a promise of the banishing of evil, the establishment of a righteous rule among men, the kingdom of God upon earth and the reign of the Messiah. That is how Israel always understood the matter and how Christians familiar with the prophetic Scriptures normally understand the matter today. Speaking to a later generation through the prophet Isaiah, God says *"Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David"* (Isa. 55.3). The sure mercies are the things that fulfil the promise to David and the setting of the chapter shows that the time is that of the Messianic Kingdom, when Christ reigns as king. The life of David, therefore, was bound up in the purposes of God and under the protection of God in order that the promise might be fulfilled. How much Abigail knew of this, or whether, being at least a woman of faith, she was led by the Holy Spirit to speak thus, it is impossible to determine. The truth of her declaration is evident to those who know about the Divine promise to Abraham through Jacob and David which culminated in Christ. Peter made this clear in the first Christian sermon to be preached. *"David ... knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. This Jesus God raised up ... let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified"* (Acts 2.29-36 RSV). And in his second sermon he went on to speak of this same Christ coming again at the times of restitution of all things to bring to a climax the blessing of all nations. the basis of the original promise, that points clearly to the worldwide kingdom. All this was involved in the preservation of the life of David in *"the life of my lord shall be*

bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the LORD your God".

An important aspect of the character of God and the principles by which He governs is illustrated in this matter. Apart from his reverential faith in, and fierce loyalty to, his God, David was not a particularly attractive individual. A dispassionate consideration of his recorded history shows much to be deplored in the story of his life. He was very much like all men, a mixture of good and bad. Yet God had bound up his life with Himself that he might be preserved to better things and used in a significant manner in the out-working of His plan. That is true of all mankind. God created man with a purpose in view and will not lightly relinquish His hold on any man until it is abundantly clear that the purpose can never be fulfilled purely on account of the man's own irrevocable opposition. The sin of David in the matter of Uriah the Hittite was forgiven after he had sincerely repented even although that sin had to involve retribution first, in the death of the child David loved. His deeds of blood were forgiven after he had confessed his guilt and unworthiness and come to a better understanding of the ways of God, even though he suffered the irrevocable consequence in not being allowed to build the Temple, a project upon which he had set his heart. So it is with man. The life of every man is precious to God and is bound up in the bundle of the living in His care. It will be an obdurate and determined heart indeed that withstands to the end all that God brings to bear upon it, of persuasion and encouragement to repentance. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, says of Christian believers who are utterly and completely dedicated to their Lord and altogether surrendered to the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit that their "life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3.3). This is precisely the same idea that Abigail expressed when she told David that his soul was bound up in the bundle of the living in the care of God. The fundamental difference is that the believers whose lives are thus hidden with Christ in God have been reconciled with Him by a living and vital faith in Christ and on that basis have given themselves in unreserved dedication and consecration of life to God for His service. They have entered, willingly, voluntarily, into their place in His purpose. All the remainder, those who have not yet come to that point of repentance and conversion and have not yet

become thus reconciled, are still outside their place in God's purpose. However they are definitely bound up in His bundle of life and will remain so until it has been demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt that their rejection of Christ and all for which He stands is final and irrevocable.

No man can say how many or how few of such there will be. We only know that nothing that defiles or is unclean will ever be permitted to enter the Holy City at the end (Rev. 21.27). After the final work of God with mankind, whosoever is "*not found written in the book of life he*" will be "*thrown into the lake of fire*" (Rev. 20.14-15). That latter imagery is based upon the fiery valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem where the city refuse was burnt and thus signifies the utter destruction of all that is evil. That which is good remains eternally; that which is evil ceases to exist: and there is no escape from this Divine law.

But all the emphasis in the Bible is on the triumph of good. The soul of every man is preserved in the bundle of life in order that he may have every possible opportunity to free himself from the dominion of evil and enter into the "*glorious liberty of the children of God*" (Rom. 8.21). The confidence of Abigail is justified in a sphere and on a scale that never entered her own mind. The instinct that told her God was guiding David and preserving him for a great purpose is the same that tells us in no uncertain terms that God is steadily bringing to pass in history the elements of an all embracing Plan. Its object is the reconciliation to Himself, and the ushering into an everlasting inheritance of "*whosoever will*" from amongst mankind. "*The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'. And let him who hears say 'Come'. And let him who is thirsty come. And let him who desires take the water of life without price*" (Rev. 22.17 RSV). The Apostle Paul told the Athenians that "*In him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17.28). That statement may very well be more, far more, than a figure of speech. We may yet find, when we pass into the "glory that excelleth", where knowledge of things now hidden is possible to us, that in a very real and literal sense our life is indeed bound up in Him and that without Him we cannot have life. Such an understanding makes it much easier to appreciate why it is, in an equally literal fashion, that "*the wages of sin is death*", the antithesis of life, "*but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord*". AOH

CART

The operation of the Christian African Relief Trust continues to be a wonderful work of co-operation between those who contribute materially or financially, those who pack and despatch the vast container loads which go to Africa and those who receive and distribute the goods that are received. Each CART Newsletter contains evidence of God's love being expressed in all kinds of ways by all sorts of people so that this ministry to many countries of Africa that remain stricken by poverty, famine and conflict can continue. Financial support pays for the huge containers that are sent and also towards specific projects such as water and medical supplies. During last year 19 of these 40 ft. containers were sent plus several smaller ones and transit costs amount to many thousands of pounds. These are sent throughout the year to countries such as Nigeria, The Gambia, Ghana, Eritrea, Malawi Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Uganda.

Money raised through Harvest time enabled CART to send 15 solar powered hearing aids. CART operates a sponsorship scheme to assist children. Friends of CART are able to visit places in Africa that have benefited by this registered Charity's work. It is quite wonderful that there has

been contact with some of our Christian brethren in places such as Liberia for many years, which greatly helps to support them in times of crisis.

CART still need clothing, soap and other toiletries, bedding, children's books and other educational materials, typewriters, sewing machines and computers. Food needs to be of the kind that can be stored (canned or dried) and medical supplies need to be those useful for general distribution.

CART's work is centred in Huddersfield where they have a splendid warehouse and shop. Best quality materials are sold in the shop to help with transit costs. During the winter months there has been a radical reorganisation that is now complete and ready to receive goods. It is noteworthy that administration of this charity is paid for by the trustees and every penny sent for Africa goes to Africa in some way.

Any reader who wishes to help in anyway towards this work and has not yet made contact, can do so through Mr. Guildford G. Tompkins, 'Whitegates', Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD8 0LR. CART is grateful to those readers who have helped in the past.

"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone" (Romans 14.7). This principle is increasingly neglected in our day because older generations have failed to teach it to the next. Today it is each man for himself and the weakest goes to the wall. A current example is the ever-prevalent industrial unrest with its demand for more money and better conditions for a limited minority. So the sick and poor suffer. It is easy to criticise but not so easy to find a solution which is fair and equitable to all parties. The issue is running the world on the principles of selfishness or those of love. If the former, then every man grabs what he can and closes his mind to the plight of the less fortunate; even so he is never really satisfied. If the latter, then each person's interests are being looked after by everyone else and the result cannot be other than eminently satisfactory. Behind all this is another consideration. The human race can only continue an orderly and adequate existence by recognising the interdependence of people upon each other. What is called the 'balance of nature' in the world of plants and animals is true of mankind. Each must contribute to the common welfare and each should receive his or her share from the com-

mon store. The earth is capable of bringing forth enough for all, even in this modern day of increasing population but only if everyone plays a part. At present many do not. While the rule of selfishness continues, many will not. Therefore some, usually the weakest, must go short. That is true within a nation, some of whose citizens strive to acquire a disproportionate share of that nation's wealth and products. It is also true of the entire world in which some nations use their power and knowledge to gain for themselves all they desire of the earth's resources at the expense of less able nations who must then go short. So we have the spectacle of abounding plenty in one nation whilst another nation starves. All this is well known and admitted. What is not so readily admitted is that nothing can change this state of things until the rule of man is replaced by the rule of Christ. 'Self-preservation' is the first law of Nature is an old cliché but it is an untrue one. The first law of Nature is that stated by Jesus, *"Treat others as you would like them to treat you"* (Luke 6.31). When in the coming Messianic Age that precept is accepted and put into action, the world's troubles will disappear.

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

13. Chapter 11.1-32

VV 1-13 Learning to pray. Note Luke's interest in prayer. What inspired the disciple's question? It was usual for rabbis to teach their disciples to pray. Jesus wanted His followers to know just how much God delights to answer prayer. Will He refuse anything? What are the limits of our asking? Matt. 21.22; John 15.7; 16.24; Do we take Him at His Word? Jesus' model prayer is one of the best known passages of Scripture. Was it meant to be used as it stands or was it an example to follow basic elements? Jesus was unique in teaching us to speak to God as Father. Jesus is recorded of using the intimate form of Abba (the equivalent of 'Daddy' in English) in Mark 14.36 in Gethsemane and Paul uses it in Rom. 8.15 and Gal. 4.6. God is not referred to as Father in Acts, and elsewhere in the New Testament the more formal '*Pater*' is used usually in close association with 'God.' 'Father' is a hallowed name because we are addressing the Almighty Creator. In Hebrew a 'name' stood for the whole personality and Jesus describes His Father many times in Matt. 5-7 (of which the Lord's prayer is a part).

Was Jesus telling us to pray for the Kingdom to come in power or was He referring to 'kingly power' or 'Divine rule' in our lives? Note that God and His Kingdom come before our 'wants'.

Why ask for 'bread?' The word 'our' refers us to the bond of believers.

Ground for our forgiveness is grace alone; willingness to forgive others is a condition of our being forgiven (but God doesn't barter with us), Matt. 11.25; 18.35.

The phrase about temptation provokes discussion; James 1.13,14. It is similar to a phrase in Jewish morning worship. This prayer can be summed up as worship, hope, request, pardon and testing, in that order.

V 5. Why did Jesus tell this parable? In hot countries travelling can be late evening to avoid heat of daytime. They baked bread enough for one day. Many Jews lived in one large room where all the family ate, slept and kept animals. Imagine the effect of the father of the household getting up in the middle of the night. But hospitality was a sacred duty. Why does God insist on importunity if He is going to answer anyway? Gen. 8.32; 32.26; Deut.

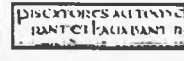
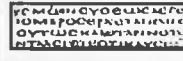
9.18; Matt. 15.27; Luke 22. 44; Acts 12.5; Heb. 12.1; Luke 6.12.

'Ask, seek, knock', all three verbs are present imperative – a continuous uninterrupted act (1). Seek here means do everything possible to receive, urgently determine to obtain; knock means 'pray urgently' or urgent sincerity to find. How insulting if we fail to believe what we would trust an earthly father to do. Our Father doesn't refuse genuine requests for the Holy Spirit and it follows that all other requests will be according to His will. James 5.1-8; 1 John 5.14,15; Heb. 10.26-31; 2 Pet. 2.20

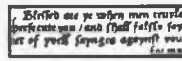
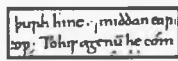
VV 14-32 Pharisees' opposition: that Jesus did miracles and made people whole in mind and body they could not deny but because of their own spiritual failure they did not recognise by whose power the miracles were done nor see them as signs of God's Kingdom. We need to pray that our spiritual eyes are open so that our human prejudice does not warp our judgment. They failed, as many have done since, to recognise that the goodness and faithfulness of genuine believers cannot spring from deception and fraud. We need to be alert to 'signs of God's Kingdom'. If we attribute the work of God's Spirit to the Devil we shall fail spiritually as Jesus' enemies. How relevant are references to exorcism to us now? Matt. 9.32-34; 16.1-4; John 2.25; Ex. 8.19; How valid is Jesus argument about "the forces of evil destroying themselves"? What was the 'sign of the prophet Jonah' and how did it convince the people of Nineveh? Beelzebul was variously thought of as 'Lord of the Flies' and 'Lord of the Refuse'; but Jesus was making reference to Satan and was assaulting the forces and bastions of evil.

What is the danger of temporary reformation? We can't live in a spiritual vacuum; we need positive thinking – Phil. 4.8. The people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba shamed the Jews of the 1st century; are there any who shame us today? Do I demand a sign or the right sign to believe God? Jesus spoke gently to the woman and corrected a popular attitude to values – are those values ours?

(1) Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (MMS).



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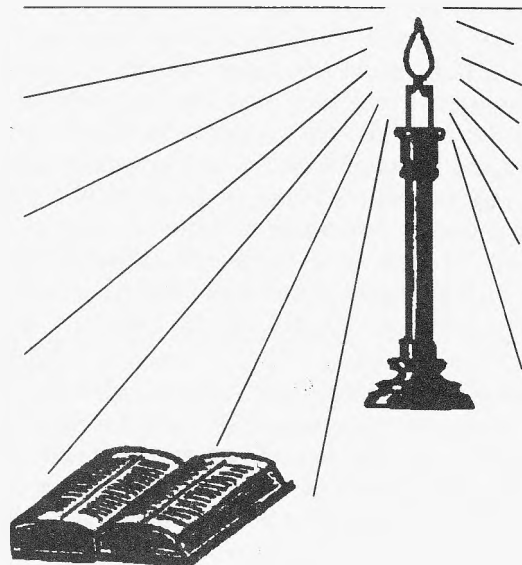
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"... it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil." (Ecclesiastes 3.13 NRSV) Has this been the experience of most people through the past three thousand years? All very well for kings in palaces to make such remarks or even those who live in the west in the 20th or 21st centuries, but just how true is this for the majority of mankind? So often God's words to Adam have been true "... in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life, ... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground..." (Genesis 3.17-19). For a large part of human history and for a large majority of people this has been true. Humanity has been subject to various forms of slavery while a favoured few have enjoyed the fruits of their labour. In earlier centuries it was just plainly being the property of a slave owner. After the beginning of industrial revolution many were caught up in the poverty of large urban areas. More recently under-developed countries contribute billions of pounds to the 'scientific'

west. Yet the Creator designed this beautiful planet for the happiness of all its residents and that is how it will be when the principles of the Kingdom of God are fully implemented upon the Earth and today's 'lords and masters' will do their share of the work. But that will be when the curse of sin is removed and human physique will be equal to the tasks to be accomplished. Rewards will be fair and people will be able to enjoy the food and drink, no longer ruined by chemicals but allowed to grow naturally to give full nourishment. Then mankind will find that toil is good and to be part of it will be a joy. Men and women will want to work, not to accumulate its rewards in miserly fashion or in competition but so that they can express their love for their Creator and for everyone around them. Then "My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands" and all will have sufficient for "they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them."

NOTICES

Costs and Gifts: Costs connected with the Bible Study Monthly remain stable and to send six 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. New readers keep pace with cancellations and lapsed copies. DN

Gainsborough House, a Christian retirement centre on the border of Dorset and Somerset has

several vacancies for permanent residents. It is under the loving care of Corrinne Vaughan, the resident housekeeper who prepares a first rate midday meal for all residents. The flats, including a new one suitable for a couple, are self contained. These can also provide accommodation for those in need of a short break amid the beautiful countryside in the south west. The centre has two lounges and a dining room in the main house. There is a fine meeting room and a well-stocked library. There are pleasant gardens in which to stroll or sit; residents have worked very hard to keep the flower and vegetable areas looking attractive. Milborne Port is an interesting country town and not far away is Sherborne, full of history. Yeovil is a larger bustling town and coastal resorts are reachable for a day trip. Mrs. Vaughan welcomes enquiries on 01963 250684.

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

9. David and Bathsheba

David continued on his career of conquest. It was during that career that an incident occurred which was to have far-reaching consequences. Nahash, king of the nation of Ammon, died. The territory of Ammon, descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham and therefore of blood-kinship to Israel, lay on the other side of Jordan more or less east of Jerusalem. It would appear that David and Nahash had always been on friendly terms and no animosity existed between the two peoples (2 Sam. 10.1-2). Not unnaturally David sent envoys to the new king, Hanun, to commiserate with him on the death of his father, and probably to reiterate his pledges of friendship. Hanun, however, being in all probability a young man, allowed himself to be advised by his probably equally young advisers, treated the ambassadors with contempt and shameful insults and expelled them from his country. David, furious at this affront and despite his past friendship with Ammon, immediately declared war and sent his forces under Joab, his nephew and commander-in-chief, to teach Hanun a salutary lesson. The Ammonites, knowing that conflict was inevitable, called upon the Syrians to come to their aid and when Joab arrived he found himself facing the joint strength of Ammon and Syria. In the ensuing melee the Syrians were the first to give way and withdraw from the contest; this induced Hadadezer, the king of Syria, to call up reinforcements from his outlying dominions and allies and send Shobach his own senior military commander to direct operations. This escalation of the conflict brought David himself to the scene of operations with a greatly augmented force of Israelites. The result was that the Syrians were defeated and largely annihilated, their commander Shobach slain, their equipment captured by David, and only a pitiful remnant got back to Syria to tell the tale to Hadadezer. In consequence Syria and her allies became tributary to Israel and David extended his dominions still farther. The Israelite historian who recorded these things in 2 Sam. 10 concluded his account, a trifle maliciously and certainly with relish "*So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more*".

David, flushed with success, now set out to even up the score with Ammon. He sent Joab again, with

a suitable force, to lay siege to Rabbah their capital city. It is evident that Hanun was next on the list for the chop. Joab and his men took up their positions and David relaxed from the rigours of war in his palace.

That relaxing was his undoing. He would have been better employed in communion with God giving renewed thanks for his unparalleled succession of victories, for the peace and safety Israel now enjoyed, and seeking guidance for the future. Instead he took a stroll upon the roof of his palace, much as did King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon upon a later memorable occasion, looking over the city he had built, and perhaps congratulating himself upon his achievements as had that king. It was while thus occupied that his gaze was attracted by a movement in the courtyard of a private house below him not far from the palace. From earliest times the houses of the relatively well-to-do in Eastern countries consisted of rooms built completely round a central courtyard open to the sky. Complete privacy was afforded in such a courtyard except from above and probably the roof of the palace was the only vantage point from which a view into this courtyard could be obtained. The king looked more closely; a woman was there, engaged in her ablutions, and he could see that she was beautiful. How long he gazed is not stated; eventually he descended to his apartments and summoned a servant. The servant was to ascertain the identity of the woman residing in the house he described. David waited rather impatiently for the man's return. The answer came. The woman was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was one of the thirty stalwarts who had adventured with David and stood by him in those dark days of Adullam when Saul was seeking his life. He was one of David's loyal supporters and a close friend. He was, also, at this moment, not at home in Jerusalem; he was away at the battlefield with Joab, fighting the Ammonites. David thought for a moment, then came to a quick decision. "Bring her to me", he ordered curtly, and turned and retired to his own apartments. The messenger went as the king had commanded.

Let it be realised that Bathsheba herself had no choice in this matter. The king was supreme; he

could do as he liked and he did do as he liked. The messengers came, and she had to go with them. Afterwards she was permitted to go to her own house and so far as David was concerned that was the end of the matter, or so he thought. But a little later on his complacency was rudely disturbed. He received a message from Bathsheba which said, in the succinct words of 2 Sam. 11.5, "*I am with child*".

David probably panicked a little at first. Not because he had committed adultery, and that more or less by force, but because of the scandal in Israel this would create. The king stood as the champion and example of the Divine law and should appear always beyond reproach. And there was the probable reaction of Uriah when he found out. He was a tough and hardened warrior and not likely to take this lying down. The war with Ammon must end eventually, and he would be home. Kings had been toppled from their thrones for less than this. David did some more thinking and in consequence despatched an urgent message to Joab to send Uriah back to Jerusalem for consultations.

The warrior entered into the presence of his king. David, all affable, made him welcome and discussed with him the conduct of the war, the welfare of the troops and how Joab was standing up to the strain. They probably chatted a little about old times, and then David, still affable, told Uriah he deserved a short respite from the rigours of the campaign and he was sending him home to spend a few days with his wife before going back to Rabbah. So Uriah went out from his presence and David leaned back in his chair feeling that all would now be well.

Unfortunately for David, it was not. There was a nobility in the character of Uriah upon which the king had not reckoned. When morning came David's servants told him that Uriah had not gone down to his own home; he had found himself a bed for the night with them. In some annoyance, not unmixed with a certain perturbation, David sent for him and demanded an explanation. He got the answer. The army, and Joab, were enduring the rigours of war in the open fields, said Uriah, and while they are there I will not enjoy the comforts of my home, "*Shall I then go to my house*", he said "*to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing*" (RSV).

David was baulked. His very obvious plot had

failed. He must think of something else. But meanwhile he had another try. He called Uriah to a private convivial evening for the two of them and plied his guest with liquor, until he had made him thoroughly drunk. Then he told him to go home to his wife for the night, hoping that he had made him so drunk that his resolve would weaken. But when morning came the position was as before.

The king was getting desperate. Had he been in his right mind he would not have done what he did do next. He was not in his right mind; he was desperately worried and clutching at any expedient that offered a way out of his dilemma. He sent a letter to Joab by the hand of Uriah telling Joab to set Uriah in a battle position where he would be isolated and slain by the Ammonites. "*Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down and die*". To his former crime he was now adding that of murder.

Joab did as he was told. Before long another messenger appeared before David with dispatches from the battle-front. As a casual postscript Joab had added "*Uriah the Hittite is dead also*". David told the messenger to assure Joab that he was not to be cast down "*for the sword devours now one and now another*" he added unctuously, conscious of an inner feeling of relief that the matter had now been very satisfactorily settled. He began to think of Bathsheba again and the beauty that had first attracted him. She, when she heard that her husband was dead, says the narrator, "*mourned for her husband*" but probably nobody took any notice of that. And after an appropriate period had elapsed, "*David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son*". He most likely felt that this was the easiest way to regularize the matter and avoid any breath of scandal later; one more wife added to the eleven or twelve he already had was neither here nor there. Bathsheba's own wishes were, of course, not consulted, but with her husband killed in battle she might have felt this to be the best solution to her own personal problems. David must have developed an affection for her later, for she became his favourite wife and it was one of her sons that he designated to succeed him as king.

But in all his self-congratulations David quite forgot one factor, and that an important one. The narrator records it at the end of the story. "*The*

thing that David and done displeased the Lord." From that moment nothing went right for David. The first eighteen years of his reign were marked by continuous and unqualified success in everything. The remaining twenty-two years were

times of continuous disaster, treachery, rebellion, and heartbreak. David ultimately received Divine forgiveness for his sin, but its repercussions never left him to the day of his death.

(To be continued)

AFFLICTION'S GOOD

When a blade of wheat springs up, and all is promising well, sometimes the wheat-fly pierces it, and lays its eggs within. Then the grubs come out and devour it all. Now we might suppose that with its only stem thus nipped in the bud the wheat would be destroyed. But it is not so. The seed corn possesses an inherent power of recovery and what at first seems fatal to its fruitfulness proves to be for its greatest good. The plant, by the death of its first shoot, has time for its new lateral feeders to become more firmly established in the soil; and, in place of the one ear that was destroyed, from its stronger root, now puts forth many.

It is often thus in the life of the Christian. All his plans and purposes are suddenly undermined. God in mercy sends a worm, as He did to Jonah's gourd; then it withers away in a night, and all seems lost. But it is not so. He who has "the root of the matter" in his heart, finds that root of faith and love now rendered stronger and firmer by the painful process.

Moses was far more fit for his mighty work after forty troubled years of disappointment and humiliation, spent as a humble shepherd in the lonely deserts of Midian, than upon the morning of that day when he first assayed his people's deliverance with all the prestige of Egypt's royalty. David, hunted as a partridge in the mountains and reduced almost to despair, was nearer the throne of

honour than when he formerly dwelt at ease, the flattered favourite of Israel's king.

Peter indeed thought himself well able to defend his Master on that evening when, moved by love, zeal, and courage, he uttered the eager resolve, "*Though all men shall be offended because of you, yet will I never be offended.*" But the night of failure, shame, and anguish that followed his self-confident cry, and the after-days of darkness, left him a wiser, stronger, braver man. He, who had once quailed in the presence of a maidservant, bore a fearless testimony to his Saviour before that very court which had crucified Jesus and was openly bent on the destruction of His followers.

The lives of most of God's servants have been alike trying and eventful. The divine rule of promotion is, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*" The reason for this is given by the Apostle Paul and it serves to solve much of the great mystery of pain. "*Tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.*" "*No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby.*" In God's good time the blighted purpose and disappointed life prove a tenfold increase of true Christian fruitfulness, which could not have been otherwise attained. AS

NOTICES

Bibles and study books: Quite a large number of these are now being sent direct to several known Christian communities in Africa and India. If readers have any of these that they no longer need, we would be glad to have them to send on.

Bible Study Monthly back numbers, especially from the 1970s and 1980s are occasionally requested by readers and we would be happy to receive them.

Gone from us

Brother Keleher (Eastbourne)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Ebenezer – Stone of Help (1 Sam 7.12)

Not one single moment passes,
But is laden as it flies,
With some precious gift of blessing,
Which His loving care supplies.

Not one step, in faith, is taken,
O'er life's pathway rough and dim,
But may open out new treasures
To the soul that trusts in Him.

Ebenezer! Countless mercies,
Bid us praise Him more and more,
Calmly to His wisdom leaving
What the future has in store.

THE SADDUCEES AND THE RESURRECTION

*A study of
Luke 20.27-40*

"Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife." (Luke 20.33).

The Sadducees, who were the materialist philosophers of Jesus' day, did not believe in a resurrection to a future life and had no use for Jesus' teaching of a coming Messianic Kingdom in which *"all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth"* (John 5.28). They despised the simple faith of women like Martha who knew that her dead brother Lazarus would *"rise again in the resurrection at the last day"* (John 11.24). And they thought they had found a weak point in the argument, to put Jesus in a quandary. So they came to Him with their conundrum.

The question was based on the old Mosaic law which sought to prevent any family inheritance passing to another line in consequence of there being no male heir in the particular family. Moses had provided that in the event of a man dying without leaving a son to inherit his estate, his widow was not free to remarry whom she pleased, neither was she at liberty to remain single. It was the obligation and duty of the dead man's nearest brother to take the widow as his wife. The first-born son of that union was then to be accounted from the legal standpoint, not the son of his true father but the son of the dead man. That first-born became heir to the dead man's property, taking his family name and behaving in all ways as if he were in reality his son. By means of this custom it was hoped to keep every family inheritance in the line of the family to which it had originally belonged. Whether the custom was ever carried out in its fulness or whether it was even really practicable in later times when Israel grew into a great nation is not material to the point now at issue. Suffice it, thought these Sadducees, that here is something which cannot possibly fit into this fantastic teaching about men and women being resurrected from the dead to live on earth again.

Thus it was that Jesus listened patiently whilst they unfolded their story. There were seven brothers, good Israelites all and zealous for the laws of their fathers. The eldest was married but unfortunately he died without leaving an heir. The second son, obedient to the Law, married the

widow with the intention of raising up seed to his brother. Most regrettably, he died also, without having achieved his object. The third brother was no less zealous in his devotion to the Law, and without delay he married the already twice widowed woman. His good intentions were cut short by his own untimely demise and the unfortunate wife was passed on in turn to brothers four, five, six and seven, all of whom died in turn without son or heir. It is perhaps not surprising to learn that after this series of matrimonial disasters, the woman died also, leaving seven inheritances without owners.

Incidentally the story as framed by these Sadducees is a bitter commentary on the contempt in which women were held in the days of the First Advent. These men saw nothing distasteful in the idea of this unfortunate wife being passed on from man to man seven times repeated. The point of their question would have been equally well made had there been only two husbands involved, but they had to make it seven. The woman in the story was viewed merely as a means of producing the desired heir to the inheritance and apart from that received no consideration at all. It is important to bear that fact in mind when considering this incident.

With sly malice therefore the fateful question was brought into the open. The seven men and the woman have all been raised from the dead and stand upon earth again, alive and virile. *"Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife!"* It is only when one considers for a moment the nature of the Mosaic laws regarding marriage that one realizes just how diabolically clever was that question. It was not merely a matter of deciding which of the seven was the legal husband of the woman. The laws of Deut. 25 forbade any woman to return to her first husband after having been married to a second. To do so was "an abomination to the Lord". On that showing it would be necessary in the resurrection for this woman to remain the wife of the seventh husband. However, the laws of Leviticus 18 branded as criminal any man who had a husband's relationship to his brother's wife during the brother's lifetime. With the first brother now alive again and present before them there could be no

doubt that his was the first legal marriage and therefore all the other six brothers were lawbreakers and also "abomination to the Lord". To whichever brother the Lord awarded the wife, therefore, He would be recommending the breaking of one or another of the Mosaic laws on the subject and making one or more of the persons in the story into transgressors. To those legalistic minds there was no way out of the impasse; there could be no such thing as a resurrection without compelling someone or other to break the laws of Moses.

In addition to that sufficiently condemning fact, there was also the question of the inheritances. With the seven brothers all back on earth, to whom would each property belong? The wife would have become the legal custodian of all seven estates after the death of the seventh brother, and until the birth of her first son, the son which was never born, for the Sadducees took care that in the story she died childless. However, suppose in this new resurrected life she did bear a son to whichever husband secured the award of her as wife, what then? Under the Law that son would become heir of all seven inheritances, whilst the seven original owners were standing by, morally if not legally each still entitled to his own property. There must have been a certain amount of rubbing of hands together as these learned men waited for Jesus to unravel this legal tangle.

His was a simple answer, and though completely unexpected, it was incontrovertible. *"Those considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection of the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage; and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection"*. (Luke 20.35-36 NIV). There was a world of meaning in those few simple words of Jesus, and most of it does not occur to our Western minds until we relate the answer to the question, and the background of the question.

Jesus was not referring to people of the world generally in His reply, and He was not referring to the institution of marriage as such. He was talking about the specific problem raised by these Sadducees, the relation of the Mosaic Law on re-marriage of widows to the resurrection and mankind's future in the Millennial Age. The word "marry" in this text is one that refers to the action

of a man taking a woman to be his wife, and is not used in this form to describe a woman entering into marriage. Likewise, the word rendered "given in marriage" is one that refers to the giving of a woman to a man, as by a relative who thus formally hands her over. It is much the same as a modern bride's father will "give away" his daughter at the ceremony, or as Ruth the Moabitess was given to Boaz to be his wife that he might raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. Both terms are consistent with the conclusion that Jesus was telling the Sadducees that in the future age men would not take women in marriage **for the purpose laid down in** the Mosaic Law. Neither would women be given in marriage for that purpose, because men will die no more, like the angels. Quite obviously in a world where there is no death the question of raising up an heir to a dead man's inheritance will not arise. Likewise the puzzle of deciding who will be the rightful heir to the inheritances is very simply resolved. This is so because all men in the Millennial Age are children of God by virtue of the resurrection and not children of Adam by lineal descent. Rights to inheritances which are dependent on lineal descent will no longer have any validity in a world where there is no such thing as lineal descent, and so here again the Sadducees' unspoken question fell to the ground.

In few words, Jesus answered the question, not by setting aside the law of Moses nor yet by nullifying its prohibitions, but by showing that the conditions which brought the Mosaic Law into being will no longer apply. The remarriage of widows to their brothers-in-law for the preservation of inheritances was an arrangement that owed its existence to the fact that death was in the world. Jesus showed that since in the next Age there will be no death the problem will never arise.

The expression applied to those who have been *"considered worthy of taking part in that Age"* to the effect that *"they can no longer die"* is liable to provoke queries when it is remembered that if any man should give himself over to deliberate and incorrigible sin, in that day, he can and will assuredly die. It seems evident that Jesus is referring to the completed work of the Age, and the fulness of resurrected life which is the portion of those who are adjudged righteous at the end of the Age. He uses the phrase *"considered worthy of*

taking part in that Age and in the resurrection". There is no question of worthiness in the first awakening from the sleep of death at the beginning of the Millennial Age. *"All that are in their graves"* said Jesus, and **all** it must be without reference to worthiness or to unworthiness. And in such case it is literally true that those who pass into the Ages of Glory, perfect and righteous, *cannot* die. It will be no more possible for a righteous man to die than for an unrighteous man to live. That is the Divine decree. God made man to live, and all the time that any man in those ages of eternity lives in harmony with righteousness he can do nothing else but live. Eternal life is as much a concomitant of righteousness as is eternal death of sin.

The A.V. text says that such are *"equal to the angels"* which is manifestly incorrect. Man, even perfect man, is inferior to, and not equal to, the angels. Says the Psalmist *"What is man, that you are mindful of him... You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour You made him ruler over the works of your hands"*. (Psa. 8:4-6). The correct rendering of the text is that they die no more because they are *like* angels, in the fact that they are perfect and sinless.

Jesus left quite untouched the wider question of the relationship of the sexes in the future Age. This text is sometimes taken as basis for the assertion that human beings will be sexless in that Age, neither man nor woman, but combining the qualities of both. There is really no evidence that Jesus intended to convey any such idea. The indications are in fact to the contrary. It is hardly likely that so revolutionary and unnatural a teaching would have won from some of the listening scribes the admiring admission "Master, thou hast well said". The question which inspired this glimpse of the future was not answered by saying there would no longer be men and women, but that there would no longer be death, and that disposed of the matter for good. There is also the fact that Jesus told them they ought to have known the answer to the question from the Scriptures: *"You are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matt. 22:29). Behind all the complicated legislation of Moses that in the future Age is to be swept away, there lay

the original Divine institution of marriage inherent in the original Divine ideal for mankind, and that is certainly not going to be swept away. The first chapter of Genesis gives us the culminating point to which Divine creation had attained prior to the entry of sin. God created man *"in his own image, in the likeness of God created he him; male and female created he them ... and God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good"*. In the expanded account of man's creation which we have in the second chapter of Genesis the statement is plainly made that it was not good for man to be alone and therefore God ordained a companion for him. That was before sin entered, when there was at the very least the possibility that man might develop his inheritance as God had instructed him without ever yielding to sin. There is no reason for thinking that the dual principle that pervades nearly all Nature and certainly the whole of the higher orders of life, and was extended to man at his creation, is going to be changed. Nor is there reason to believe that perfect humanity at the end of God's creative work is fundamentally any different from perfect humanity at the beginning of that work. Scripture does not discourse in detail on the conditions of human existence after the consummation of the Divine plan and the final defeat of evil. We can only reason from the general principles of God's creation. So far as this particular aspect of the subject is concerned we are on fundamentally more secure ground in the first two chapters of Genesis than we would be by taking the narrative of Luke 20 out of its context and applying it to something that was not in question and was not being discussed.

This incident is a striking example of the folly of men who thought they could prove the fundamental unsoundness of Jesus' teaching. *"You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). How often is the same thing repeated in our day! Men criticize and deride the message of the Kingdom because they neither understand nor want to understand its principles. Happy are we if, like Jesus, we can base our message and our faith upon the unassailable *"living and abiding Word of God."* (1 Peter 1:23).

AOH

Disappointment is a wholesome medicine and in the secret of it, as in the twilight so beloved by

Titian, we may see colours of things with deeper truth than in the most dazzling sunshine. (Ruskin)

“WHAT GOD HAS CLEANSED”

“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” Acts 10.15. This is the NIV translation of those remarkable words that were said to Peter as he saw the vision at Joppa. They were 'shattering' words, breaking down all the old manmade barriers that kept people apart. These words were to affect human society in a fundamental way. The idea that some people by reason of birth and circumstances were inferior and 'unholy' had always been cherished by a favoured few who considered themselves superior to the rest of mankind. The kind of spiritual aristocracy that had arisen in Judaism after the Babylonian exile was not part of their heritage from the Patriarchs and Moses. That feeling of superiority was witnessed in Egypt at the time of Joseph (Genesis 43.22). When the Jews harboured such feelings over the Gentiles it did nothing for their spiritual growth but rather had the opposite effect and caused them to stumble. They had to learn that Jew and Gentile were in need of spiritual cleansing from sin and that as sons of Adam they were all 'unclean' in God's sight. That feeling continues to affect Christians, world religions and many social and political situations. The problem remains within the Christian church; each group, however large or small has the belief that they are the only ones in step with God. A proud mother watching her son on a military parade ground had a similar feeling.

Equality of the races was a hard lesson for Peter to learn though it was through him that the principle was first made known. In Gal. 2.14. (NIV) Paul wrote "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel". Much has been written about that word, that in the Greek is '*aletheia*', but truth cleanses for the purpose of uniting brethren in Christ. Truth, genuine truth, (not just interpretations by sects) has an effect on Christian behaviour which makes those truly enlightened more loving and gentle, more forgiving and patient, like the Divine Author of truth. Truth has the power to cleanse so that healing can take place.

The first recognition of a difference between what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean is found in the record of Noah entering the ark with the animals (Genesis 7.2). Perhaps we should ponder the Genesis record of the entry of sin into the world

and the dispute between Cain and Abel. Sin has always been looked upon as something unclean, unholy that needs cleansing. So the Apostle in 1 John 1.7 writes that we are cleansed from sin through the blood of Jesus.

In the Psalms we meet forceful analogies of impurity and uncleanness with that of sin and unholiness. In his remarkable contrition after exposure of the sin against Uriah, recorded in Psalm 51, David asks "*Wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin*". The removal of sin and the application of forgiveness require the right attitude on the part of the sinner. We catch a glimpse of this at the end of Genesis when Joseph's brothers tell him that Jacob requested forgiveness for his brothers for what they had done to Joseph. Cleansing takes place when both parties are ready to offer and accept forgiveness. Jesus, like His Father, set an example of readiness to forgive. If we would want to be like them we must live with an attitude of forgiveness irrespective of those who have offended. Some say they can't forgive until the offending party has repented but our Father in Heaven is clearly more ready to forgive our sins than we are to confess them. Before we were born and committed any sin, God had planned and provided for a means of cleansing from sin for every sinner. The spirit of forgiveness has always been part of His nature as shown by Moses and Jeremiah when they speak of God's compassion.

The dreadful condition of people with leprosy in the first century was used as a picture of sin. This was apparently a reasonable analogy but it emphasised the terrible stigma surrounding the disease. Jesus would have been aware of the effect of this upon those who so suffered and reached out to touch them making it clear that the legal barriers had gone forever. Jesus declared to the Pharisees that all foods were clean (Mark 7.19) but it took some time after Pentecost for the principle to be accepted. James, the Lord's brother and leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, began to see the light at the council meeting recorded in Acts 15 after Peter had spoken of cleansing the heart by faith. In his letter much later he wrote of drawing near to God and the need to cleanse the heart. Maybe he remembered the words of Jesus (Luke 11.41) when He said "*But give for alms those things which are*

within and behold everything is clean for you."

Barclay writes that there are four words closely associated with *katharos* which means cleansing; *alethinos* which means real, genuine, the opposite of fake; *amiges* which means pure, unmixed, unalloyed; *akratos* – as with a pure liquid; *akeratos* which describes gold hair that has never been shorn or an unmown meadow or a chaste virgin. "Blessed are those whose motives are absolutely unmixed, whose minds are utterly sincere, who are completely and totally single minded." Such, Jesus said *"shall see God"*.

Fruitfulness develops after pruning (AV purge, John 15.3) which occurs as we really take in the Word of God. Paul expresses a similar idea in

Ephesians 5.26 when writing about Christian husbands and wives. *"Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word"*.

Acceptance of Christ as Saviour takes but a short time compared with the long process of 'sanctification' or cleansing in preparation to see the Father 'face to face'. There is a way for man to rise to the sublime abode;

"An offering and a sacrifice, a Holy Spirit's energies,

An advocate with God".

DN

SCIENTISTS ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD

The celebrated scientist, astronomer Fred Hoyle has found God by means of mathematical calculations as reported some years ago in the daily Press. That may seem to some a strange way to find God, yet in a world of so many kinds of minds, must it not be that there are different avenues of approach to the One who is the Creator of that variety? Formerly an agnostic, Mr. Hoyle has now found, by means of elaborate mathematical calculations that the probability of life coming into being from non-living matter is so fantastically remote that he has to conclude that life could not possibly have arisen in such fashion. This is in spite of so many claims to the contrary by so many scientists for so many years. The only possible alternative, he and his fellow-researchers suggest, is God. "Once we see that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly miniscule as to make it absurd" they say "it becomes sensible to think that the favourable properties of physics on which life depends, are in every respect deliberate. It is almost inevitable that our own measure of intelligence must reflect higher intelligence, even to the limit of God". In other words, the admirable fitness of the earth for human habitation is itself evidence of planning and designing by an intelligent Creator.

This is just what the Bible says *"God formed the earth and made it; he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited."* *"The heavens are the Lord's, but the earth hath he given to the children of men"* (Isa. 45.18; Ps. 115, 16). And just to elaborate the joint testimony of Hoyle, Isaiah and David, it may be pertinent to refer back to another

well-known astronomer, Isaac Asimov, who drew attention in his book *"Planets For Man"* (1965) to this same admirable adaptability. It would appear that human life requires an average daily temperature not outside the limits of 14 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit; 95% of earth's population live in lands where the average is between 40 and 80 degrees, comfortably inside. The intensity of sunlight that can be tolerated must lie between certain limits; our eyes are exactly attuned to the middle point of that intensity. If our earth was half its present size gravity would be insufficient to prevent bouncing about, as witness the experiences of astronauts on the moon. If it was twice its present size we would be too heavy to move about at all. If the earth was as little as 10% nearer to the sun than it is, only one fifth of its surface would be habitable, which would mean mainly Canada and Northern Europe and virtually nothing in the Southern Hemisphere. If on the other hand it was 10% farther away from the sun, men could live only in the tropical and sub-tropical regions.

Way back early in the twentieth century, another then well-known astronomer, Sir James Jeans, onetime Astronomer-Royal, had said *"the stream of knowledge is leading towards a non-material reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine"*. Upon another occasion he wrote *"atoms are thoughts in the mind of God"*. A man more familiar to the present generation, Dr. Einstein, famous for his "Relativity Theory", has said "the conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is

revealed in the comprehensible universe, forms my idea of God. My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds". Another thoughtful comment comes from the pen of Gattland in *"The Inhabited Universe"* (1957) "The question we must strive to answer is whether the universe is purposive, that is to say, man emerged from the shapeless dust clouds of interstellar space merely as the result of blind throws of chance, or is there some special kind of direction behind him ... The inevitable question ... must now be faced 'Is the purposefulness revealed in the universe an attribute of God'? What is God? At best, we can only think of an infinite Consciousness which is beyond our powers of understanding ... We can only interpret the effects of creation, we cannot investigate the Creator".

One often hears of the "conflict between science and religion". It is not always fair comment; in some spheres there is no conflict at all. An increasing number of scientific researchers are coming to the conclusion that the existence of the universe, and of life in the universe, can only be explained by

the fact that all was brought into existence by an intelligent Creator. That conclusion does not of itself make the scientist a Christian, neither does it answer all his questions. But it is at least a start. Later on, perhaps, such an investigator will come a little closer to understanding that *"this is eternal life, that they might know thee the only true God; and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"* (John 17.3). In the meantime, it may be worth reflecting that David of old, may, in his youthful shepherding days, have come near to God by much the same route. One of his more famous sayings gives a clue; *"the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night shows knowledge. There is no sound; there are no words; their voice is not heard; but their measure is gone out through all the earth, and their message to the end of the world"* (Psa. 19.1-3).

Three thousand years ago that simple shepherd boy looked up into the heavens and saw God; is it to be wondered at that in our own day and time some of the much wiser and more intellectual of this world are able to look up and do the same.

AOH

THE WORD OF TRUTH

"If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study (be diligent) to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH." (2 Timothy 2.15).

Paul was urging young Timothy to teach the danger of using words as a sword. Rather he should be an example of the best use of words in his preaching of the Gospel. For Paul the gospel was the word of truth, *"the word of the truth, the Gospel of your salvation"*. The word of the truth of the Gospel. (Eph 1.13 and Col. 1.5)

James wrote of a word of truth as that by which God generated new life in a believer (James 1.18). Have you ever been used to speak such a word? Paul was not advising Timothy to undertake intensive study of words and texts (of the Old Testament, as it would have been). Would he not have used the term Holy Scriptures had this been the case? Rather he was indicating the effort

needed to present the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to groups or individuals in such a way that their lives would be changed. Timothy was after all an evangelist, (2 Tim. 4.5.) not a scholar like Paul. His work was to carry the water of life to the thirsty. Good news indeed, we are not all students and scholars. But we can all make a study of how to bring the Good News of God's love to others. We can use the Scriptures for this purpose. Or we can use parables or examples to bring the message. Paul would urge us not to use Scripture as a sword to fight others. Rather he would have us use it skillfully, tailoring the message to the individual or group with the help of meditation and prayer. "Lord, use us to carry a word of truth in season to him that is needy." Or perhaps better: 'May people read the Gospel according to us'.

"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you, a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and reverence." (1 Pet 3.15). "May our lives be such that **people will ask us.**" (H L F Panteny)

JT

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

10. Rejoicing to suffer

"Believers were the more added to the Lord; multitudes both of men and women." The sad incident of Annanias and Sapphira passed; there was much to do and the crowds outside were pressing. The miracles of healing continued; the physical absence of Jesus made no difference to that. Whenever and wherever Peter passed down the street he found the sick, the crippled and the lame on beds and couches, waiting in the hope that at least his shadow might fall on them as he passed. From the villages around Jerusalem came people bringing their sick for his ministry and the victims of demon possession in the hope of freedom; *"and they were healed every one"*. There can be no doubt that every act of healing was accompanied by a witness to the good news of the coming Kingdom and of the fulfilment of all that the prophets had spoken concerning the future Messianic era. Then all men, the least to the greatest, will hear the gracious message of the goodness of God in Christ. So they exhorted all to believe in Him, and believing, be saved. Repeatedly the Apostles reiterated the basis of their message and the power behind what they were doing: *"This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses."* (Acts 2.32 RSV)

Eventually the priestly party could take no more. Their first clash with Peter and John had left them defeated, but resentful. They were compelled to stand by helplessly and see the whole nation going after these men and they could not tolerate the situation. Perhaps they began to reason that their forefathers had frequently put the prophets of God to death and apparently not suffered vengeance from above. Perhaps they themselves had not been sufficiently resolute on the last occasion and the situation had got out of hand accordingly. In all probability it was in sheer desperation that they arrested, not merely Peter and John as on the previous occasion, but all the apostles, and locked them up in prison for the night pending an arraignment before the Sanhedrin in the morning. The captain of the guard returned to report that all instructions had been duly carried out, and for the first time for quite a while the high priest and his supporters enjoyed a good night's sleep.

Came the morning and with it the Sanhedrin assembled in formal session, Sadducees on one side and Pharisees on the other, the high priest presid-

ing. When all was ready, the captain of the Temple guard was ordered to produce the prisoners. There ensued an unexpected and unexplained delay; after a while an officer appeared in the entry and beckoned urgently to the captain of the guard. There ensued a whispered colloquy that only served to increase the impatience of Annas, waiting to commence the proceedings. At length the unhappy captain, red of face, returned to inform the high priest that upon going to the prison and finding everything safely locked and in order with the jailers duly standing guard before the doors, his men had most unaccountably and inexplicably found no one inside. The news was received in shocked silence; it was not customary for the high priest's prisoners to get out so easily and there were muttered doubts as to what the outcome of this situation was going to be. *"When the chief priests heard these things they doubted of them whereunto this would grow."* The Sadducees, who believed in nothing supernatural, looked to Annas, himself a Sadducee, for a rational explanation of this unexpected happening but amongst the Pharisees, the conservatives who believed in all that the Old Testament recorded, there was whispering and head-shaking. Suppose that the angel of the Lord had gone to that prison in the dead of night, opened the doors and set these men free? Few among them would deny the possibility of such a happening, if that was God's will. If so, what an item on the credit side of their continual antagonism to the Sadducees, who did not believe in the existence of angels! The Pharisees settled themselves comfortably on their benches to see how their old enemy Annas was going to get out of this one.

That worthy was reprieved at the last minute. One of the busybodies who are always to be found haunting the courts of authority came bustling in to tell anyone who would listen that the men they had put in prison were at that moment standing in the Temple teaching the people. Anxious to retrieve his somewhat tarnished reputation, the captain of the guard was off like a shot with his officers, to make another attempt at the apprehension of these singularly elusive offenders. By virtue of his calling and social level he was a little more in touch with the general public than were his superiors. He realised that discretion would assuredly be the better part of

valour in the somewhat ticklish business of taking the party of apostles away from the people who idolized them. He had been in Temple riots before. Moreover he was probably not quite sure what other-worldly power the apostles might possess wherewith to resist arrest. That matter of their escape from prison without opening the doors still rankled in his mind. No matter what his Sadducee superiors might say about the mythical nature of Old Testament history, he was painfully conscious of the story of the old prophet Elijah and what he was said to have done to two parties of fifty sent by the king of that day to arrest him (2 Kings 1.10, 11). The more he thought about it the more he felt the matter should be approached in a spirit of sweet reasonableness. It was a greatly relieved captain of the guard, therefore, who found that the men he sought were perfectly prepared to accompany him, on an entirely voluntary basis, to the presence of the high priest!

Annas was annoyed and he was frightened. It is obvious that he felt he was losing command of the situation. The uncomfortable fact that they had escaped from his prison and then walked into his presence of their own free will had done nothing to improve his confidence. His opening words are not an accusation; they are a complaint, and a weak complaint at that. *"We strictly charged you not to teach in this name yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us"* (Acts 5.28 RSV). Considering that he and his, not many weeks previously, had incited the mob to cry *"His blood be upon us and upon our children"* Annas was, on the most charitable view possible, a bit forgetful. He also pretended to forget that when he imposed the prohibition Peter had flatly defied him and he had been powerless to do anything about it. This second arraignment was a policy of desperation, with no real belief that it could produce results. Annas knew it, and Peter knew it. Apparently all the apostles had their say. Probably Peter, as usual, took the lead and said the most. The joint answer was forthright. *"We ought to obey God rather than men."* The Apostles again accused them of their sin; *"the God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed"*. Finally, they were His witnesses and they had no intention of abandoning their preaching and their work.

Once again the Sanhedrin faced a condition of stalemate. The expression in the A.V. *"they were*

cut to the heart" means literally that they were rent with vexation. It is evident that the apostles had been sent out of the council chamber at this point while their judges deliberated on the action to be taken. The only apparent solution was to find ways and means to encompass the deaths of these obstinate and resolute men. But at this point a new voice was raised in the council, that of Gamaliel.

Gamaliel is famous in Jewish history outside the New Testament. He was a Pharisee, grandson of the even more famous Hillel, and himself greatly respected for his wisdom, learning, and knowledge of the Law. The Apostle Paul received his early training under Gamaliel (Acts 22.3). Thirty-five years later, when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by Titus and the nation scattered, Gamaliel was one of those active in re-establishing the Sanhedrin at Jamnia and become its President. At this present time his opinions were sought and respected by both Pharisees and Sadducees, and when he intervened in this dilemma his words received marked attention.

Gamaliel counselled moderation. He reminded his hearers that there had been men in times past who had put themselves forward as the nation's deliverers and gathered followers, and had come to naught. Theudas, he said, had gathered a band of four hundred rebels but he was slain and his followers dispersed. Judas of Galilee had risen up and collected a band of adherents and met the same fate. *"So in the present case,"* he went on *"keep away from these men, and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail: but if it is of God; you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God"* (Acts 5.38, 39).

Whatever may have been the personal feelings of Annas, the majority of the Sanhedrin agreed with Gamaliel. It was the second ignominious retreat of the rulers of Israel from the determination of Peter and John. The Apostles were recalled to the council chamber and told of the decision; but Annas had them flogged as a mark of his displeasure. Then, weakly, *"they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus"*, knowing all the time that they would ignore the prohibition as they had done before. And so they let them go. *"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the Temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"*. (To be continued) AOH

THE ROD OF GOD'S ANGER

*A Study in
Prophecy*

Part 1

"Ho, Assyrian, the rod of mine anger and the staff of my fury. Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him" (Isa. 10.5-6 RSV).

The 10th chapter of Isaiah commences one of the most important prophetic passages of the Old Testament. Its significance resides in the fact of its primary fulfilment during Isaiah's own day, in the Assyrian king Sennacherib's military campaigns in Judah during the period 710-701 BC, campaigns that ended with the destruction of his army by Divine intervention. It also constitutes a set of guide lines to interpret other O.T. foreshadowing of events that terminate this present world-age and usher in the Messianic era upon earth. There are a number of striking factors connected with the theme which serve to draw attention to its importance in prophetic study; these will be alluded to in order.

The first four verses of Isaiah 10 belong to the preceding chapter. Chapters 8.5 to 10.4 comprise the Lord's message to Israel's generation of Isaiah's day warning them that judgment for their apostasies must inevitably come upon them. However, the denunciation is combined with the consoling promise that after the judgment will come repentance and blessing and the coming of the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 10.5 starts a new theme; this continues to the end of chapter 12. First of all, in 10.5 to 10.11, "the Assyrian" is hailed as God's instrument of judgment upon Israel. In his arrogance he claims that what he is doing is by his own power and in his own strength. He does not know that in reality God is using his ambitious designs as the means of Israel's chastisement and when that purpose is achieved he himself will be destroyed (10.12-19). Isaiah 10.20-23 leads on to a vision of the far-distant future when Israel will have learned the lesson of this judgment and returned to its own land in peace and prosperity. Verses 24-27 record God's appeal to Israel to have no fear of "the Assyrian" but to rest upon God in faith. As though to test this faith, the rest of the chapter, vss 28-34, is a vivid description of the manner in which the invading armies will advance upon and encompass Jerusalem, ending again with the assurance that they advance to their own destruction. As a literal account of Sennacherib's

campaign back in Isaiah's day this is the end of the story. The greater fulfilment that Sennacherib prefigured does not end here; it goes on into chapter 11 with the next stage in the Divine programme following the destruction of world evil, the arising of Christ to establish his Millennial Kingdom, the conditions of which are described up to verse 9. Verses 10-16 continue with the theme of the restoration of Israel to the Holy Land at that time; chapter 12 completes the story with the picture of converted and purified Israel, secure in its own land, ready for the part it is to play in the work of world conversion which is the purpose of the Messianic era.

In the O.T. 'the Assyrian', referred to in this way five times by Isaiah and several times elsewhere, is always a fore view or a memory of Sennacherib. Because of his boastful claims and arrogance against God he was regarded by every generation of Israelites as the great prototype of God's greatest enemies. Certain "End-Time" prophecies of Daniel, Zechariah and Micah, in addition to Isaiah, are expressed in phraseology reminiscent of that momentous invasion of Judah by this ruthless conqueror.

The prophetic allusions to Sennacherib's campaigns and their relation to the Divine judgment and, later, deliverance, which came to Israel, can only be understood in the light of some knowledge of the history of the period. The historical accounts of this king's military activities in Judah and his disastrous end are found in 2 Kings 18.13 to the end of chap. 19; 2 Chron. 32.1-23, and Isaiah chapters 36 and 37. There is also Sennacherib's own account. A century ago there were discovered at Nineveh two six-sided clay cylinders inscribed with the Assyrian king's own account of the same campaigns. These inscriptions supplement and considerably amplify the Scripture narrative; it is true that Sennacherib says a great deal more than the Bible about the treasures he took away from Judah and is virtually silent about the details of his calamitous defeat at Jerusalem. That, perhaps, is only natural. But the accounts are valuable aids and do throw light upon many of the details which the Scriptures record only briefly. The cylinders, made by the order of Sennacherib fifteen years after the events they record, remain to

this day, one in the British Museum and one in the University of Chicago, strong witnesses to the truth of the Bible.

The year was 711 B.C.; Hezekiah was king of Judah and the prophet Isaiah his faithful counsellor. Sargon, king of Assyria, was away fighting in the east. Taking advantage of the opportunity, the western tributary states of Palestine and Phoenicia had revolted under promise of help from Egypt, help that in the event was not forthcoming. Sargon's son, the Crown Prince Sennacherib, invaded the west as Commander-in-Chief of the forces and suppressed the revolt. The Philistine stronghold of Ashdod was besieged and taken. In 710 the Assyrian turned his attention to Judah, which was on the defensive; this is when towers equipped with weapons were erected on the walls and Hezekiah built his famous tunnel to carry water to the pool of Siloam (2 Chron. 32.1-8). Hezekiah made peace with promise of tribute, and Sennacherib went on to subdue Lower Egypt and return to his own land.

This year, 710 BC, was the commencement of nine troublous years for Judah. Within four years Sargon was dead and again the Palestinians were in revolt, still under promise of help from Egypt. By 702 Sennacherib, now king, was on the spot again and this time prepared for a thorough settlement of the problem. He first took possession of the Lebanon district and conquered the commercial port of Sidon, so gaining control of the sea-going trade of the Phoenicians, which was one of his objectives. At this the coalition began to break up. The three States of Moab, Ammon and Edom sent messengers to the king with assurances of friendship and submission; they were spared the horrors of war. The Philistines were overrun, only the city of Lachish holding out. Hezekiah alone refused submission and prepared for another siege. (This is where 2 Chron. 32.7-23 and 2 Kings 18.13 to 19.37 apply). This time the Egyptians did come out to help but the Assyrian forces defeated them. With most of Judah in Assyrian hands and Egypt proved a broken reed, as Isaiah had warned would be the case, (Isa. 20.4-6; see also Isa. 36.6), Hezekiah submitted and paid heavy tribute. (2 Kings 18.14). Sennacherib says that he sent over two hundred thousand captives to Nineveh out of Judah; the Bible is silent as to this save a possible allusion in Isa. 22.

The Philistine city of Lachish was still holding out and this being the one remaining obstacle on the way to Egypt, Sennacherib's forces commenced a siege. For the second time Egyptian troops, aided this time by Ethiopians, advanced into Palestine. The Assyrian had to divide his forces, some to hold the Egyptians at Libnah in the south of Palestine, some to maintain the siege of Lachish, and another detachment detailed to surround Jerusalem, despite the agreement with Hezekiah, and demand its capitulation. This was the stage of which so much is said in Kings, Chronicles and Isaiah. Conforming to the prophet's advice, Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord – and defied the Assyrian general. *"Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed"* (Isaiah 37.36-37). That was the end; Sennacherib never returned. And for many years afterwards the people of Israel had peace. These and many other details form the background to several Old Testament views of future events characterizing the destruction of evil at the end of this present Age. The basis for this understanding seems to reside in what seems at first sight to be a most unlikely text, Isaiah 20.1. *"In the year that the commander in chief who was sent by Sargon the King of Assyria came to Ashdod and fought against it, and took it"*. Sennacherib was the "tartan" (*tartanu*) or commander-in-chief of the army when he captured Ashdod in 711 BC and then turned his attention to Jerusalem in 710. Now this year 710 seems to be a significant one in the timing of the Divine purpose. It forms the exact midpoint between the institution of Israel as the chosen nation of God at Sinai in 1452 BC and the final rejection (*'your house is left unto you desolate'*), at the Crucifixion in AD 33. It is also the mid-point between the birth of Ishmael in 2057 B.C. and the completion of the conquest of Palestine by the Arab descendants of Ishmael under Caliph Omar in 638 AD from which time Arabic claim to possession of the land subsists. It is also the mid-point, within a few years, between the commencement of the Hebrew prophetic ministry in David the king (accession 1017 BC) and its end with the death of Malachi about 403 BC during

which time the Divine messages of warning and hope were constantly in their ears. There is fairly reasonable ground for thinking that, within a century or so at any rate, it also forms the mid-point of the entire history of this present world-age. This is from the warning period that immediately preceded the Flood to the similar warning period which constitutes the "signs of the times" of the approaching Messianic Age.

All this can hardly be accidental. At this time Isaiah, (20.2-3) was to conduct himself in a stipulated manner to make himself a "sign" to all observers, declaring that within a few more years the power of the existing great world-ruler, Egypt, was to be broken before the rising strength of a new tyrant, Assyria.

Elsewhere in Isaiah it is revealed that the new usurper was to be destroyed by Divine intervention before receiving the fruits of victory and that in all this, Israel would learn the futility of placing its trust in any earthly power, and eventually turn to God for deliverance. The likeness of all this to what is so often foreseen in Scripture as the manner in which the kingdoms of this world will eventually become the Kingdom of God is so marked that one might very reasonably conclude that here we have a kind of Divine marker, saying in effect; here in the events of this short period, commencing with Sennacherib's first threat to Jerusalem in 710 B.C. and culminating in his final overthrow in 701, there is enshrined a picture in miniature of the more spectacular events staged on a greater scale, which are to mark the period of the ending of this present age and the overthrow of all its forces of evil. At the very least, the details of this nine-year period, as recorded in both the Scriptures and Sennacherib's inscriptions (Taylor cylinder, so called after its discoverer), can throw some light upon the significance of various allusions in Daniel 11, Micah 5 and Zechariah 14. Of these three, Micah is the earliest in point of time, contemporary with Isaiah, and therefore himself involved in the events of Sennacherib's campaign. From some internal indications his prophecy would appear to have been spoken or written before the fall of Samaria and the Ten-Tribe captivity. He foresaw the Babylonian captivity, still more than a century future, and he may well have foreseen the Assyrian invasion of Judah before it occurred on the basis of what he already knew of Assyrian oppression in Samaria.

At any rate, in his 5th chapter, which is a Messianic preview, he brings together in masterly fashion the conflict between the evil forces of this world, symbolized by "the Assyrian", and the irresistible power of the Ruler who emanates from Bethlehem. Interwoven with this is the triumph of God's faithful ones who are delivered from the Assyrian and proceed then to evangelize the nations.

The second analogy enshrines the words of the revealing angel to Daniel in his 11th chapter. The passage describing the deeds of the "king of the north" who at the Time of the End invades and ravages and crushes all opposition until he meets his own end at the standing up of Michael, champion of Israel, so reminiscent of Sennacherib's invasion in the days of Hezekiah that it might almost have been written with that story in mind. Were Daniel 11 the unaided work of man that might well be so, but we have to remember that this passage constitutes part of a message from above, revealed to Daniel by the power of the Holy Spirit. The choice of words and the descriptive background is of God. If it is manifestly analogous to Sennacherib's actions that can only be because the student is expected to follow the analogy for the detailed interpretation of the revelation.

The whole of Dan. 11 is a guarded and necessarily somewhat obscure foreview of world history as it affects God's people from the time of Daniel himself to the end of this Age and the inauguration of the Messianic Age. The relevant portion dealing with the "king of the north" and the close of the Age is contained within verses 36-45 and it is this portion which is capable of considerable illumination when compared with the Judean campaign of Sennacherib. The stage, of course, is immeasurably widened and the actors representative of world powers greater by far than those who in that past day wrangled over the possession of Judah. Sennacherib becomes the "king of the north", a great world power emerging late in the Age, almost at its end; Egypt the older world power which has borne rule more or less from the beginning. Judah and Jerusalem picture the regathered and purified "Holy Nation" of the End Time, awaiting that spectacular deliverance from the enmity of the world which is symbolized by the "standing up" of Michael, at His Second Advent. On this basis a detailed examination of the passage repays the effort.

Finally, against a different background and covering a much shorter period of time, there is the brief but eloquent vision in Zechariah 14. This describes the gathering of all the nations of the world against Israel, regathered in faith, and the intervention of God from heaven to deliver His people and declare the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Two or three allusions here are

reminiscent of Sennacherib, and the analogy does facilitate the interpretation of what has often been felt to be a difficult metaphorical passage.

But the full examination of these three Scriptural prophecies in the light of the Sennacherib analogy must form the subject of further instalments.

(To be continued)

AOH

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF ROMANS

Is it Paul's autobiography?

The seventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans has presented many problems to earnest students of God's Word. The main difficulty appears to lie in describing a pre-Christian, did Paul also refer to happenings which concerned himself and others (and even ourselves) **after** becoming followers of the Lord Jesus Christ? This article will examine what Paul has written, in the expectation of a divine blessing.

The Apostle first of all deals with the need of freedom from the law, and it may be asked why should he be so concerned about such freedom? The law is God's, it forbids sin and demands right doing. Paul sees no fault in the law itself for it is holy, just and good (v.12). The fault lies in the concept that by meticulous adherence to a code of law, merit in God's sight can be acquired.

In the chapter before us Paul tells us that he found the law inadequate as a means of securing a righteous standing before God. He had previously touched upon this when he wrote, "*By the law is the knowledge of sin*" (3.20).

In the early part of our chapter, freedom from law is illustrated by reference to the principle ruling between a wife and her husband. Marriage is a lifelong relationship. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. Death breaks the marriage-bond. Paul's dictum is that as the death of the one party breaks that bond, so the believer's death with Christ breaks the bond which previously yoked him to the law and frees him to enter into union with Christ.

In verse 5 Paul writes: "*While we lived on the level of our lower nature, the sinful passions evoked by the law worked in our bodies*" (NEB) but "*having died to that wherein we were holden, we are discharged from the law*" (v.6 RV).

The following section covered by verses 7 to 13 may be entitled "the dawn of conscience". In his

earliest days, Paul had no consciousness of sin nor would he have been acquainted with the demands of the law. The time in his life came, however, perhaps when he was thirteen years of age, when as "a son of the commandment" he assumed personal responsibility to keep the law comprised in the Ten Commandments, all but one of which were charged with prohibitions, "*You shall not ...*" Prohibitions tend to awake a desire to do the forbidden things. Paul cites an example, "*I should never have come to know what covetousness was but for the commandment which says, You shall not covet. It stirred into life a sin that lay dormant. Consequently, the commandments given, that man might keep them and live brought about death, not life.*"

The Apostle did not think of his own experience as unique, for he saw it as representative of the experience of the human race as a whole. He would have Adam's transgression in mind as well as his own. He writes "*I was once alive apart from the law*" (v.9). In the same way, Adam was not conscious of any sinful inclination until his obedience was put to the test by the commandment: "*You shall not eat*". Paul's belief in, and understanding of, the narrative of the Fall were strengthened in the light of his own experience.

Nevertheless, the law in itself was holy, just and good. Why then was an evil state of affairs brought into being by the introduction of the law? The answer is that the villain in the piece is Sin. Sin seized the opportunity afforded it when the law showed what was right and what was wrong but without making available the power to do the right and avoid doing the wrong. Thus Paul appreciated how "*exceeding sinful*" sin was. (v.13).

The next section to which we turn our attention is covered by verses 14 to 25 and may be entitled 'The conflict within'. Paul uses the first person singular, no longer using the past tense but the

present tense. This change should be very carefully noted. In verses 7 to 13, he told us that sin attacked him furtively and he fell, but in the section now before us, he puts up an agonizing resistance. He is now living on two planes at the same time, earnestly desiring to live on the higher but only too aware of the power of indwelling sin that persists in pulling him down to the lower.

Christians, like Paul, after being "*apprehended of Christ Jesus*", live in two worlds at the same time. Temporally, we are flesh and blood; "sons of Adam", like our fellows, to whom applies "in Adam all die". Spiritually, however, we have passed from death to life; translated from darkness to light; having shared in Christ's death, burial and resurrection to "*walk in newness of life*"; citizens of heaven; members of a new creation, no longer 'in Adam' but 'in Christ. Notwithstanding, Paul wrote in Gal. 5.17: "*the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; ... to prevent you from doing what you would*". This coincides with his words: "*For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do*" (Rom. 7.19 RSV).

"*The law of sin which is in my members*" (v.23) and the struggle against it has surely been the experience of too many Christian believers for it to be stated confidently (as many do) that Paul cannot be writing autobiographically, portraying part of his own life. As we have seen, he is using the present tense. Was he a meek and gentle man naturally? Is it not most likely with his commanding and intense enthusiasm, he found it difficult to "*crucify the flesh*"; "*to keep under his body*"; to gain complete victory over a hasty utterance or judgment; to repel resentment at any invasion into the field of his apostolic ministry? All these factors must have given rise to his constant portrayal of the Christian course to be a race to be won, a battle to be fought.

Victory did come to Paul "*through Jesus Christ our Lord*", although he linked it with a confession of inability. Such inability remained so long as "*I myself*" ("I, in my own strength") maintain the conflict. So long as he does that he may serve the law of God with his mind but his body will continue to obey the law of sin. But must it always be defeat? Must this incubus always be on his back? Will deliverance never come? Yes, it will, thank God! Through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Let us recapitulate by referring more particu-

larly to expressions Paul uses in the section from verse 14 onwards: "*I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine*" (v. 15 NEB). "*It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells within me*" (vv. 17,20). "*To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not*" (v.18 RV). 'The inward man' (v. 22) is the 'new man' in Christ Jesus that is daily renewed in the Creator's image. "*The law of sin*" (v.23) is the evil principle of indwelling sin. "*O wretched man that I am!*" (v.24).

Believers are accounted righteous by God through faith. They are justified but their sanctification is only beginning and this is progressive. When we believed in Christ, we knew but very little of our fallen Adamic nature, and when we had the vision of the Saviour, we thought our carnal mind to be dead, but we discovered later, this was not actually so. Many, perhaps most, have experienced more inward trials after coming to Christ than when they were first awakened to their need of the Saviour. "*Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" is the cry until we are made perfect in holiness, but we have the assurance that He who hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Christ. "*The body of this death*" or "*this body of death*" (RSV) is that heritage of human nature subject to the law of sin and death, in which all the Sons of Adam are involved, and from which we cannot extricate ourselves by our own endeavour.

But the answer to "*who shall deliver me?*" is there – God alone through Jesus Christ our Lord! "*Thanks be to God!*" (RSV). Romans 8 describes more fully how this deliverance from indwelling sin may be appropriated. In chapter 7, however, after Paul's brief indication that the situation is not hopeless, he goes back to summarize his moral predicament already set forth in verses 14 to 24. "*So then with the mind I myself serve (am in servitude to) the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin*". Some have said that these sentences are misplaced, but their position as in the A.V. is the same as in the earliest manuscripts. 'I myself' is emphatic; it means 'I by myself' who knows defeat and frustration. But 'I', as a Spirit-filled Christian, am not left to 'myself'; the law of the Spirit in Christ dwells within me and that power makes an almighty difference.

Chapter 8 of Romans begins by setting forth "Life in the Spirit". We have already quoted, Gal.

5.17, but immediately before these words Paul had written: "*Walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh*" (v.16). No mention has been made of the Holy Spirit in Romans 7 but chapter 8 describes the life of victory and hope through the Spirit. When we avail ourselves of the full resources of life and power that are ours 'in Christ Jesus', we are "*more than conquerors*"; "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (8.1). "Condemnation" is not merely the opposite of "justification". The Greek word for "condemnation" here used means rather "punishment following sentence", and Paul appears to be saying that there is no reason why those who are in Christ Jesus should go on doing penal servitude, as though they had never loved us. The vic-

tory that overcomes is the victory of faith. Let us therefore be released from the prison of sin. We stumble and fail even although we walk in the Spirit, but we are not condemned for every failure. Who is He that condemns? Christ that died? The answer is 'no' and we go on our way with greater circumspection, rejoicing withal. In all these things we are more than conquerors (super-conquerors) but only through Him are we persuaded that nothing shall be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

From the Forest Gate Bible Monthly

The above interpretation is supported by the commentaries of Conneybeare & Howson and Barnes. The alternative viewpoint is supported by Agar Beet. Further contributions may appear in a future issue.

IN THE LAND OF BEGINNING AGAIN

Short stories of the Kingdom

He watched the girl making her way towards him across the grass. Her slender figure outlined against the greensward made a pretty enough picture as with lithe steps she came quickly up to him. The radiance of youth gave a touch of eagerness to a countenance aflame with missionary zeal as she approached.

"Well, Arthur, have you made up your mind yet?"

"I have not, Sindra."

The girl sat down on the low wall beside him, stretching out one hand to coax an inquisitive sparrow towards her. "Is the evidence still insufficient, then?"

The man leaned forward, hands together between his knees. "I don't know" he said slowly. "I don't want to be unreasonable but"

"But you are sure there's a rational explanation of it all somewhere, if you can only have time to find it," replied Sindra, a mischievous smile lightening the gravity of her face.

Her companion flushed. "Now you're teasing again. Well, yes, there must be a rational explanation. Things like this just don't happen, that's all – it's absurd, incredible."

"But this one has happened," returned the girl gently.

Arthur looked out over the cliffs to the distant sea. "I know just what you are going to say. That I look thirty and feel it. I'm sound in wind and limb and am fitter than I ever remember feeling before and yet I know that I am sixty years of age. Not

long ago I was fighting for my breath with two nurses and a doctor doing their best for me. You are going to tell me again that I didn't fall asleep at all, but that I died and was buried and have been raised from the dead, and I tell you it's incredible. I won't believe it."

"How do you account for your being here, then?" His hands moved restlessly. "I don't know. I remember the room beginning to go dark and the doctor's voice coming, as from a great distance, 'He's going,' and then everything seemed to swim before my eyes and things just faded out. When I opened my eyes again I was lying on the grass fully dressed and you were holding my hand." His eyes held a far-away look. "Just like she did on the day..."

"...you slid down Giles' gravel pit and knocked yourself silly at the bottom?" suggested the girl.

Arthur sat bolt upright. "How do you know anything about that?" he demanded. "That happened years ago and you couldn't have been born then."

She laughed lightly. "Perhaps your mother told me."

"You're a queer girl, Sindra. I can't make you out at all. I'll wager you are not more than nineteen and you talk sometimes as if you've lived for years and years. How could you have known my mother? She died when I was sixteen." He was suddenly silent.

"Tell me about her," said the girl softly.

"There isn't much to tell. We were the best of pals ... more like brother and sister. They brought

her home one day from the river. She had tried to save a child from the water. The child was saved, but my mother was dead when they got her out." He paused for a moment. "I was sixteen and about to become a Sunday school teacher. That night something died in me. It was all so cruel, so senseless. If God exists, He would not have allowed it. I became a rationalist, and for forty years preached rationalism until my illness."

"And now?"

"I shall go on preaching it, I suppose."

"Why I suppose?"

"The people here don't seem as if they are likely subjects somehow. They are so *sure*."

"Sure of what?"

"That God is, and that they are living under a new and righteous system of government."

"Well, it is new, and it is righteous, isn't it?"

"I grant you that. Everything seems different somehow – and everyone seems happy, except –" He dropped his face into his hands.

"Poor laddie."

He looked up instantly.

"Sindra, you said that in exactly the way my mother used to say it when I was in trouble as a little chap. The same tone of voice, the same tricks of speech – yes, and the same fixed faith in your

God. What does it mean? Who are you? I can't understand."

Blue eyes looked into his own. A cool hand was laid on his. Incredulity and amazement fought for mastery on his face as realization came to him. The words fell from his lips slowly, haltingly, as though he feared to speak them. "Sindra ... you are my mother. Younger than I have ever known you. Living, and I saw you dead. Talking to me here, and yet I saw them filling in ... Then God be merciful to me a sinner."

He broke down shoulders heaving. Strong young arms encircled him and an endearing voice he had thought was forever stilled spoke words of comfort in his ears as a woman's heart gave thanks to Heaven for answered prayer and the surrender of one more life to the Lord Jesus Christ. The evening mists began to gather. Youthful voices carried on the breeze to the two seated on the cliff top.

Far, far away, like bells at evening peeling,
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea,
And laden souls by thousands come for healing,
Great Shepherd, turning eager steps to Thee.
Angels of Jesus! Angels of light!

Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

Hand-in-hand they wandered down the pathway
into the village.

AOH

QUESTION TIME

Why Theology?

What is the use of theology? I was shocked when someone asked this question. Perhaps we should first ask, what is theology? Quite simply, it is the study of God, His character and His work. A theologian is a scholar of theology although some appear to think that what a scholar says is acceptable but what a theologian says is not. Does anyone suppose that Albert Barnes or Frederic Farrar were not theologians in the nineteenth century or F. F. Bruce and W. E. Vine in the twentieth century. Yet we owe a tremendous debt to such as these as we do to Robert Young, James Strong, Professor Grim and J. H. Thayer

Christian Theology is a systematic study of the Bible. It sorts out facts and principles from interpretations and then proceeds to study accordingly. Moral theology is a specialised form of the study of Christian behaviour based on the Bible. Similarly a study of basic principles of the Bible can be invaluable if they can be applied to

Christian behaviour. Old Testament theology develops with Israel through the centuries. With the coming of Jesus the great doctrines of atonement and covenant were reborn. Their application to sin and salvation, of love and forgiveness, are much richer. The principles upon which thinking was based in Old Testament times were re-shaped and re-applied in the New Testament as shown in Paul's letter to the Galatians. The affect of the principle of sin is the breaking of God's Law. In the Old Testament that Law was defined on Sinai in the detailed record of rules and regulations. In the New Testament that Law is simply defined as 'Love'. Thinking, saying or doing something not motivated by 'love' is sin.

When there is a serious failure in theology there is readily a decline in behaviour. Two outstanding examples of this are the 'religious' leaders in the time of Jesus and the medieval Christian church that tortured and burned heretics. Theology should

never have divided loved ones or segmented the people of God. In fact true theology does not cause division but personal and sectarian interpretation does, as witness the church at Corinth. Theology

should focus our thoughts upon God and therefore should be the basis of true worship. Strong principles underlie good relationships.

THE LONELINESS OF JESUS

*A glimpse of
our Lord's life*

Almost the first concern evinced by our Lord on entering upon His public ministry was for companionship. He gathered round Him selected companions. *"that they might be with Him"* (Mark 3.14). His choice was made mainly from the working classes, men of action, men who toiled for a living with their hands, men who had no resources apart from what they could earn, men who had looked life in the face and knew its hardest facts.

He had little interest in rich men as such, nor in the complexities that riches bring. He desired simplicity, "plain living and high thinking" but above all, He sought fellowship, for His life was lonely. Human relationships had been discarded; *"My brother, my sister and my mother,"* said He, *"are they who shall do the will of My Father in Heaven"* (Mark 3.35). Apart from such, He had no intimates in life. How lonely is a life without a soul with whom one may converse in loving intimacy; such human loneliness was Jesus' lot. Did He find fellowship in those He called about Him; did they fill His need, understand Him, and sympathize? Were they not, on the contrary, self-centred, self-occupied and self-concerned?

Hear them as the storm raged about them on the Lake of Galilee: *"Do you not care if we perish?"* Listen to Peter, as with astonishing self-complacency he remarked: *"Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?"* (Matt. 19. 27). Was there ever such a speech made to One who had left the glory of Heaven for the sake of sinful men? Towards the end of His ministry, after more than three years of intercourse, precept and holy example, what must He have felt as He came upon them quarrelling among themselves who should be the greatest? No; He had no 'brother, sister or mother' fellowship; to the last He walked a lonely path. How often we read: *"He was alone upon the land"* (Mark 6.47); *"Jesus was left alone"* (John 8. 9); *"Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself"* (John 6.15). Not that the disciples meant to withhold from their Lord the fellowship He so much desired. Indeed when many went back and walked no more with Him, the

twelve refused to go away, and He gladly recognised this. *"You are those who have continued with me in my trials"* He said. They continued with Him, but, oh, how self-occupied even in that companionship!

At length they set off on that last sad journey to Jerusalem. The end was in His view, though not in theirs. Must He face this alone? Tenderly He opened the subject to them as they went together.

Surely this would draw out their loving sympathy, so He told them what was about to happen, that He must *"suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed; and on the third day be raised."* (Matt. 16.21 RSV), but He was met by a rebuke; they refused to believe the news. It was so utterly opposed to all their hopes. Was such a calamity to end their cherished visions of a glorious Messianic reign in which they were to share? Impossible; it would not be! So our Lord was left alone to His thoughts and sorrows, and they walked with Him wholly out of fellowship with what so moved His heart.

With infinite patience later on He tried again (Matt. 17.22-23). He unfolded the coming betrayal and the dreadful killing, and then the rising again. They listened in silence, and deep depression fell upon them all; *"and they were greatly distressed"* sorry that, after all, the calamity must come, that it must be accepted as inevitable, that their prospects were an illusion, and hope was gone. They did not understand; they were so taken up with themselves that they did not enter into what it meant to Him.

Again a third time (Matt. 20.17), Jesus took them apart in the way and told it all again, adding this time the mocking and scourging, as though appealing to their hearts for sympathy. Did they extend it to Him? They had had time to think and talk together, and a new aspect of the matter dawned on them. All was not so dark; He would rise again; the Kingdom would come after all. They had not followed Him in vain, and while He dwelt on the betrayal, the mocking, the scourging and the death, their self-centred hearts were occupied with their place in the Kingdom that would follow! At

such a time as this, two of them actually came forward with a request for first place. Jesus continued His path to the 'valley of shadows' alone, with no human heart to sympathize or understand or share His sorrows.

"The hour is coming, indeed it has come," said He to them on the last evening of his earthly life, *"when you will be scattered every man to his home, and will leave me alone, yet I am not alone for the Father is with me"* (John 16.32). One heart fully understood and cared and sympathized with the Saviour, and one heart alone – the Father's.

When the three who were nearest to Him went with Him to the garden they failed Him even there. They could not watch one hour. He withdrew Himself; He was alone. Thus the Lord sought fellowship with His own who were in the world – His own whom He loved to the end, the uttermost; yet whose response was so meagre, and whose love so cold. Such was His experience then; what is it now?

Jesus still seeks the fellowship of His people; we who are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1.9). Does He receive the fellowship He seeks, or do we fail to give it to Him? Is our contact with Him after all, mainly selfish?

Do we seek Him only for what we can get ourselves, pardon, protection, help, guidance? Is our need our first concern, or is our real objective that of Paul, *"that I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings"*? Are we prone to forget that our Lord seeks something from us and that apart from us He is still alone in relation to men? He longs for our co-operation in His plans and purposes, even to the extent of our suffering on behalf of others, as He set us an example. Like the disciples of old, we can be so taken up with ourselves, even though, like them, we have left all to follow Him, that His thoughts and purposes and yearning desires take a minor place, and our needs and hopes fill all our thoughts, and even our prayers. We are so selfish in our spiritual outlook that even our most holy things are sometimes tinged with it. How often it is we seek our own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's (Phil. 2.21). The Lord looks to us often in vain for that understanding, sympathy and fellowship with Him in His world plans, in comparison with which our little personal concerns, hopes and fears are insignificant indeed.

May He forgive us, and teach us how to enter into a life of real communion with Him in the days that yet remain to us.

TH

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

These words of the prophet Haggai were spoken to encourage Israel to rebuild the Temple, having now returned from the land of captivity. The prophecy is so worded that the casual reader might consider that the consequent rebuilding of the Temple was the fulfilment and end of the prophecy. However because the writer to the Hebrews quotes part of these words (Heb. 12.26) and speaks of them as being still future, there must be a further fulfilment. And so it is necessary to look farther than Israel's local history for fulfilment; the wording speaks of the shaking (and therefore, removal, adds Paul) of the heavens, the earth, the sea, the dry land and ALL the nations. This is the day of God's judgment on the nations, the oft declared time of trouble on the whole world. But, as is often the case with the prophets, the words of calamity are immediately followed by tidings of joy, the desire of all nations shall come. The manifestation of Divine dealings, judgment followed by grace, is the main theme of the Bible so far as man is concerned. Good if all 'prophets' of

judgment would likewise speak of the ensuing grace!

What is this 'desire of all nations' that follows the world-shaking? Various answers can be made to the question and each has its element of truth. It is conceivable that the desires of men and nations alter as the pages of history bring new visions and new needs to view. The Reformation brought a desire to be free of Papal oppression; and according to the slogan of the French Revolution, mankind in those days wanted "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". These desires were but partly realised, possibly because the shaking of those days was more of man than of the Lord. Some will say that man's desire today is for peace. This is true enough, if peace is merely abstention from war. But not yet do they desire that peace which accrues from harmony with their Creator. That will be their desire after He has made wars to cease and the judgments of the Lord are in the earth. As they learn righteousness then they will desire true peace. These desires are all subsidiary to man's eternal desire for life. This

desire, like the others, will only be attained by Divine intervention. God intervenes by shaking all nations, and then gives to man his desires, for it is by opening His hand that He satisfies the desire of every living thing.

But when national peace is achieved by the quelling of oppressors in the time of trouble, the restriction of Satan, and the establishment of the Kingdom by One who will take the kingdom and possess it for ever, then surely man's desire will change. National peace will give way to the desire for personal peace. Peace of body, of mind, of heart, or in one word – LIFE! And they will find that the one who gave them rest from war and strife will give them life. "Obey and live" will be the universal rule.

When man is enjoying the gifts of life then surely another desire will come into his heart. He will want to know more of Him who made peace and life possible, and we instantly think of the Messiah, who will be the desire of all nations. Rotherham's translation speaks of "delight of all nations". Do the Scriptures so portray our Lord? Once He had no beauty that they should desire him, but now all beauties that man can imagine are His. The word "beauty" is not full enough to describe the One who will be the desire of all nations.

The prophet Isaiah (9.6-7) shows how He is man's desire and cause of adoration. See how in these words man's many desires are accomplished in one Person! WONDERFUL. A happening is wonderful when it causes man to wonder how it occurred, or is miraculous, or because it transcends man's own imaginings. A thing is wonderful when it is the only one of its kind. The idea in the Hebrew is "singular". Using the word in this true sense it can be said that He stands alone and above all others. The fifth chapter of Revelation shows Him to be wonderful because He is exceptional, and the chapter closes with universal adoration of this desire of all nations. He alone could die, the just for the unjust, and He alone can extricate man from his troubles. When the Revelator looked to see the Lion of Judah who had prevailed to open the book, he saw the Lamb, which is certainly singular and wonderful. The Strong One is found to be Him who dies as the Lamb.

COUNSELLOR. Man has had many counsellors who dispense advice, but are incapable of dispensing the real need. This "desire of man" is a counsellor in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge coupled with the power of an endless life. One only can combine this work of prophet and priest.

THE MIGHTY GOD. Here the word is "*elohim*", used of one wielding power. The word mighty is "*gibbor*"; it also has the sense of power and is rendered "champion". It refers to the One who is properly known as man's powerful champion.

THE EVERLASTING FATHER. One of man's many desires, life, is met by Him who has abolished death and brought life to light through the Gospel.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE. It has been well said that man now desires peace, but not the Prince of Peace. When man enjoys that peace which will arise from the righteous rule of the Prince (Isaiah 32.17), they will then desire to know of Him who has so blessed them.

The next verse of the prophet Isaiah (ch. 9.7) details some of the glories of that righteous kingdom. Once established the kingdom, will never end. It is dominated by the throne of David that was at Jerusalem. There will thus be a visible world centre for man to desire and delight in. And so, in this One Person man's best desires are all met. Are these the final desires of nations? Will they not desire one thing more? Surely by the time the kingdom has settled down, the whole earth is at rest and is quiet, one more desire will arise in the hearts of men. They will surely desire to honour the Father even as they honour the Son, for (says Isaiah 9.7) it is the zeal of the Lord of Hosts that has made this great kingdom possible. Nothing would ever have been fulfilled unless God himself had planned it all. Man's final desire will be to "know thee, the holy true God" and thus have the full blessing of eternal life (John 17.2-3).

And he will be quite ready for the day, at the end of the reign of Christ, that the kingdom is delivered up to the Father, that God may be all in all.

BJD

Proud Christians – and the Master was meek and lowly? There is nothing that will so shame us out of our pride as to take a good look at Jesus

Christ. And He says to those who have come and received that promised rest; learn not to be selfish, and learn not to be proud.

WGS

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

14. Chapter 11.33-12.12

11.33-36 Verse 33 echoes thoughts in Matthew 5.15; Mark 4.21 and Luke 8.16. Light is love in action and reflects God's glory. Verses 14 and 15 is paralleled by Matthew 6.22, 23. Light enters the physical body through the eyes and their correct functioning permits the rest of the body to function normally – so in spiritual life (1) Does our spiritual sight allow God's light into our hearts or are we in darkness because our spiritual eyes are unsound or unclear. The word 'unsound' may be translated 'evil'(2) so darkness. Jewish religious leaders were blind to the real issues of life. Barclay (3) suggests 'hardening of heart'. Their fathers had paid lip service but really rejected the prophets who were God's messengers, because they looked only on outward appearance and ignored the condition of the heart. Is Abel included in the prophets? The true faith opens the heart to God. Religion is about outward appearances that people see.

11.38-41 Why was Jesus invited to a meal by a Pharisee? Was he following up what he had heard Jesus say? '*Aristao*' suggests taking lunch not dining (4). Washing was ceremonial with prescribed amounts of water, obligatory and omission was sinful. The phrase "*those things which are within*" has led to different interpretations. Does it refer to 'giving' from our own private store or giving from the heart or something else? The answer concerns real cleanliness (or purity). Morris (4) believes that Jesus was speaking about the inward condition of the heart.

11.42-54 'Woe' is deep regret referring to dead tradition, greed and hypocrisy. Tithing was to be a joyful offering but how does it affect a Christian? Walking over graves made a Jew ceremonially unclean but following the Pharisees made one morally unclean.

v.45 'reproach' would be better translated 'insult'.

v.49 the derivation of the expression 'wisdom of God' appears to be unknown.

v.52 what does 'key of knowledge' refer to?

vv.53, 54 Catch (Gr. *thereusai*) refers to hunting

wild animals.

12.1-12. As elsewhere, Luke has arranged his material in a different order and in a different context from the other evangelists. Chronological order is not the intent of the Gospel writers. It is most likely that Jesus said the same things in different places and at different times. Only Luke writes of 'ten thousands' being present. Jesus criticised hypocrisy more than most faults. It's acting out a part. Morris (5) says "The practice of saying one thing and doing another eats at the moral life like a canker". Leaven or yeast work insidiously. The art of hypocrisy is concealment. Jesus words here are very searching and make us guard our thoughts and words; one day they will be exposed. Judgment is God's prerogative alone. How are these sins paralleled in the v.21. The religious leaders' denial of God's work through Jesus was blasphemy; the only way they could deny it was to say that Satan did it – do we ever say that? What is sin against the Holy Spirit? Is it disbelief that refuses to repent? Barclay (6) suggests that it is calling the grace of God devilish; what a warning! Jesus was saying that by condemning me you condemn yourselves; do we fall for that one too? Shutting our eyes to God at work in people. What comfort that God forgets nothing not even sparrows; do we? Barclay (7) points out that although perfect love casts out one kind of fear (1 John 4.18) there is another kind that is compatible with love and is a necessary ingredient in right living. It is recognition of the greatness and rightness of God over against our readiness to sin. The word for Hell here is Gehenna. Only God has power over eternal issues.

Let us wait upon God for He will fill our minds with positive good things then our tongues and pens (printers and e-mails) can only be right in His sight.

(1) (2) (4) (5) Morris – Commentary on Luke (3) (6) (7)
Barclay Daily Study Bible – Luke

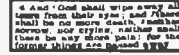
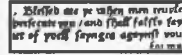
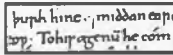
DN

When the eyes of men are opened to see Him in all His grace and wisdom and sympathy, in all the sufficiency of His sacrifice and the comfort of His Spirit; the heart is satisfied and every rival light is lost in the infinite splendour. (Joseph Parker)

Share it with someone else and you will make the blessing double yours. Jesus once borrowed Peter's ship and returned it full of fish.



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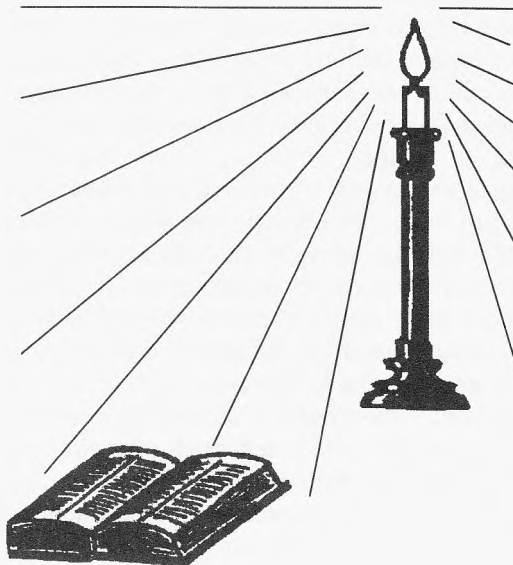
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged". This clear warning against Christians judging each other indicates the consequences of disobedience. In Matthew 7 Jesus illustrates His teaching by telling a forceful parable. *"Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye, while the log is in your own eye?'"* Criticism of other people is so often based on a wrong attitude towards them. Jesus regards it as a defect of our spiritual vision. He took this sin very seriously and said those who committed it are 'hypocrites'. There were two human faults that our Master particularly disliked, one was hypocrisy and the other arrogance. These serious weaknesses are both involved in judging others. When we judge someone else we make the arrogant assumption that we are better than the person we are talking about. We may be trying to be helpful, but really we are covering our own weaknesses. Comments made about other people's beliefs without the spirit of love prevent us from seeing clearly our own failure to interpret the Scriptures correctly.

Paul wrote to the Church at Rome *"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. ... Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead make up your mind not to put a stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."* Romans 14 is a chapter to be read often (especially when we have heard a juicy piece of gossip). Paul takes to task those who criticise others about what they eat and which days they observe. Christ alone, Master of all, is in possession of all the facts and circumstances, is much better able to 'judge', particularly as He was the one who went all the way to Calvary for the brother or sister being criticised.

The members of the Church at Corinth were very divided among themselves with criticisms flying in all directions. *"Therefore"* Paul writes to them, *"judge nothing before the appointed time, wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in the darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."*

James too has a word on this subject *"Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. ... There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbour?"* (Jas 4.11,12). This attitude towards others within the Church is gossip and slander. Sadly it is also extended to other communities. The principles and basis for condemning other groups who we feel do not belong to Christ are the same as for individuals and can be just as hurtful, not only to those who are judged but to those who are uncharitable enough to make the criticisms. Other Christians, not of our persuasion, stand or fall before one Master and Lord – and He gave the law of love by example, not only in word but in every action of His life.

DN

Gone from us

Brother Dan Henderson (Lydney)

Brother Ellis Thurman (Barnsley)

Sister Elsi Booth (Manchester)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A panorama of
the way of Christ*

1. Herald in the Wilderness

It is two thousand years since a man came on the stage to play a part in the great drama of human history. He claimed to be the Light of the world, to be the Truth and the Way in which men and women must walk if they want to live in peace and security, with hope and confidence in a future in which existing evils would be finally eradicated. For centuries many have endeavoured to walk in that light, to seek the paths of truth and righteousness that lead to abundant life; yet the aspect of the world, with its brilliantly lit streets and stores of knowledge, is still dark. All the evils of which darkness is a symbol abound, while the good for which light is a symbol is often opposed. That light, neglected and ignored, shines on as it did in those early days of crisis and confusion when the thinking part of the population hardly knew what to do or which way to turn. To them came the voice of a prophet recalling them to a sense of duty. He came to prepare the way, to herald the coming of One greater than himself. It was a period of change, the end of an era when old things were passing away. In what appeared to be wilderness conditions the prophet raised his voice. His words were the introduction to an age of grace and salvation, to light and truth, to a new revealing of God's concern with man by the example and sacrifice of the One he had chosen to be the Light of Men. "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness*" (John 1.23).

A wilderness is a place, uncultivated, uninhabited by human beings. Nature, untrained by the hand of man, runs riot producing a pathless, tangled tract which leads nowhere and serves no purpose, except as a haunt for those less attractive birds and beasts which shun the light of day. To be lost in a howling wilderness is a grim and depressing experience. Yet the herald of Christ, coming out of his desert abode to make known the approach of One who would be great in history, described himself as one making his proclamation in the wilderness, where there were none to listen or respond to his message. To run around in a pathless waste, shouting out good news to wild, unheeding Nature, seems a deplorable waste of energy. John might well have wondered what he was about, if, after all his youthful discipline, his preaching fell on deaf ears. The society of his day

had become decadent, its religion a mere formalism, a lifeless system of creed and ritual. People were confused, groping as the half-blind in a twilit pathless place where there was no order, purpose or fruitfulness. Futility, discouragement and apathy is the general air of a wilderness. In such conditions do peoples exist when there is no vision, no aim, no light, no drive, no knowing what they are doing or where they are going.

A wilderness is not a dead thing. It grows, often in rampant luxury. Its very vigour is often the source of its most ensnaring entanglements. The traveller forced to proceed through its territory has to hack a way through climbers and creepers which snatch at arms and legs. Low branches smack him in the face and jutting stones trip his feet. A wilderness is no exaggerated picture of an affluent, knowledgeable society, undisciplined, without faith and without vision, each man going his or her own way, with a general contempt for law and order and a complete disregard for all that is lovely and of good report. These latter things thrive in a well ordered society, in the full light of day, while the dense underworld which crowds the floor of the wilderness stretches out its vigorous tentacles in a secretive gloom.

Whatever the facade of John's world, to his trained senses it was a wilderness. His was a lone voice crying among a people walking in darkness. He stood at a crossroads in history. A pagan age was dying of its own corruption. A new one was about to take its place and he hailed it with stirring enthusiasm. Few took him seriously. Like many prophets he created a sensation. Power and intrigue were at hand to silence him. Those who might have benefited by his words plunged heedlessly on to greater perils.

So it has been with most of God's messengers. They have cried in the wilderness to the deaf and the blind that have preferred the entanglements and deceptions of this world. Lonely, discouraged, opposed, they might well doubt both mission and message but for the glorious example of their forerunners who spoke up loud and strong for a better way and a better day. The echoes of those lone voices crying in the wilderness of man's bewilderment come to us out of the past with an

urgent message for the present to 'Labour on!'

*Go labour on! 'tis not for nought
Thine earthly loss is heavenly gain
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not
The Master praises – what are men?
Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice
No toil for Him shall be in vain.*

"*Make straight the way of the Lord*" (John 1.23 NRSV). There was no way through the wilderness, no road upon which wayfarers might travel, sure of their direction and their destination. John, crying in the wilderness of human gloom and perplexity, called upon his hearers to bestir themselves, to get to work, to clear a path, to make a way through the entangling growths which caught and ensnared them into ever deeper perplexities. The way he called upon them to make was no ordinary track serving as a makeshift means of getting nowhere in particular. It was the way of the Lord, the King's highway, which he wanted them to build of strong, enduring substance.

The highways of the world are well known and well named. Far from being temporary structures they have existed from ancient days, carved originally through the waste lands of the earth permanent roads over which history, merchandise and men have travelled on their varied errands to a known destination. John, looking on the world around him, saw it as a wasteland without a highway and without an aim. There was only a confused running around, with no future, no way to anywhere. Such times are ripe for change. A new vision appears to the eyes of men tired of the outworn past. New hope, new ideas will spur people on to enthusiastic endeavours. The foremost will hack a way through the jungle to some new and nobler prospect, and feebler souls will travel on behind in safety and confidence.

The call is a challenge. It is not merely a stimulus to survival but an act of renewal. New work for a new goal is the preparation for a new mode of life. In a personal way, on an individual scale, the call comes at a crisis in life to get up and get going, to get something done, to start out on a new venture. Such pave the way that others looking on may take heart and venture also on a fresh start and some useful work.

Nations have their prophets and their call to cut through the wilderness of waste and confusion to a nobler and better life where even the simple may

walk safely. John was clearing a way, casting up a highway for a King, whose advent brought new light and life, new goals and visions to mankind. That age is ending again in the wilderness. Yet once more the voice of the prophet cries out "Make way, cast up a highway! Cut through the entanglements, the snares, the stifling growth, throw out the stones. Prepare the way, not for any earthly title but for our God". "*For every valley shall be exalted; every mountain and hill, made low; the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.*"

What is this but a blossoming, rejoicing wilderness, a new vision, a new hope, a new life, a new world; the voice of One crying "All things new", "*For the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together*"? When that which is old is on its last legs, staggering with weakness and confusion, the new, vigorous, glowing with health, is already at the door, and expectant hearts lift up their voice in song.

"*Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1.29). When John saw Jesus walking towards him at the river Jordan, he immediately identified Him as the Lamb of God, whose mission was to take away the sin of the world. John pointed to a person, to one man with a special title that endowed Him with life saving qualities. The nation of Israel were well aware of the Passover lamb by whose blood they had been preserved when the angel of death was abroad over the land of Egypt. Every year each family commemorated that deliverance, but the ritual did not preserve them from the failings, the sicknesses and death common to man. They were still in a wilderness state, groping for a way and a place, subject to Caesar, to all the miseries of foreign rule. Their problems were less moral and physical than national. Freedom from taxation and a hated yoke of government was their chief concern. Yet John, a prophet and a patriot, did not speak of taxes, of sectarianism or of political intolerance. He spoke of sin, enlarging the race of his own people into that of all races. He did not say "Behold a king, a leader, a deliverer", but "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world". It probably was a disappointing statement after such fiery oratory as had brought the crowds out to be baptized in the swiftly flowing Jordan. Sin would be no more likeable a word then than it is now. Whatever name is given to the misdeeds of men, they are still the

root cause of all human tribulation. Man's inhumanity to man has half a dozen substitute names for sin, but it is still the words and actions of depraved human nature which make the race suffer.

To take away all that is crooked, cruel and unjust is a sublime vocation and one man was chosen for that high office. Could that generation have seen then, as now this age might see, that the selfishness of sin is the evil root of all the world's troubles, they would gladly have plucked it out that the plant of goodness might dispense instead its fruitful blessings. Goodness is not a thing to be jeered at but a Divine alchemy whose mystical properties can transform the heart of man and through him the entire world from a state of hideous jungle to a planet of abounding peace and plenty. The Lamb of God went about doing good. His spirit of compassion, of giving, of simplicity and truth was God's answer to the world's evils of hatred, cruelty, greed, ambition, selfishness and falsehood.

"Behold the Lamb!" Could we have looked on Him as people then looked upon Him we should not have seen the knitted brows, the tight lips, the jutting jaws, the proud spirit of those leaders of men whose blunders have made the angels weep. He was one over whom they sang with joy, innocent as His title implied, benign, a man of peace and prayer, man of moral and spiritual power, the friend of children, of the outcasts of society, of the widows and the weary, of the sick and sorrowing. He walked with dignity, His face serene, His hands full of healing, His voice stronger than the elements, His word laden with wisdom and life. Wherever His penetrating eye fell sin fled before Him. Only a king of that calibre is fit to rule the world. Only His goodness can prevail against the world's sin and wickedness. Only His love has the power to make the human race into one agreeable whole without destroying one vestige of the individual personality. Behold the Lamb of God! He whom saints have followed for twenty centuries will yet take earth's government upon His shoulder.

"What seek you?" (John 1.38) Man, during his chequered history, has sought for many things, for silver and gold, for precious gems, for new continents, for the sources of great rivers, for things long extinct which reveal the primeval nature of the great globe he inhabits. The elixir of life with its

promise of eternal youth, the philosopher's stone with its promised easy wealth, the secrets of sea and sky, of life and death are some of those quests which the dedicated have followed with all the tenacity of the knight who sought the Holy Grail.

"But the best courage man has ever shown

Is daring to cut loose and think alone,

To seek for truth as blind men grope for light."

In the days of John, the last of Israel's prophets, centuries of heathen philosophy enclosed the world in a pagan twilight. Such worship of the one true and living God as there had been had deteriorated into mere lip service. The preaching of John had stirred thoughtful minds from their indifference. When he pointed out a Man greater than himself, two young men who were his disciples noted that man and followed Him. Jesus turned and saw them coming after Him. He did not on this occasion ask, whom do you see, but **what?** The young men wished to talk with Him, to ask questions, to hear His answers. What they sought was knowledge of a special kind, which they felt He had, a knowledge not to be obtained in the public thoroughfares but in private, so they replied simply, "Master, where do you live?". Graciously they were invited to His lodging place, where they stayed with Him one whole day learning from the lips of One who spoke the words of God in the simple language of men and Nature, secrets hidden hitherto from the wise and prudent.

What they discovered in that interview became apparent in their lives in after years. As Jews they sought the King of Israel, and their questions no doubt turned on Israel's future, but as men they sought life. Later in His ministry when men began to forsake Him because His words and deeds were not those of a military leader, He gave these young men a chance to go with them. It was then that one of them revealed the true object of their search in the words *"To whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life."*

Knowledge, however ample, falls short of the ultimate. The old passes away as the new makes itself known. Wealth fails to satisfy the heart and health eventually succumbs to the weakness of age and the earth takes back her dust. What then is left to man worthy the seeking that will outlast time and his own feeble frame? What will satisfy the deep places of the heart, uplift his spirit, fortify his mind and make him one forever with the great

fountain of life and light which owns and controls the vast, mysterious universe? Men have sought and found many strange inventions, affording a temporary pleasure or producing long-lasting evils. Only one search has found that power which enables man to triumph over both the best and the worst of this world. Those who followed Jesus to his dwelling found it in what He said, "*The words I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.*" "What seek you?" If life in everlasting measure,

there is only one source.

Christ the blessed one gives to all
Wonderful words of life
Brother list to his loving call
All so freely given,
Blessed boon from heaven
Beautiful words! Wonderful words!
Wonderful words of life.

AOH

TRIUMPHANT FAITH

"For whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5.4,5 NRSV). The life that God gives to His children is born in a heart that has turned to Him in faith. Believing in the Son of God is not a dull intellectual acknowledgement but an active faith. God's life in us develops contrary to the spirit of the world and in opposition to the natural feelings of our human nature. It is life that will continue when this world has ended.

Is 'faith' relevant in this modern scientific world? Is it not a relic of past days when people were slaves of superstition and blind credulity? Let us first ask 'what is faith?' One Bible writer provides us with a definition, "*Faith gives substance to our hopes and makes certain of realities we do not see.*" (Hebrews 11.1 NEB) Another translation of the same verse reads "*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (NRSV). Blind credulity hopes for something that may be impossible to obtain. Christian faith is based on reasonable evidence and is a conviction inspired by personal experience. Faith is part of a living relationship and so is bound up with trusting someone.

From birth a baby instinctively trusts those who feed it. From the moment of its first cry it depends for its needs and protection on its parents. As the child grows, so does its confidence. As the years pass children learn to trust teachers and text-books. If home and school let them down sadly the trust is broken. This faith in others is important to maintain social structures of daily life. We learn to trust those who produce and sell food and many others things. We trust those who operate public transport and those who build and maintain the

places where we live and work. In times of crisis we become helplessly dependent on those people responsible for medical and health care.

Scientists, like everyone else, need faith. Students at college, depend for a great deal on lecturers. They learn to trust the accuracy of instruments and apparatus. They depend on the work of colleagues and their own growing skills. Sometimes confidence wavers and relationships are strained.

Faith in God is the first principle of following Jesus Christ. It is impossible to follow Him or please God without it. Is it a surprise that many scientists have such faith? There is a sense in which this faith is given by God and empowered by Him (Hebrews 11.6; Romans 10.17; Ephesians 2.8,9; 1 Peter 1.5). We need to understand the difference between knowing something that our senses tell us to be factually correct and having faith about something that our senses cannot absolutely prove to be a fact. As we build evidence to support spiritual understanding so confidence grows into deep conviction and this is especially so where the hand of God can definitely be traced in our own life. He does not let us down even amid our doubts and fears. If our faith is personal experience of our God it will not be permanently damaged by clever rationalist argument. It is very important that those who have the pastoral care of young Christians make certain that the lambs know the Chief Shepherd. Structures of doctrine can never replace a personal knowledge of the Saviour. One loose card in the 'castle of interpretation' can bring down the whole 'building'.

It was the quality of Abraham's faith that prompted obedience to leave his homeland and his family twice in his life. His departure from Ur and then from Haran are worthy of meditation. It's

difficult to understand really how he could give up the son whom God had given him to fulfil His own promise. As obedience to God increases so we are more ready to relinquish the things nearest our hearts and that in turn strengthens faith. Slowly we learn that the 'unseen' is much greater and stronger than the 'seen'. *"This slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4.17, 18 NRSV). What the saints have endured from Abraham till now must have felt much worse than "momentary affliction" but its rewards were eternal (Hebrews 12.11).

It was the quality of Abraham's faith that inspired him to leave the security of his native city, with its noble buildings and prosperous merchants. He became a man of 'the tent and the altar' among the hills and valleys of Canaan. As he cut the ties of his former life, one by one, he became strong in his ties with God. It must have been strange to him that he left behind child sacrifice in Ur and was then asked to sacrifice on the mountains of Moriah. He must have lived very close to God and been very sure of His commands. He was still human and must have felt the load of sorrow on His heart. Yet he believed *"that God could raise his son up, even if he were dead. And he did, in a manner of speaking, receive him back from death"* (Hebrews 11.19 Phillips).

So Paul uses Abraham's life to illustrate the teaching of justification by faith. God forgave Abraham's sin because he trusted in Him. It is a doctrine so profound that the teachers of the great religions have never been able to understand it. They do not have the relationship to God that old father Abraham enjoyed. Simply walking with Jesus and trusting Him gives us acceptance with His Father. Nothing else can do that.

Blindly, Jewish leaders clung to their tradition and belief that they could earn salvation by their own good actions. It caused them to reject their Messiah. The medieval Church had the same problem. Few in that period knew their God. Faith deteriorated into rites and ceremonies. The more we trust God the greater the effect on our lives. Meditation upon 'goodness' may appear helpful but sin can only be overcome and conquered when we focus our thoughts upon God through Christ Jesus.

Paul not only was the most able exponent of Christian doctrine and especially of justification by faith but his whole life was a commentary on the failure of self effort and the need to trust God for salvation. Before being confronted on the Damascus road by the Lord Jesus, Paul had tried to gain salvation by obedience to the Law. For the same reason the rich young synagogue ruler in Perea was a failure (Luke 18.18-29). Human endeavour cannot overcome sin and reach up to eternal life. Saul of Tarsus had been so proud of his ancestry and background. His pedigree and curriculum vitae were second to none. He had been born into a religious family and educated by the greatest teachers of his day. He had lived a careful life according to the highest moral teaching known to man. But Saul was wretched and longed for deliverance from those things that his conscience told him were wrong. Within his heart he knew he could not 'lift himself by his own bootstraps' and had to come to terms with the fact that to reach the presence of the Eternal God meant total surrender and contrition before the Lord as David had expressed it in Psalm 51. But we must go further, so much further, and discover the fellowship of the Lord Jesus if we would see God face to face and Paul records the steps we must take in his self revelation in Philippians 3.

The social gospel and the ideals of humanism have had a similar appeal to human pride as the Jewish Law did two millennia ago. It has been hoped that moral and social reform would bring lasting peace and prosperity. During the last hundred years or so there have been changes to alleviate suffering and distribute wealth more fairly. The discoveries and inventions of science or the theories of philosophers cannot change the hearts of mankind. Only the Creator can do that. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved"* were Paul's words to the gaoler at Philippi (Acts 16.31) and they are still true. Simple faith in Jesus is the solution to all our problems and the victory in all our conflicts. It must be the goal of all our yearnings (Romans 10.8-10).

Jesus said *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath."* (John 3.36 NRSV) It is clear from reading the whole of this verse that 'believing' is very much more than giving mental assent. This is what the young ruler found.

'Believing' in the New Testament sense involves bringing the whole of life under obedience to Christ. As Jesus came to the end of that Last Supper He told His disciples to be of good cheer for He had overcome the world. He hardly looked like the victor a few hours later as He hung on the cross. But His complete obedience to His Father's instructions and the total dominance of love in His life until He died, not only conquered the world but gained the victory over Satan. From then on those who trusted in Christ shared His victories. For the most part the world does not recognise that conquest yet and remains in ignorance and darkness. It has yet to discover that the expressions of faith in Christ, demonstrated by loving actions of His people will outlast the kingdoms of this world and bring an end to the world dominated by the Devil. But ours is not the kind of victory that smashes and destroys but rather the day to day victory over sin in the human heart.

What kind of a world is it that we have to overcome? Essentially, it is a world that demands its own way and the more affluent people become the more demanding they become. Every newspaper declares it across its front pages, every news bulletin announces through every day. Disputes are not settled by what is logically good for a whole community (parochial or international) but to win personal and national prestige. It is a world that has no place for the man or woman who surrenders his or her preferences and wishes for the sake of others. When we have difficult choices to make the solution to the problem lies in those words of Romans 14, *"whatever is not of faith is sin"*. Our lives do not depend on the outcome of industrial disputes or on the vagaries of lotteries. But these words come at the end of a chapter about judging others. We cannot decide what our brother or sister must be doing for that is between themselves and the Lord. Nor must our harsh criticism be a means of stumbling others. Let them see that complete dependence upon God and complete obedience to His requirements is the only truly life of bliss.

Cities get a bad press in the Bible from Babel onwards. Towns are places where people live for security in each other. We live in a world that struggles against insecurity of peace, of health, of old age, of impending disaster. Jesus' words in Matthew 6.24-34 should give us comfort. The great missions of this world whether to the needy in this

land or in places across the sea; were begun in faith, depending on God to supply the resources.

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. That was the promise to Abraham and Sarah. Others, notably Jeremiah, echoed it. That promise remains firm to us who believe. Oh that we had faith as big as a mustard seed. Faith played such a part in Jesus' dealings with people. The faith of two gentiles, a centurion and a desperate Phoenician mother brought forth exclamations of joy from the Master but close disciples greatly disappointed Him; *"O you of little faith"* He said. They verbally promised so much but failed when it came to putting their faith into action; as Peter found during Jesus trial before Caiaphas.

First we must be aware of the challenge of Scripture and other indications given of what God requires of us. There is no room for excuses and explaining away the plain statements of Scripture. We may feel nervous and anxious but this is part of our human nature still with us. Ours is a life of faith; sometimes a fight of faith. It's a daily battle against wrong and it is won by faith in Christ's finished work. If we will let Him, He can make us bold and strong, able to subdue the power of evil, first in our own lives and then in the lives those around us. *'Lord, increase our faith.'*

DN

COMMUNION

Begin the day with God;
Kneel down to Him in prayer;
Lift up thy heart to His abode,
And seek His love to share.

Open the Book of God,
And read a portion there,
That it may hallow all thy thoughts
And sweeten all thy care.

Go through the day with God,
Whate'er thy work may be;
Where'er thou art – at home, abroad,
He is still near to thee.

Lie down at night with God,
Who gives His servant sleep;
And when thou tread'st the vale of death
He will thee guard and keep.

THE ROD OF GOD'S ANGER

A study in prophecy

Part 2

In Part I we dwelt upon the history of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib's campaign in and around Judah during the period 711-701 BC and its relation to the prophetic fore views of Daniel and other prophets. The subject now for examination is that part of Daniel's 11th chapter that describes the exploits of the 'king of the north' who at the Time of the End will embark upon a career of world conquest. He will ravage the nations and meet his doom by Divine intervention when he attacks the restored and converted people, God settled in the Holy Land, the nucleus of the Messianic kingdom upon earth. The parallel between the actions and fate of the Assyrian and those of his greater counterpart at the end of the Age is best shown by a process of verse by verse examination of the relevant passage, Daniel 11.36-45 RSV.

* * *

Vv. 36-37. *"And the king shall do according to his will; he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods ... He shall give no heed to the gods of his fathers, or to the one beloved by women; he shall not give heed to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all."*

Sennacherib was victorious wherever he went and no nation was able to withstand him: with his continuing victories his arrogance grew apace. He counted himself superior to all gods, as witness his words in 2 Chron. 32.13-15 (RSV) *"Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand? ... no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand ... how much less will your God deliver you out of my hand?"* The 'God of his fathers' is Asshur, the national supreme god of Assyria (Asshur was their deified ancestor, a son of patriarch Shem). The 'one beloved of women' is a term, according to Gesenius, applicable to the goddess Ishtar, Queen of heaven and revered by all Semitic peoples. Asshur and Ishtar were the two leading deities of the Assyrians until the time of Sennacherib but he neglected their worship in favour of a lesser god, Nisroch.

If the analogy holds good, the 'northern power'

at the end of this Age is one which repudiates and defies every type of religious faith and worship, and, to use the NEB rendering, utters "*monstrous blasphemies*" against God Most High. The reference to Ishtar might well constitute a hint that the very considerable section of the world Church that reveres the Virgin Mary as worthy of worship is also included in this rejection. The "king of the north" is thus shown to be completely atheistic and to have banished God and all expressions of religion from his policy and practice.

Vv. 38-39 *"He shall honour the god of fortresses instead of these; a god whom his fathers did not know he shall honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god: those who acknowledge him he shall magnify with honour. He shall make them rulers over many and shall divide the land for a price."*

Sennacherib had adopted, as his favourite deity, Nisroch, a god depicted on the tablets with the head of a vulture, a fitting choice for this man. According to Isaiah 37.38 it was while worshipping in the temple of this god that he met his end. Nisroch was virtually unknown to his predecessors; Sennacherib elevated him to the front rank. To this god the Assyrian dedicated the fruits of his many conquests. By virtue of the destruction of Sidon all world trade between the west, south and east was diverted to pass through Nineveh and came under Assyrian control. The 37th chapter of Ezekiel gives a vivid picture of the trading wealth which passed from Phoenicia to Assyria at this time although that chapter refers to the similar calamity which fell upon the sister city of Tyre a century later at the hands of the Babylonians. The Phoenicians had recovered their lost trade control in the meantime following the fall of Assyria. By means of his military conquests Sennacherib controlled, politically and commercially, all the ancient Bible lands, with the exception of Egypt, but extending into South Arabia and far into the interior of Siberia. Having conquered, he left the local national kings and rulers in control subject to him, on payment of heavy annual tribute in treasure and kind, thus "*dividing the land for a price*".

Similarly the 'king of the north' of Daniel's

vision can be expected to attain considerable commercial supremacy in the world, in the name of a hitherto new and unwelcome ideology which can well merit the description of a "foreign god", a god of fortresses, a military power. There will seem no power that can withstand this relentless conqueror steadily submitting one nation after another to his will.

Vv. 40-41. *"At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him; but the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships, and shall come into the countries and shall overflow and pass through. He shall come into the glorious land and tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand; Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites."*

In Sennacherib's day the 'king of the south' was Egypt, the other and much older empire. Egypt was being steadily circumscribed and restricted by the rising power of Assyria. There had already been clashes; now the Egyptians marched north to give battle whilst Sennacherib was still in Syria. The Assyrian advanced at a furious pace; his armies swarmed over Syria, Phoenicia, the land of the Philistines, Samaria and Judah, and met the Egyptian forces at Eltekeh, south-west of Jerusalem. The Egyptians were defeated and withdrew. A feature of this campaign was that the kings of Edom, Moab and Ammon came to Sennacherib with protestations of friendship and in consequence he left these three countries alone. They did not suffer the horrors of war. But in Judah, "the glorious land", he did take more than two hundred thousand captives, and sent them to Nineveh with much spoil. Although the Scripture history says nothing about his use of ships, it is known that shortly afterwards Sennacherib employed a great fleet of war galleys in his wars with Elam. His grandfather, Shalmaneser, originated Assyrian maritime power by using sixty ships manned by eight thousand rowers in his attack upon Tyre. It is perfectly feasible to conclude that Sennacherib's advance through Syria and Philistia towards Egypt was accompanied by a war fleet sailing along the Palestine coast to assist in the attack, and that Daniel's vision at this point was a reflection of that fact.

In like manner does the end-of-the-age 'king of the north' advance upon the Holy Land where God's

people of faith await his coming. His quarrel at this moment is not primarily with them but with the latter-day "king of the south" who is his great adversary. He has provided himself with 'many ships', a new departure for this king of the north who has previously relied upon land warfare. The Semitic Arabs of the adjacent lands, pictured in Daniel by Moab, Edom, Ammon, are on terms of amity with him and escape his wrath, but the people of God do suffer his vengeance in proportion as they are still allied with the "king of the south". Not until that link is broken does God deliver. So just as Sennacherib at the corresponding moment took captives and a great spoil from Judah, so does the latter-day king of the north exact his toll from restored Israel while they still look for salvation to the "kingdoms of this world". This is shown more clearly in succeeding verses.

Vv 42-43 *"He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the precious things of Egypt, but the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his heel."*

Here the dark shadow of his approaching doom begins to fall upon Sennacherib. He seems to be at the point of success; he now besieges and captures the Philistine fortress of Lachish, the last effective barrier to his advance into Egypt proper. He has left behind him an elaborate sculpture commemorating the fall of Lachish in which he is depicted reviewing the treasures he has captured. But Egypt, now thoroughly alarmed, had called up all her available allies to meet the threat of the terrible Assyrian. The Ethiopians, the Lubim, the Nubians, the Phutites, all the powerful peoples of Africa came out of Egypt under the leadership of Tirhakah the Ethiopian monarch, to give battle. The result appears indecisive; Sennacherib claimed a great victory but Egyptian lore asserts that Egypt was saved by the interposition of Egypt's gods who intervened to destroy his army. Certain it is that he did not set foot in Egypt proper although he did destroy Egyptian influence in Judah and Syria. And the statement that the Libyans (properly Phutites) and Ethiopians shall be "at his heel" (not "steps" as AV) seems almost to indicate that at this point he was compelled to desist and turn back. Almost immediately came the miraculous deliverance at Jerusalem when the besieging army was destroyed

by the angel of the Lord and the Assyrian "*returned with shame of face to his own land*".

Now all this, translated to the events of the end of the age, seems to picture an unexpected slowing up or check to the worldwide conquests of the king of the north for a reason not immediately apparent. The king of the south is down but not out; he is still capable of offering battle but all the advantage and initiative is with the king of the north. There would seem to be no reason why he does not follow up his acquisition of the treasures of the king of the south by advancing completely into his territory and taking full possession. But he does not do so. Instead he pauses in his onward career to settle once and for all this vexed problem of the people of God ensconced in their own land. When at last the inability of the king of the south to help them has been abundantly demonstrated publicly they avow their faith in God, that He will deliver. The arm of flesh has failed them. The carnal weapons in which they had put their trust are cast aside, and they wait in calm confidence to see what the Lord will do. And here, with two great powers facing each other and the people of God trapped between them, comes the climax to this momentous drama.

Vv 44-45 "*But tidings from the east and the north shall alarm him; and he shall go forth with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many. And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.*"

It was at this point, whilst the Assyrian armies were besieging Jerusalem and Hezekiah was praying to God for deliverance, that news came to Sennacherib from Nineveh that rebellion had broken out in his subject lands of Babylonia and Elam in the east and Armenia in the north. It was imperative that he return to deal with the rebels. The immediate result was to step up his attempt to capture Jerusalem; the extent of his fury is indicated in the Old Testament by the combined promises and threats directed against the besieged people of Jerusalem, threats to which they disdained to reply. He was at this time superintending the removal of the treasures from the captured city of Lachish and the sculpture above referred to shows him seated in front of his royal pavilion whilst thus engaged. It was the custom for kings in those days when on active service with their troops to have such a pavilion-

tent for personal use and this sculpture of such at Lachish is a striking commentary on this verse. Lachish lies "*between the sea*" (the Mediterranean) "*and the glorious holy mountain*" (Mount Zion-Jerusalem). Sennacherib in his inscriptions had already boasted that he would "pitch my silken tent not only in the high places of the north" (Syria, where he did do so) "but in Jerusalem itself, and profane its palace gardens" (which in the event he certainly did not do. This incidentally is alluded to in 2 Kings 19.23.)

Here he came to his end. In the night the Angel of the Lord passed over the Assyrian host and slew of them a hundred and eighty five thousand men. The Assyrian, the rod of God's anger, the scourge of Israel, was suddenly and irrevocably broken by God whom he had defied, and made his way back to Nineveh never to return. At that point he passes out of the Scripture story; in reality he lived a further nineteen years before being assassinated by his sons, but that is no part of the prophetic picture. With the loss of his army, and his precipitate flight from Jerusalem, he came to his end with none to help him.

So it will be at this end of the Age. One can picture the dread invader establishing his headquarters on the very borders of the Holy Land and exulting at the prospect of imminent and easy victory, and then the coming of tidings from the east and north which convey a new danger. The tidings that would be most likely to constitute a threat to this hitherto invincible world ruler would be that of the active intervention of Heaven. The Assyrians looked to a mountain in the far north-east as the abode of the gods and the centre of Divine rulership. 'The Mountain of the East' they called it, and sometimes 'the heights of the North' (this is alluded to in Isaiah 14.13). From there had come their ancestors after the Great Flood. One of the phenomena of the closing events of this Age must be a dawning realization on the part of the evil forces of this world that the powers of Heaven are joining issue with them and that the fight will be to a finish. The vision of Rev. 19 where the Rider on the White Horse from Heaven is seen facing the powers of evil and completely overthrowing them is a parallel picture describing the same event. If this be a valid interpretation, then this intimation that Heaven's powers from the "east and north", the centre of Divine rule, are on the way, to give battle

to all world evil. This is followed almost immediately by the spectacular and miraculous deliverance of the trusting people of God in the Holy Land and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on Earth. Logically enough the following chapter, Daniel 12, declares at this point that Michael, the traditional archangel-protector of Israel, 'stands up', and the reign of blessing begins.

This chain of obscure allusions in these few verses of Daniel 11, related to the known details of Sennacherib's campaign at the time of Israel's earlier but similar trial of faith, is valuable guidance to an understanding of the detailed sequence of happenings which will characterize the final few years of 'this present evil world.'

(To be concluded) AOH

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

10. Retribution for sin

The guard appeared in the doorway and strode noiselessly across the floor. He bowed low before the throne.

"The prophet Nathan seeks audience with you, O king", he said. David stared at him morosely. "Let him be admitted" he said at last. His eyes betrayed a slight apprehension. The guard bowed again and retired. David waited, chin on hand. The curtains parted to reveal a tall, commanding figure, flowing locks and beard belying apparent youthfulness, piercing eyes and firm mouth giving evidence of a maturity of character beyond his evident thirty or so years of life. He moved with deliberate steps across the room and stood still, inclining his head slightly in acknowledgement.

"And what, O man of God, have I done wrong now" asked David sarcastically. The prophet regarded him impassively. "I come, O king, that you give judgment on a matter of wrongdoing".

"Give judgment?" echoed David a little blankly. The apprehension faded from his eyes. "Are there no judges in Jerusalem who can hear the case?"

"This is a matter which only the king can judge."

David settled himself more comfortably in his seat. He regarded Nathan more amiably. "Proceed then".

"There were two men in the city" Nathan began, "one rich, one poor. The rich man possessed great wealth in flocks and herds, the poor man only one ewe lamb that he had nurtured. The rich man had a guest. Instead of taking from his own flocks for his needs he sent and deprived the poor man of his one ewe lamb to provide the feast." He stopped and looked straight at the king. David's quick temper flared out. He rose from his seat. "As the Lord lives" he declared hotly "the man that has done this thing shall surely die". He stopped abruptly. Nathan had raised his arm; his accusing finger pointed directly at the king. "You are the man!"

David sank slowly back to his seat, face paling. "Thus says the Lord God of Israel" declared the other "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house, the houses of Israel and Judah; wherefore then have you despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife." He paused a moment. David had shrunk back in his seat and buried his face in his hands to avoid those accusing eyes. The remorseless voice went on. "Hear therefore the word of the Lord. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house. Because you have despised me, and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife, and have slain him, I will raise up evil against you out of your house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour. You did this thing secretly, but I will do it before all Israel." He ceased and waited. There was a long silence. David lifted his head at last. His countenance was stricken; his voice broken. "I have sinned against the Lord!"

There was no softening of the austere features confronting him. "The Lord has spoken. You will not die, but the child your wife has given you shall surely die!"

"No, no, not that" cried the distraught man. He received no answer. Nathan had gone.

How long David sat there he never knew. His mind was in turmoil. The transgression was some two years in the past now and he had virtually forgotten it; his passion for Bath-sheba had continued and he dearly loved their year-old child. The war with the Ammonites, that had given opportunity for the death of Uriah, was in its closing stages with Joab permanently at the battlefield and David making periodic visits to the scene of operations. He knew that a few more months would see the end

of the conflict and with that victory he had been looking forward to a period of peace and ease such as he had enjoyed during most of his past thirteen years in Jerusalem. Now all that was changed; his sin had been brought up before his face and he knew, now, that nothing could ever be the same again. Wearily he got up and went out of the throne-room.

Through the open door of the vestibule he could see, across the palace gardens, a small crowd around the entrance to the house of the women. At first he regarded the scene disinterestedly, and then something caught his attention. He beckoned an attendant. "Is not that Malachi the physician going in there?" he exclaimed, "What is going on?" The man looked confused. "I will go and find out, sire" he replied, and promptly disappeared. David waited awhile, then crossed the garden himself towards the crowd. It melted as he approached and he stopped before the guard at the doorway. "What is happening here?" He demanded. The guard looked at him with a troubled expression; he spoke reluctantly. "The child of the lady Bath-sheba is sick". The words were hardly out of his mouth before David had pushed past him and was taking long hasty steps to his wife's apartment. The Levite, bending low over the child's couch, straightened up as the king approached and bowed before him. David had time to discern the little form, pale and still, stretched out upon the couch, and Bath-sheba's tearful face. "Tell me" demanded the king of the other, "can you cure him? Will the child live?" He waited an eternity for the answer. Malachi looked down again at the infant, next at the mother, and then at the anxious face of the king.

"O my king", he said, "I know not what this malady is. Only the Lord God of Israel can save him now." He bowed low again and left the room.

"And the Lord God of Israel has decreed that he must die, because of my sin" groaned David. He went slowly back to his own apartments.

It was a week later. David had remained all that time in close seclusion, seeing no one. Affairs of state were neglected and forgotten. His ministers came for audience and went away as they came. He refused all food and drink. Prostrate on the ground, he besought the Lord to rescind the sentence and spare the life of his infant son. The entreaties of his ministers and his servants alike were ignored. All else was abandoned in his frantic pleas to the Lord

to spare the life of his child. On the seventh day the child died.

The palace servants were afraid to tell David. "If he behaved like this while there was yet some hope that the child would live" they told each other "what is he going to do when he knows he is dead". So for a while there was a conspiracy of silence, until David perceived by whisperings and glances, when they thought he was not looking, that there was something amiss.

"Therefore David said to his servants, 'Is the child dead?' And they said, 'he is dead!' And thereupon David rose from the ground, washed himself and donned fresh garments, and went to 'the house of the Lord' the tent he had erected in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant, and there he worshipped. Returning to the palace, he called for food, and began to eat."

Greatly daring, his servants asked the reason for this sudden change of demeanour. Apparently quite affably, he told them that while the child lived, there was always the chance that God would heed his distress and listen to his plea. Now the child was dead and God had not listened; there was no longer any point in keeping up the supplications; he might as well return to normal life. *"I shall go to him"* he said, *"but he shall not return to me".* *"And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon".*

* * *

To what extent David felt sincere remorse for his crime it is impossible to say. The only indication in the narrative is his frank avowal to Nathan "I have sinned against the Lord". It has often been suggested that Psalms 32 and 51 were composed by David to express his feelings after realization of his sin came to him, or was forced upon him by Nathan. The language of both Psalms is very fitting, especially his heartfelt plea in Psa. 51.14. *"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God"*. In the light of those two Psalms it is probably right to conclude that he was indeed remorseful and repentant, and sincerely regretted the momentary weakness which had led him astray and involved him in so grievous a calamity. It is likely that for the rest of his life he was haunted by the memory of the valiant soldier who had served him so faithfully, and whom he had so basely betrayed and murdered. If he was indeed thus sincerely repentant, then of course the Lord did extend him forgiveness; but even so, the conse-

quences remained. The Divine law "what a man sows, that shall he also reap" cannot be avoided or set aside. The death of his child was not the only penalty David was destined to suffer. The rest of his reign was filled with a long succession of disasters, characterized by outrage and murder, all stemming in some degree from the implications of his crime against Uriah.

For the present, David picked up the threads of life again. There is no doubt that Bath-sheba became his favourite wife, there is no mention again of any of the others, and she was almost certainly a much younger woman, as is evidenced by other Scriptural deductions. For the present he was still occupied with the war against Ammon. At about this time Joab had virtually ended the campaign by capturing the capital city of Rabbah. He called David to come down and receive the people's submission in person, which David lost no time in doing and it must be said with regret, treating the defeated citizens with atrocious cruelty, if 2 Sam. 13.31 and 32 are accepted as a true record. His justification probably was the fact that the Ammonites were probably some of the cruellest of the ancient nations and had treated Israel in much the same way in times gone past. David probably re-

flected that the Mosaic Law demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and he was only doing what Moses commanded.

Less than a year later Bath-sheba presented David with a second son, whom he named Solomon. From him came the kings of Israel, the royal line. In later years there was a third son, Nathan, who became the blood ancestor of both Joseph and Mary, and through Mary, of Christ. Then there was a fourth son of whom no further mention is made. David at fifty years of age had what was virtually a second family; there were probably some girls as well as boys. His earlier sons were by now grown up and the eldest was twenty one years of age. In the ordinary way he would be the prospective heir to the throne but David was now manifestly showing his preference for Solomon, the child of Bath-sheba, and obviously Amnon would be looking a little askance at this interloper. He was not the only one. Others of the older sons of David had their eyes on the throne and here were all the seeds of the conflict that led eventually to the murder of at least three of David's sons. From that casual glance from the roof of his palace on that fateful afternoon David was to reap a bitter harvest.

(To be continued) AOH

Live to give the world a true conception of the unseen Lord. Put away self-indulgence, whether of the sense or thought for this will undermine the better qualities of the heart. Carefully check impatience, uncharity, insincerity of speech and manner. Embody in heart and life the meekness and gentleness, the purity and truth of the Lord

Jesus. Do the commonest and smallest things beneath His eye. Are you beset with chafing irritations and annoyances? Bear them as the martyrs the pillory and the torture chamber. You may do all these things by the grace of God and without brilliant talent.

(F B Meyer)

The Tares

The word 'tares' in the parable of the wheat and tares, is a translation of the Greek word *zizania*. This word does not appear in the writings of any classical Greek writers and it is supposed that it was a Palestinian local name for the plant that today is known in the land as ziwan. This plant is definitely poisonous. Travellers have observed that it has the property of causing giddiness and even unconsciousness and that its effect is insidious and often unnoticed until too late. At least one case is on record where a whole community of people was affected by eating ziwan that not been cleansed out of the wheat that had been used to make their bread. Jesus used an apt simile for his parable.

Parable and Apologue

An *apologue* (or aplogue) is a fable or parabolic tale, with a moral truth; animals, trees, etc are used as characters and as it progresses towards the end, the moral lesson can be deduced. A celebrated aplogue is that of the trees called upon to choose a king in Judges 9. The aplogue is in verses 8-15 and the moral in verses 55-57 though the whole chapter is a framework for the subject.

A *parable* is different, in that it is in itself a pictorial narrative, with a cryptic meaning not so easily understood without a key to the cypher. After His series of word-pictures Jesus privately explained them to His disciples, as is evident from Matthew 13.10, 11, 16, 51 and 52.

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

11. The Conversion of Cornelius – Acts 10

From his vantage point on the rooftop he looked across the wide expanse of sunlit sea. His eyes followed the long waves as they formed far out and travelled at steady pace towards the shore, raising smooth brows as they approached, curling over with foam-covered crests, falling to break in a cascade of shining water flooding across the flat sands. The sky above him shimmered like a sheet of white-hot steel, and in the distance on his right he could see the long line of rocks running out to sea where legend had it the fair maiden Andromeda had once been chained as a sacrifice to appease the terrible sea-monster. The hero Perseus had appeared in time to slay the monster and deliver Andromeda. But Peter had no interest in Greek legend: he knew that this thriving seaport town of Joppa preserved the story as a distorted recollection of a prophet of his own people. Jonah of Gath-hepher had left this place in a merchant ship to run away from his Divine commission and had been brought back not many days later by a great sea beast. He knew that the old half-ruined Temple of Dagon on the hillside behind him had once contained the skeleton of a great sea beast. He recalled what the citizens of Joppa told him, that less than a century earlier it had been taken to Rome and placed in a Natural History exhibition. His mind went back to Jonah and his eventual successful mission to the alien Assyrians, men who were outside the commonwealth of Israel, Gentiles, beyond the pale and yet God had blessed them because of their faith! He wondered why he had been guided to Joppa, a cosmopolitan seafaring city having more to do with the Gentile world than the Jewish. What interest could his risen Lord have in such a place, he mused. In Jonah's day it had been the scene of a wondrous manifestation of Divine power and heralded a great missionary work among certain Gentiles and a great deliverance. But he himself was not like Jonah, a missionary to Gentiles. He was sent, as Jesus had been sent, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and in these last few days he had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to do great things. At Lydda, not many miles away, he had cured the Christian disciple Aeneas of his paralysis. Here at Joppa he had performed the most marvellous miracle of all. He had raised the devout woman Tabitha from the dead, and the

resultant sensation in the town had brought many to the Lord and laid the foundations of a Christian community. It was to endure for many years and play its part in some momentous events in the history of the Church.

But Peter's thoughts were still with Jonah. He had elected to accept the hospitality of this brother in the Lord, Simon the tanner, in his humble home on the seashore. It was humble, because all orthodox Jews abhorred the tanner's trade and the calling was looked down upon and those who followed it were despised. Simon was a poor man but he was a believer and with him Peter felt at home. Somehow or other he sensed some new phase of his commission was going to open before him but he could not be sure what it was going to be. For some time now the infant Church had been experiencing a period of rest. The opposition of the priests had subsided; the advice of Gamaliel had been followed. Peter had taken the opportunity to leave Jerusalem and travel through Samaria and then the lowlands along the coast, preaching the word and making converts, and now he was here at Joppa and there was an element of uncertainty what he should do next.

He shifted his position on the parapet of the roof to avoid the noonday sun getting into his eyes. They would be calling him down soon for the midday meal and his burly fisherman's frame was already calling out for it. But more than his physical hunger was this desire for the revelation of God's will that he felt his soul needed. In the direction towards which he was now looking he could see a Tyrian merchant vessel setting out on its journey to some distant land. He watched the oars flashing in the sunlight as the rowers strove to assist the tremendous square sail, speeding the ship onward. Peter wondered where it was going. His eyes swept beyond it to the line of the far horizon, the boundary between sea and sky. Beyond that horizon, he knew lay Rome, the city that was master of the world, and the arrogant race that worshipped gods many and lords many and knew naught of Christ. Still farther on to the west, he had heard of Spain, gateway to the mighty western ocean that extended to the rim of the world and from which no man who crossed had ever returned. One day when he was declaring the Good News in

the streets of Joppa, there had stopped to listen three unusual looking men, mariners, with blue eyes and fair hair. They had just come from placing their offerings on a modest shrine on the quayside to a strange god called Lud. In answer to his questions, they had told him they were Britons, from a land in the far north-west where the ships of Tyre went to trade for tin, a metal scarce in the East but plentiful in their land. The round trip to their country and back took the ships two years, they told him. Although the pay was good for taking service on the Tyrian ships they were always glad to leave the hot and arid country of Judea and get back to their own green and pleasant land. Peter asked them about Lud and they said he was a great god in their land and in their capital city there was a temple to him on a hill called the Hill of Lud approached through a gate in the city wall called Lud Gate. When he talked to them about Jesus and the resurrection they shook their heads uncomprehendingly and said they did not understand. As they went down the street towards their ship Peter was conscious again of that strange stab of feeling for these men who had never known the God of Israel, never heard of Jesus, and without believing in his Name could never be saved.

He thought of those three men now as he watched the ship ploughing its way through the waters, heading west. They were probably on that very ship now he mused. In due time they would be back in their own land where that strange god they had told him about was worshipped. Would they remember anything of what he had said to them about Jesus; perhaps tell of him to their fellows in that land? And if so, would it be any good? What hope was there for them? They were Gentiles, outside the sphere of God's favour, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, dogs, unclean, common...

There was a great stillness. The scene before him had taken on an unreal aspect. There was still sea and sky, but the town and the sands had disappeared; the parapet before him was not there now. He seemed to be suspended in space. There was no movement; the rolling waves had arrested their motion and were stationary. Drawn by an irresistible impulse, he looked up to the sky. The great square sail of the ship he had just been watching was there, high in the heavens, suspended by its ropes and tackling from some invisible support. It was descending, coming rapidly towards

him, and as it came near he saw that it was crowded with moving figures, figures of animals, wild animals, reptiles, unclean beasts like swine and camels, scavenging birds like the vulture, and his soul shrank within him at the sight. All the things of the animate natural world that offended his Jewish mind and were proscribed by the Law of Moses were there obtruding upon his sight. Try as he might he could not escape them and as the great sail hung there, suspended by its four-corners, with its repugnant cargo, there came a rumbling of thunder from the clear skies above. It shaped itself into words, words uttered in the familiar voice of his Master, words from which he instinctively shrank in horror; "*Rise, Peter, kill, and eat!*".

Swift and unhesitating came his response. "*Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.*" There was a pause, and then that heavenly voice again, measured, serene, compelling. "*What God has cleansed, you must not call common.*". Peter was silent, his mind in turmoil. Never before had his Master commanded him to commit so flagrant a breach of the Law. What did it imply; why must he do this thing, so alien to all that he had been taught and believed? Had he in reality heard aright and was this in very truth the voice of the Lord and not some demoniac trick of the Evil One. The voice came again, louder and more stern this time, each word impinging on his consciousness with an impact as of a heavy blow. "*What God has cleansed, you must not call common.*". There could be no doubt about it; this was indeed the voice he knew so well. This was indeed Jesus speaking to him from the other side. But how could he do such a thing? What would his fellow-apostles and the believers say? Where would be the distinction between his position as a son of Israel, one of the chosen people, and that of any of the Gentiles around him, the unclean, the outcasts? In tones of thunder now, a challenge that could not be gainsaid, a command he could not but obey, reverberating through his mind and continuing in successive echoes against which he could not close his ears; "*What God has cleansed, you must not call common.*".

He looked up. The voice had ceased; the stillness had returned. The great sail with its strange load was ascending again into the heavens. Even as he gazed it became a speck in the sky and was gone. Suddenly the silence was broken. The twittering of

birds fell upon his ears, the noises of people moving in the street below. The scene before his eyes came to life, the sea-waves rolling in to the shore as they had been a few minutes ago. The houses of the town were there, and the parapet before him, and the flat roof beneath his feet. The scenery took on perspective and came alive; far away at sea he saw the Tyrian ship dipping in the rollers as it headed west. It seemed to be in the same place on the ocean as when he last saw it before this thing happened to him, almost as if time had stood still for a space.

Long did Peter sit there pondering the vision; for that it was a vision he now had no doubt. His earlier feeling that something momentous was about to happen was now fully justified. What lay behind his Lord's insistence that he no longer recognize the distinction between clean and unclean? And why the great ship's sail, suspended in the heavens as choice of vehicle for the unclean company that he was now to treat as clean? His eyes rested again on the ship, now little more than a speck on the horizon, and his mind suddenly realised the truth. There, straining against the tall mast of that merchant vessel, held by the ropes and tackling that spread it to receive the wind, was the same sail he had just seen in vision. It was taking that ship to the lands of the Gentiles. Its crew would fraternize with the Gentiles, trade with them for their goods, eat of their food, breathe the air of their countries and bring the products of their lands back to the land of Judea. That sail, driven and impelled forward by the wind of heaven, was a means of breaking down the physical barrier between Jew and Gentile, and no power on earth could prevent it. Had God shown him the sail, the agent of union – the unclean made clean – the message of the Gospel to go out from Israel to peoples far beyond the sea just as that ship was doing at this very moment? Would God then indeed grant to the Gentiles repentance unto life? So he sat, musing, until soon there came upon his questing but receptive mind an intuition with which he was becoming increasingly familiar in these wonderful days; the voice of the Spirit. Now it was saying to him *"Behold; three men are looking for you"*. Slowly he got up from the parapet and went down the steps to the little group of strangers standing at the door of the house.

* * *

Cornelius the centurion was a native Roman. His men were Romans also. Many of the soldiers stationed in Judea were drawn from occupied countries of the Empire other than Rome. Indeed even Jews could be found in the Roman forces, but in order to impart some "stiffening" to these mixed companies certain legions were composed purely of highly trained men of Italy. Cornelius was a centurion of one such legion. He had probably been stationed at Caesarea, which was the headquarters of the Roman governor of Judea, for a long time, for he had come to know and to worship the God of Israel. He was evidently a man of sterling worth, for his family and household staff were believers also, and even some of his legionaries (soldiers). Unlike most of the occupying forces he was just and generous in his dealings with the subject people, even to adopting the Jewish practice of giving alms to the poor. A Gentile, he served the God of Israel, and God saw, and hearkened, and honoured his faith. And it came to pass that a messenger from heaven was sent to him, and he was told that his prayers and his alms had come up for a memorial before God. *"Now"* said the angel *"send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter... he shall tell you what you ought to do."*

So it came about that two of Cornelius' household servants and one of his legionaries set out to tramp the thirty miles which separated the two towns, and about noon on the second day entered Joppa and enquired for the house of Simon the tanner. Peter, coming down from the rooftop, found the three men, one in the uniform of a Roman soldier, all three obviously non-Jews, waiting for him. Quietly for once, he listened to their story, how that a Divine revelation to their master Cornelius had prompted him to send this request that Peter return with them to Caesarea and bring with him the words of life. Peter must have listened with mixed feelings; this man was a Gentile and he had not as yet had any contact with Gentiles in his missionary work; but the vision he had just seen must have been a powerful influence. Perhaps it was at this point he began, however reluctantly, to accept that God had something in store for others besides the Jewish people, that the covenant with Abraham, promising blessing to all the families of the earth, was intended to be taken literally. At all events, he consented to go, and

having invited six of the Joppa brethren to accompany him, the little party set out for Caesarea.

There was time during that two days' journey, travelling on foot, for Peter to consider and reconsider all that the vision had shown him. That great ship's sail was still in his mind. The word rendered "sheet" in Acts 10.11 and 11.5 also denotes ship's sails, whilst that rendered "vessel" means, among other things, the ship's tackling and accessories used to hold the sail in place. What Peter saw therefore was this great square sail with its ropes and tackle fixed to its four corners so that it hung in the skies suspended from above containing the beasts and birds. Everything about that vision pointed to the Gentile world. Now he was in the company of Gentiles and going, for perhaps the first time in his life, into a Gentile household. It must have been a thoughtful Peter who eventually stepped across the threshold of Cornelius' house and greeted the centurion.

The room was full; Cornelius had gathered together all his kinsfolk and personal friends, and doubtless his household servants and those of his soldiery who shared his faith. Peter must have felt somewhat at a loss as he surveyed this motley assembly. All Gentiles, all strangers from the covenant of promise, all outside the circle of the chosen people, how was he to address them and what was he to tell them? But first of all he wanted to make his own position clear. He could, and did, offer Jesus to the Jews as the logical climax to the Mosaic Law and the fulfilment of the prophets' fore views of Messiah. He was not yet at all sure in what terms he could present Christ to these Gentiles or what place he could allot to them in the Divine Plan. "*You yourselves know*" he commenced "*How unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me?*"

This was putting the onus back on his host. Peter was evidently still feeling his way, still uncertain about the whole position, yet conscious that his Lord was leading him by stages to some new phase of understanding which he had formerly not even imagined could exist. He was no longer antagonistic, just conscious of inadequate knowledge, and he was waiting for the guidance and revelation that he knew would come.

Cornelius responded with his story. Four days earlier, two days before Peter's vision on the rooftop, he had this vision of an angel from God bidding him to send to Joppa for a man of whom he had never heard. He was told the precise house where he was to be found, and assured him that that man would speak to him the words of life which his soul desired. "*Now therefore*" he concluded "*we are all here present before God, to hear all that are commanded by the Lord*". Peter's expression was serious. He had listened intently to the narrative and his agile mind was piecing its elements together. This man before him had seen his vision at precisely the right moment to ensure the arrival of his messengers at Peter's house just when his own vision had ended. This thing was of God; there could be no other explanation. His Lord had intended and commissioned him to come to these Gentiles with the words of life. Everything was now perfectly clear. Christ was Lord of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. God had a place for Gentiles just as He had a place for Jews. When Jesus had told his disciples, so long ago now, to preach his gospel to the ends of the earth it was not just the scattered Jewish community in the world, the Diaspora, to which He referred. He meant all men, without exception. A whole new range of ideas suddenly suffused the mind of the rugged Apostle, and when he spoke it was in an unusually subdued tone and with intense earnestness.

"Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him, and does what is right, is acceptable to him".

Then, suddenly, his mood changed. As the full implication of the glorious truth he had just enunciated burst upon his mind he became the old Peter, enthusiastic, zealous, confident. With that same passion and fervour which had characterized his first appeal to the Jews at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost he plunged anew into his exposition of Jesus Christ and him crucified. "*You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ.*" He no longer saw Gentiles in front of him. He saw only men and women, for whom Christ had died, for whom Christ had risen, to whom Christ would come again in the days of His Second Advent for their salvation. So he told the story of that dying and that resurrection and that coming, as forcefully and convincingly as ever he had done in his speaking to the sons of Israel. While

he was yet speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon that assembly, just as it had done upon the disciples in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost itself. When the six Jewish Christians from Joppa who had accompanied Peter witnessed that sight, they bowed their heads in awe. Here was the Divine endorsement, God's acceptance of these strangers into His family and His purposes even though they could lay no claim to being of the seed of Abraham. Upon these people also, outsiders once, but now accepted as the elect of God, came the visible and audible gifts of the Spirit and no man could gainsay them.

Quick witted as ever, Peter grasped the situation and he knew what it implied. "These have received the Holy Spirit as we have! Can any man therefore forbid them baptism into Christ?". And no man could. So they were baptized. Thus did the Gospel go to the Gentiles.

Many years later St. Paul referred to this momentous happening when, writing to the Ephesians, he said (Eph. 2.14) that "*he ... has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... so then you are no longer strangers and sojourners (aliens), but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God*". From that time onward there was no more Jew nor Greek, but all were one in Christ Jesus.

The other apostles, and the church with them at Jerusalem, were not so sure. When Peter got back eventually to the capital some of them made an issue of the matter. They were not prepared to accept Gentiles as their brethren in Christ. "*Why did you go to uncircumcised men*" they accusingly asked him "*and eat with them*". But they did listen patiently to Peter's explanation, and at the end, perhaps wondering, but certainly believing, declared "*then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life*". It was almost unbelievable; it cut across all their preconceived ideas of God's attitude to the outsiders, it was going to raise all sorts of questions as to the validity of the Mosaic Law in the Christian community, but "*God has granted the opportunity of repentance to the Gentiles*". Perhaps some of them thought of Jonah and remembered that God is a merciful God, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. There were to be arguments and rifts and misunderstandings in the future before the Jewish section of the Church finally accepted that the Lord Jesus Christ was Lord of all and not only to the Jew. The standards of the universal Church were well and truly defined on that day when the Jewish Apostle Peter went to visit the Roman centurion Cornelius.

(To be continued) AOH

NOTE ON ROMANS 8.14

"*The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God*" (Rom. 8.14). This is one of those statements which can only be understood when it is accepted that God is actively working in history to bring about a desired consummation which is yet future. There is nothing static about such a statement; it does not define a condition of life or society that can be expected to remain the same generation after generation into infinity. Here is a plain indication of "*that far-off Divine event, to which the whole creation moves*." Man, says Paul in this noteworthy passage, is at present subject to futility. There will be no disagreement or dispute as to that. One day in the future men will be set free from this bondage and obtain liberty. The verse above quoted equates that desirable end with the "*revealing of the sons of God*". This can only refer to the manifestation of the Christian Church to all mankind "in glory" at the consummation of the Age ("end of the world"

in common parlance) in association with Christ at His Second Advent. At that time He puts into operation the second stage of the Divine Plan for human development – the rule of righteousness. This doctrine and expectation finds no favour with some serious Christians who feel more impressed with the claims for orderly evolution of the human society toward Christian ideals than for the intervention of God Most High to save men from their own folly, but the doctrine is a true one nevertheless. The fact must be faced, now in this twenty first century that man, after thousands of years on this planet and possessed of marvellous powers of perception and invention, is creating problems of survival faster than he is solving them, and the end can only be disaster, unless God intervenes. It remains now for the Church of today to rise to its destiny and be worthy of being thus "revealed" when the time comes.

AOH

MELCHIZEDEK

Light on an ancient story

The identity of Melchizedek, King of Salem (Gen. 14.18-24), has been for a long time a subject of casual speculation and the very brevity of Scriptural allusion to this person has afforded opportunity for more than one flight of fancy. Some Christian writers identified him with the Son of God who spent a period of time upon earth in the form of human flesh many centuries before He was born of Mary. This was because of the statement in Hebrews 7.3 that he was "*without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life*". Jewish tradition, a little more rationally, declared that he was Shem the son of Noah. Some Early Fathers and later commentators tried to establish a case for the mysterious priest-king to whom Abraham paid tithes after the defeat of Chedorlaomer, being Enoch returned to earth after his death.

All these speculations have been dissolved by research, which in recent years has so illuminated the Old Testament that the mystery has been stripped from the personality of this man, so wonderfully honoured in being made a type of that everlasting priesthood which is characteristic of our Lord's Millennial glory. Were it not for this inspired usage of the little scrap of history recorded in Genesis 14, Melchizedek would have been as unknown to Christians as is another occupant of the same exalted office half a millennium afterwards. How many can recall, without recourse to Bible or Concordance, what the Scripture has to say about Adoni-zedek, King of Jerusalem? Yet there is more said about this latter king than Melchizedek himself (Joshua 10).

The story opens at the time when the armies of the east invaded Canaan, taking Lot among their prisoners. Abraham followed and defeated them and returned in triumph from Northern Canaan along the Jordan valley on his way back to Hebron. He came, says the narrative, to Salem. The full ancient native name was Uru-Salim, the city of peace. That name transliterated into English gives us the familiar Jerusalem. No one knows just how old is the Holy City of our faith but it was already in existence when recorded history began.

"And Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and

earth, And blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And Abraham gave him a tenth of everything" (Gen. 14.18-20 RSV). That is all that the Scriptures tell us about this mystic person, yet how full of detail is the brief statement! It is worthy of note that this verse is the first place in the Bible where the word 'priest' is mentioned. In all the history of the days before Abraham there is no mention of a priest. Here is presented a kingly priest, a priest upon his throne. Note also that Abraham acknowledged the authority of this man, superior to himself, for he rendered him tithes of his spoils of war. Thirdly, although not of the chosen family which had been called out of Ur of the Chaldees to become a great nation, the people of God, this man nevertheless acknowledged the same God as did Abraham. This is the more noteworthy when, upon reflection, it is realised that Melchizedek reigned as king over a land which was about to be promised to Abraham himself, and the kingship of Melchizedek must inevitably come to an end one day.

Abraham, having rendered his obeisance and his tithes, went on his way to his home at Hebron, and thereafter Melchizedek disappears from history except for one reference in Psalm 110.4: "*The Lord hath sworn and will not repent: Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek!*" This text speaks not of a suffering Christ; not of the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah. 53.7). This hundred and tenth Psalm speaks of a victorious King, a triumphant Priest, one ruling in the midst of His enemies, and bringing all into subjection to His sway that He might become one who dispenses Divine favour. He is a Royal Priest having all power both to rule men and heal them, and so accomplish all God's good purposes for them. That is why the Psalmist's mind went back to a royal priesthood which existed centuries before that of Aaron, one which did not serve with "*offering and burnt offerings and offerings for sin*" (Heb. 10.8), picturing only sacrifice and reconciliation. This was a priesthood that dispensed bread and wine and ruled in kingly majesty that symbolized blessing to men when reconciliation was complete. That is why the Psalmist, with rare inspiration, declared in rapturous words: "*You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek!*" How appropriate the name!

"*Melchi*" – a king. "*Zedek*", righteousness. A king of righteousness, ruling over the City of Peace, an apt picture of our King and His earthly Kingdom!

Until quite recent years nothing whatever was known about this mysterious Royal Priesthood of Abraham's day: apart from the scanty references in the Scriptures. Christian teachers believed that Abraham lived an alien in a totally strange and idolatrous heathen land. That the worship of God could exist anywhere apart from Abraham and the chosen seed was hardly suspected, much less believed, and the incident of Chedorlaomer and Melchizedek was regarded by many as a fable, having no basis of fact in genuine history.

Today all that is changed. Discoveries made during the last century have definitely established that in the times of Abraham, Jacob and Joshua there was a system of belief and worship in Canaan that acknowledged and served the "Most High God". This system was corrupted with crudities of belief with which Abraham and his children were never encumbered, but nevertheless constituting an intelligent worship of One God as distinct from the idolatrous superstitions of the peoples around. It seems reasonable to believe that others beside Abram had some understanding of the primitive faith of Noah and Shem. While Abram was a child in Ur of the Chaldees, there must have been other men in other lands, sprung from the common stock, who carried with them some tolerably clear knowledge of the God of Shem, of Noah, of Enoch, and the faith of past times. Abraham was selected to advance the true knowledge of God in orderly development through that nation which should spring from his loins. However, when he came into Canaan he found already a holy city, a priesthood, and a worship which he would readily recognize as being in honour of God Most High, and to the High Priest of that faith he made due acknowledgment.

From the day of Abraham a veil is drawn across the Holy City and its affairs and Jerusalem is mentioned no more until, many centuries later when Joshua led the hosts of Israel across Jordan into the promised land. As the warriors swarmed up the roads from Jericho they found a king in Jerusalem. "*It came to pass when Adoni-zedek, King of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it ...*" (Joshua 10.1), that he sent the other kings of Southern Canaan a summons to combine for united defence. Here was

a man of evident authority among the petty kings of Canaan. His name, reminiscent of his illustrious predecessor, Adoni-zedek, 'Lord of righteousness'. He comes on the stage only to disappear as quickly, for after the historic encounter related at length in Joshua 10 he was captured with his confederates and put to death.

From the Bible alone there would be little beyond the similarity of name to justify the thought that here in the days of Joshua the priest-kings were still ruling and exercising the duties of their exalted office. The voice of the monuments has in these days made itself heard, and shown that in the days of Joshua, as in those of Abraham, the Most High God was still worshipped in Jerusalem. In 1929 a notable discovery was made at Ras Shamra, on the seacoast of Syria. A large number of inscribed tablets came to light, proving, by various evidences, to have been written about the time of the Exodus, and throwing an entirely new light upon the religious beliefs and ceremonials of Canaan at that time. A vast amount of information has been obtained from these tablets, all tending to show that whilst the Children of Israel were marching through the wilderness of Sinai on the way to the land of promise, the worship of the "Most High God" was widely prevalent in Canaan. It had a distinctive ceremonial, one that contained many features reminiscent of the later ritual. Side by side with that gross idolatry and worship of many gods against which Moses warned Israel, there existed also a form of worship that approached very near to that of the Israelites. It may well be that Melchizedek and Adoni-zedek were but two representatives of a long line of priestly kings who reigned in Jerusalem and kept the faith of the Most High alive through all those years.

These "Ras Shamra tablets" also illumined and explained another archeological enigma. In 1877 a peasant woman at Tel-el-Amarna in Egypt had stumbled upon one of the most important discoveries of the nineteenth century. She had found a large number of tablets that were later discovered to be the "Foreign Office" correspondence of the Egyptian government during the time when Joshua and the hosts of Israel were invading Canaan and subduing the Canaanites. These tablets, which were not completely and accurately deciphered until 1915,

reveal that during the period of the Exodus, Canaan was a land in nominal subjection to Egypt, each of its towns having a local ruler or an Egyptian governor, whose jurisdiction extended to the country around him, these governors rendering their allegiance to the Pharaoh of Egypt. In short, Canaan was an Egyptian province. Now among all these letters from the various petty kings of Canaan there are many written by one Abdi Khiba, King of Jerusalem. He constantly claims that he holds his position not by permission of the Egyptian power, like the other kings about him, but by decree of the Most High. From these letters and from the frequent mention of his name in documents written by other Canaanite dignitaries, it is known that Abdi-Khiba ruled Jerusalem in his own right in much the same fashion as did Melchizedek centuries previously. This king's constant lament to the Egyptian Pharaoh is that the "Khabiri" were threatening his city and country and that unless help soon came, the invaders would overrun the land. Who these "Khabiri" were was long a matter of mystery but in recent years it has been generally agreed that they were the invading Israelites under Joshua, in process of subduing the land. Abdi-Khiba's letters break off abruptly, still pleading for the help that never came, and the sequel to the story is recorded in another of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets. In a dispatch from one Suyardata, an Egyptian official, sent to Canaan to report upon the political condition of the province, reported the news of the capture of Abdi-Khiba and the fall of his city at the hands of the "Khabiri", the Israelites.

There seems little doubt that Abdi-Khiba was the last of the Melchizedek line of priest-kings. There is a possibility that Adoni-zedek was the same individual mentioned in the tablets as Abdi-Khiba. However, it is more likely that when Adoni-zedek was slain by Joshua, Abdi-Khiba succeeded him as priest-king of Jerusalem, ruling whilst the Israelites were actually engaged in conquering the land and being finally captured by them and slain as recorded in the Tel-el Amarna letters.

So ended the Melchizedek priesthood, a line of royal priests reigning in Jerusalem for an unknown period before the time of Abraham to the time of Joshua. Canaan and Syria had been populated from the "land of Shinar" many centuries before Abraham entered it. Abraham was descended from Shem through his son Arphaxad but Shem had

other sons also and there are evidences that many of the people of Canaan were their descendants. Several centuries before Abraham, the only God known to the Sumerians and Akkadians, from whom Abraham came, was the Most High God of Heaven. Some of these immigrants would have brought that knowledge and worship with them and preserved it in the midst of a land rapidly being given over to idolatry. A little later on Abraham found Abimelech, king of Gerar, worshipping the Most High, and likewise Pharaoh of Egypt when at last Abraham went there. The story of Melchizedek is therefore perfectly credible. For more than half a millennium the faith and worship of God Most High was kept alive in a land where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in succession were strangers and pilgrims and then in the fulness of time the developing plan of God demanded a new revelation of His Will. A hardy and virile people, sons of the desert, came in with the enthusiasm and confidence engendered by their Covenant with God, and before them the old primitive Canaanite worship waxed old and vanished away.

Quite evidently the fall of Jerusalem recorded by Suyardata was not followed up by the Israelites, for in Joshua 18.28, the city is mentioned by a new name, '*Jebusi*,' the city of the Jebusites. The old proud name, 'the city of peace' had vanished with the fall of its priest-kings, and not until the time of David, four centuries later, was its name restored. 1 Chron. 11.4-7 tells of the final capture of the city and of David making it his capital, restoring to it the original name by which it has been known ever since. There is an appropriateness in this, for David was a prototype of that greater Melchizedek who shall come in glory and power, and sit upon a greater throne than that of David, to rule as King and Priest in the New Jerusalem.

"... *Without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever*" says the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 7.3). These are the words that have mystified so many. How could this man, Melchizedek, be without parents, having no beginning nor ending, unless he be identified with God himself? The careful student will perceive, however, that the whole reference in Hebrews to this personage is symbolic or typical. The writer is calling to mind one little episode related in Genesis 14, and views it as an isolated

picture upon which he can build his type. Melchizedek steps on to the stage, and steps off. Whatever went before or whatever came after, we are in ignorance. However, while he stood there in the King's Dale, his holy city of Salem in the background, Abraham and his followers before him rendering willing tribute, he ministered bread and wine and raised his hands in blessing. Thus he typified One who in the power of an endless life, abiding a priest continually, is abundantly able to save those who come unto God by him. Abraham and his followers pictured all mankind, bowing the knee in glad and willing submission to their new king. The King's Dale surely foreshadows Paradise restored, the glorified earth where the willing and obedient shall rejoice in the glory of God's grace. Salem in the background pictures the New Jerusalem in its descent from heaven to earth and that venerable figure bearing bread and wine, clad in garments betokening at once royal glory and

priestly dignity, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not a High Priest after the order of Aaron; that is all in the past, but a Royal Priest whose priesthood shall never end. *"They truly,"* says the same writer again, speaking now of the Aaronic priests, *"were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death."* The priesthood of Aaron was a dying priesthood, and it could picture only sacrifice and suffering, things that one day must pass away for ever. They could never rightfully picture the everlasting glory of Christ. *"But he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues for ever."* The glory of this wonderful type will be fully revealed when Christ, the Prophet, Priest and King, accompanied by His glorified Church, comes forth to meet mankind, bearing bread and wine. In those beautiful surroundings of the King's Dale, He gives them His blessing, the blessing of the Most High God.

AOH

NOTE ON MATTHEW 5.16

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5.16).

A sermon of a famous preacher has this passage: "If your life be not as becometh the Gospel of Christ, the world will despise religion as worthless". Is this why there is a loss of faith and zeal in these trying days? Does the world's unbelief and scorn induce a growing loss of zeal, conviction and enterprise? Do we just settle down in social comfort and fellowship to wait for the Lord to set up His Kingdom and take His Church to heavenly glory without concern for the outward characteristics of salt and light in the world?

Advancing age can justify some slowing down in active service. Times are more strenuous and trying. There may be restrictions of opportunity; fewer with whom to co-operate. We would not seriously argue any of these things with our Master face to face. He would exhort us to go on, whatever the disadvantages, just showing how a Christian can live. Yet we fail, often enough, to show this to our brethren. It brings leanness to the soul.

We view our Christian life from too intellectual a viewpoint. We start this life in carefully described technical terms; repentance, justification,

consecration, sanctification and glorification. It is presented to the new believer as though he is invited to enter a commercial agreement with God. Cold as ice, and about as inviting! And all the time we ought to be conscious of the warm, vibrant words *"sacrifice and offering you would not ... a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"*.

The source of the oil for the light and power for the salt are at the foot of the Cross, where repentance and determination, contrition and hope, renunciation and consecration, go hand in hand. Not in the emotionless formalism of the detached acceptance of a cold invitation "if you do **this** ... I will give you **that**" but in the spontaneous eager realization of tender, compassionate tones *"My son, give me your heart ... who will go for us?"*. There lies the power that will make us *"shine forth as the sun"* now in the sight of all men. So shall we experience what was in the mind of Luke when he saw the fellowship of the Early Church and wrote *"praising God and having favour with all the people: and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"*. Is it any accident that those two phrases are associated so intimately together?

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

15. Chapter 12.22-59

vv.22-34 Jesus turned from the crowds to His closer disciples most of whom were poor. Had one or more of them shown anxiety? Jesus didn't advocate thoughtlessness. The challenge concerns our hearts (*cardia* v.34), our thinking, feeling, desires, endeavours and these will be right with Christ-centred prayer.

v.23 Clothes were a form of wealth. This is really all about moral values?

vv.24-28 Jesus is telling them that God's economics yield more profit than man's. The Creator provides for wildlife; people sin by coveting far more than they need.

v.24 These may be crows (unclean birds) rather than ravens (1)

v.25 Geldenhuys, Morris and other scholars discuss whether the addition is to height or span of life; recent translators adopt the latter.

v.27, 28 Scarlet anemones rather than lilies (2) Are plants more attractive than human clothing? Wood was scarce but grass was plentiful and used as fuel.

v.30 Pagan and Divine values compete for our time, energy and resources.

v.32 The only 'little flock' used in NT. Jesus told His disciples that God was their Father and they have rightly accepted that privilege ever since. It is the Father's pleasure to give us gifts. We do not have to wring them out of Him but we can neglect them. How do we accumulate treasure in heaven?

vv. 35-48 The word here for servant is 'doulos' and every true disciple is a slave and accountable to the Lord. Obedient slaves toil for a reward but will the rewards all be the same? Is ignorance regarded as a 'sin'? James 4.17

v.42 Oikonomos – often translated 'steward' which can be specific to a particular job or generally used among the believers as in 1 Peter 4.10 and NRSV translates 'manager' in this text (3) And what is the beating? How would we like the Master to find us? So what should we be doing?

vv.37, 43 'Blessed are the alert' – another beatitude?

v.41 Why did Peter ask a question? To whom does 'all' refer? Had Jesus already spoken a parable? Does Jesus answer with another question? He gives a lot of detail in the story related here –

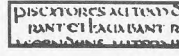
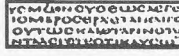
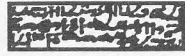
why? This becomes more understandable if we know something of a first century middle eastern household. Often the steward had been a slave. Is this a parable and what does it mean for us? What was the failure of the slave? How much did the treatment of other slaves have to do with it? How much do the parables of Matthew 25 parallel this one? How much do the words of Cain echo here? (Gen 4.9) (4) And does the parable in any way reflect what has happened in the history of the Church? Campbell Morgan insists that there must be a mutual ministry among the *douloi*. How much do we need to consider discipline and judgment? What is the difference between the last two phrases of v.48?

vv 49-59 Is there connection with the previous section? What did Jesus mean by 'fire'? Is it judgment? Did Jesus set the world on fire with the cross? It is certainly a challenge. Was God's judgment borne by the Saviour? Was this fire of the Gospel like that which was shut up in Jeremiah's bones and for which he was weary with waiting?

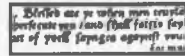
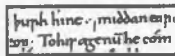
The 'Prince of Peace' says that He did not bring peace? What did He mean when He said He would set members of the same family against each other? Jesus returns to the theme of watchfulness – but for what are we watching? Jesus spoke about signs or signals. What were His signals and how does that compare with the signs for which we look? We look for signs but we are not prophets. He does not say it's wrong to know the weather signs nor be a weather forecaster. Jesus said that they should recognise the signs of the times so what were those signs? Were they 'signs' or 'signals' that the Kingdom was at hand? Was the prophecy read in the synagogue at Nazareth, (Luke 4, Isaiah 61) anything to do with it? What of Jesus answer to John the Baptist question, should we look for someone else?

V.57 Finally, Jesus speaks of reconciliation. They are similar to Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 5.21-26 when the topic was anger and the offering of acceptable worship. Are the various people connected with punishment literal or figurative? Is there any connection here with 1 Cor. 6?

(1) Morris - Luke Commentary (2) Barclay Daily Study Bible - Luke (3) Vine - Expository Dictionary of NT Words (4) Campbell Morgan - Parables and Metaphors of our Lord



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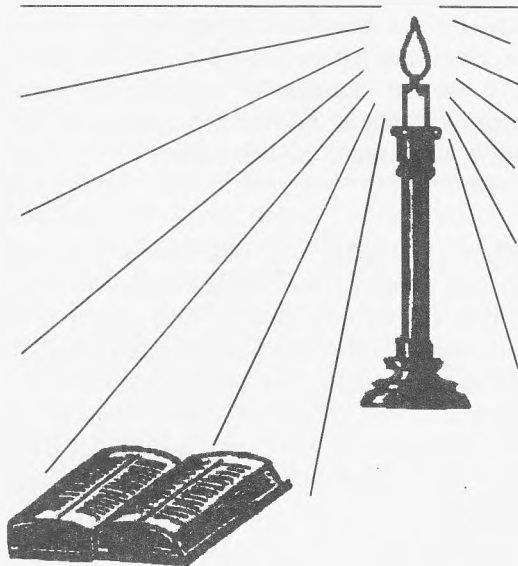
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace." (Jer. 30.5). Words that speak of a great obstacle to Christian progress! Fear is an evil spirit that dances threateningly in front of every Christian who finds it hard to believe that his mistakes will be used in the Divine economy for the good of himself or fellow believers in due course. To be an alert and zealous disciple demands full assurance of faith and confidence in the overruling power of God in our affairs. *"He opened my eyes and I have seen the Holy One. His angel has touched my lips and with the live coal from the altar; and I have heard his voice saying 'Whom shall we send; and who will go for us?'"* If in our later days we can summon to our side the same devoted spirit which at the first prompted us to say "Here am I, send me", then the spirit of fear will

find no lodgement. In these days, when the lamp is burning low in the Temple of God, there is need not only for clarity of vision and depth of spiritual insight, but also for purpose and determination. That is the antidote to apathy and lethargy that often settles upon those who have begun to lose the freshness and zeal of earlier days. Such times of depression come to all. The toils of the way, strife and schism among brethren, apparent failure of fond and long cherished hopes, cause us like Hezekiah to want to go softly all our years. Would that we could be equally appreciative, as was that good king, when a term of years is added to our time. Let us go forward with face upraised, remembering that we are now and for all time His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

— *Selected*

NOTICES

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 a gift. 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.

INTRODUCE A FRIEND Why not introduce the Bible Study Monthly to a friend? We shall be pleased to send the BSM to any name and address submitted to us. Booklets are free and make a pleasant addition to your greetings to a friend.

MAGAZINE AND BOOKLET CONTENT We try to make all publications as useful and help-

ful 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. Space and time do not always permit continuity of series or running features. They will be restored when it is possible. That applies now to 'In the Land of Beginning Again' (booklet available) and a Study in 'Gospel of Luke'.

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 the one who runs this service and spends long hours reading the material into the micro-

phone.

Particular note is drawn to the notice about publishing "Sword over all nations". There are also notices in the magazine about Gainsborough House and CART (see pages 127 and 134).

BOW DOWN IN WORSHIP

"O come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker! For he is our God; we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." (Psalm 95.6,7 RSV)

What did the Psalmist mean in this call to worship? Established as a nation and beginning to gather forms and traditions he recalled to their minds Israel's experience in the wilderness recorded in Exodus 17 to which Paul referred in 1 Cor 10. There was contrast between the stately and orderly life in a royal city and the problems of a nomadic people in the desert. Yet the worshipper had the same kind of problems in focusing on the one true God, the Maker and Controller of all things. Our common task, our social round, even among the Lord's people now, readily distracts and become more important than things of God. May be we do not kneel in our worship or use a specialized building. But there is such a need to focus upon God in thankfulness for His goodness. Worship needs to be something that pervades every aspect and detail of life not just at set times and places. Nevertheless, when brethren in Christ join their hearts and voices in worship, there surely must be a place for the outward observance as well as that within the heart and mind.

Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is with them. So that our preparation and willingness to be in the right place at the right time may be more pointed if we remember that we have an appointment with the Lord and that our gathering together is best when we are neither hurried nor noisy. We may not do the obeisance of former days but we ought to 'bow our hearts' in prayer. We are coming into the presence of the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, He who is aware of all that we do and say and think. The worship of God is so important in our spiritual

growth that our singing, reading, speaking, listening, studying, must all take place recognizing Him in whose presence we stand, sit or kneel. Outward observances, delving into the meanings of text, various forms of praise, will be of little use unless we are constantly aware of Him in our midst. We may enjoy certain types of music, ancient or modern, we may revel in the meanings of words but everything must work towards the beauty of His character in patience, gentleness and compassion. No amount of eloquence or scholarship can replace real worship before the throne. What a tremendous responsibility rests on those who lead our worship as they feed the minds of those who should be focused upon God.

Commentaries, concordances and translations will only be of spiritual value if our study results in the transformation of our behaviour into the likeness of Jesus. Nothing can replace prayerful meditation upon the Word in preparation for public worship. We need to allow the mind to absorb the full value of several scriptures rather than fill our memories with a vast number of references. As we quietly ponder the Word of God, He can speak to us through it, sometimes revealing that what we regarded as an important interpretation did not show us what we ought to be doing now.

As we enter a place of worship is it the norm for us to be aware that we are in the presence of God? Do we quietly and reverently acknowledge the mighty privilege we enjoy? Or do we come and go from the hallowed courts hardly realizing where we have been and with whom we have had to do? Where the true spirit of worship prevails there never can be division and discord. Let us not be so full of our own important issues, personal or Biblical that we miss the real blessing.

DN

"Sing a new song to the Lord! Sing to the Lord, all the world! Sing to the Lord, and praise him! Every day tell the good news that he has saved us! Proclaim his glory to the nations, his mighty acts to all peoples."

Psalm 96.1-3 GNB

"Those whom the Lord has ransomed shall return, They will come to Zion with songs on their lips, Their heads crowned with undying joy; Joy and gladness will be there to meet them And sorrow and sighing will be gone forever."

Isaiah 35.10 Phillips.

THE ROD OF GOD'S ANGER

A study in prophecy

Part 3

Parts 1 and 2 have already dealt with the use of Sennacherib the Assyrian, the "rod of God's anger", as a background model of the events prophesied of Israel's invader and that invader's clash with Michael in Daniel 11. It now only remains to notice the backgrounds of Micah 5 and Zechariah 14, both of whom colour their descriptions of the last great conflict with allusions going back to incidents of Sennacherib's campaign in Judah in the days of Hezekiah.

The fifth chapter of the Prophet Micah is notable for the striking fashion in which it alludes to, and shows the relation between, the First and Second Advents. Most of Micah's prophecy consists of short cameo visions each more or less self-contained and for the most part foreseeing some one or another aspect of the Messianic Age and Israel's relation to it. In this instance the vision commences at verse 2 which in the Hebrew Bible is the actual commencement of the chapter and finishes at verse 9. Verse 10 embarks upon a different subject. It is within vv 2-9 that this rather noteworthy reference to "the Assyrian", in connection with the assumption of regal power by Christ at the end of the present world-age, is found.

The vision opens with an address to the little town of Bethlehem, out of which is to come the Messiah who is to rule Israel at the Time of the End. The RSV presents it *"You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days"*. This is clearly a prophecy of the First Advent of Christ, born, as is so well known, at Bethlehem. That He was not mere man, of the stock of Adam, is stressed by the statement that His origin is from of old, from ancient days. As John says in his gospel *"He was in the beginning with God"*. As Son of David, He comes from Bethlehem, but as Son of God His "origin is from of old". But the rulership does not commence at once. Vs 3 describes an interregnum, a period during which God will *"give them up until she who is in travail has brought forth"*. Only then will the *"rest of his brethren return to the people of Israel"*. That, surely, is the travail of Israel, the national suffering and scattering, consequent upon unbelief and apostasy, which commenced in the time of Micah when the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities began. They continue throughout history, 'the Times of the Gentiles', until those beginnings of national

restoration which are evident today as one sign of the closing of this present Age. Then comes the true Messianic rule; *"He shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now shall he be great to the ends of the earth"* (v4). This simile of the shepherd feeding the flock is used many times in Scripture to denote the beneficent work of Christ in the world in the day of His kingdom. *"He will feed his flock like a shepherd"* (Isa. 40.11); *"I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them"* (Jeremiah 23.4); *"I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord God"* (Ezekiel 34.15). These and many other allusions liken the work of the Messianic kingdom to that of a shepherd caring for his flock.

Naturally enough, then, v5 introduces the assurance that when that day dawns there will be deliverance from the last great oppressor of Israel, the power which opposes the incoming Messianic kingdom, and it is this power which in v 5 is denoted "the Assyrian", the counterpart of Sennacherib in the days of Hezekiah. *"This shall be peace, when the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, that we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men ... they shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border"* (vv5-6). The background remains the same; just as Sennacherib invaded Judah in the days of Hezekiah and was repulsed by Divine intervention, so now, at the end of this age, the greater "Assyrian" is to be likewise repulsed and Israel delivered. There is, however, an additional detail; the deliverance is to be at the instance or by the power of "seven shepherds" and "eight princes of men", obviously agents of God in the actual deliverance. What is the meaning of this somewhat obscure phrase?

The symbol of the shepherd is easy enough to interpret. Christ himself is the great Millennial shepherd who will nourish and protect, not only Israel, but all mankind, in that blessed day. With Christ will be associated His Church, the company of the faithful of this present Christian Age, taken to be with him and resurrected to heavenly conditions at the time of His Second Advent. *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the*

kingdom of their Father": *"they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"* (Matt. 13.43; Rev. 20.4). These, obviously are the "seven shepherds"; seven is the symbolic number of completeness; the number of the Church is complete. These, associated with Christ their Head, will be operating from heaven in this work of bringing the power of evil to a close and administering the Millennial kingdom of righteousness. It remains, though, that Israel upon earth, converted and waiting on God in faith, stands in need of direct and close-at-hand guidance and leadership in what might be termed the practical down-to-earth details of their attitude and conduct in the face of the threat that overshadows them. This is where the "eight princes of men" have their place.

The word here used occurs five times only in the OT and has the significance of a prince or ruler who has been consecrated to his position by anointing and hence is bound to God's service. Eight as a number is a symbol of renewed life, of resurrection. Our Lord rose from the dead on the day after the Sabbath, on the eighth day. In the Levitical rituals the cleansed leper, entering upon a time of renewed life, had to bring his thanksgiving offering for the cleansing ceremonial on the eighth day. The eighth day thus becomes a symbol associated with conditions in God's Kingdom. The eight princes denote a company of men associated with resurrection and renewed life, although their duties and achievement have to do with an Israel which as yet is still of this world-age and is still under assault by the powers of evil.

Such a company is that indicated, albeit somewhat obscurely, in the Scriptures, as the band of Israel's heroes of old time who will appear on earth at the end of the Age to guide latter-day Israel through the supreme crisis. Known in Christian circles variously as "Old Testament Saints" or "Ancient Worthies", the Biblical designation is "Judges" (as in Isa. 1.26) the term that is used for the national rulers of Israel in the days before the monarchy. They were sterling men of faith of old time, from Abraham to John the Baptist. These "princes" will present themselves to Israel at her time of greatest need, to take up their duties as governors in Israel (Zech. 12.5), working in close harmony with the Lord from heaven in assured faith that He will deliver. In a very real sense these seven shepherds and eight princes are pre-figured

by Isaiah the prophet of God and Hezekiah the king of Judah offering themselves as joint channels of the Lord's message to the people at that similar though lesser crisis so long ago. In a manner not clearly to be defined but none the less certain these men will spearhead Israel's resistance to the enemy. Verse 6 indicates that the invaders will themselves become subject to the nation they had attacked and sought to enslave. What that implies is better defined in vv 7-8. Israel shall be on the one hand in the midst of the nations like dew from the Lord and showers upon the grass; this indicates the beneficent work of Christ, through Israel, bringing blessings of peace, security, new life and happiness to all mankind. On the other hand Israel is to be in the midst of the nations like a lion among the beasts of the forest and a young lion among the sheep. This indicates the unrelenting enmity of the social order, in the forefront of which Israel is stationed, to all forms of evil and injustice and oppression. This is the time of which Isaiah spoke when he said *"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; as the waters cover the sea."* (Isa. 11.9).

So much for the preview of Micah. Now it is necessary to turn to a later prophet, Zechariah, who also saw in vision the events that must close this Age, and, like his predecessors, saw them in pictures that were shaped and coloured in part by the deeds of Sennacherib.

Zechariah was a most versatile prophet. He drew background material for his prophecies from a wide range of historical subjects and in many ways his is the most colourful of all the Old Testament pen-pictures describing Israel's apostasies, rejection and restoration. Consequently he uses the Sennacherib theme to illustrate only one short section of his visions, that comprised by chap. 14.1-3. These three verses form the climax to his entire prophecy; the usage he makes of the theme is doubly impressive. Like Micah and Daniel, he sees the powers of this world advancing upon the restored and purified Israel nation ensconced in their holy city and trusting in faith that God will deliver. He sees what appears to be the inevitable victory of the invader and then at the eleventh hour God goes forth, as He did in the days of Sennacherib, in the irresistible power of Heaven's might, and utterly discomfits the arrogant

enemy.

The thirteenth chapter leads up to this crisis by tracing Israel's continued rejection of Christ from his First to His Second Advents and the separation of that people into believing and unbelieving entities. This culminates in the eventual establishment in the Holy Land of a community which in the main has developed true and steadfast faith in God and in His intention to deliver when the crisis comes, although in the outcome not all of them retain that faith. It is at this time that the invader advances and the people await his coming; it is here that the likeness to Sennacherib's Judean campaign subsists (For full exposition of these chapters see "Zechariah – prophet of the Restoration" BSM 1993-95). *"I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled; and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, but the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle"* (ch. 14.2, 3). The outcome is that Israel takes great spoil from the defeated enemy and divides it just as was done in the days of King Jehoshaphat and the Moabite invasion.

"The city shall be taken". The word means to gather or encompass, as when one takes birds or fishes in a net. Hosea 4.3 is an example of this usage of the word, and here in this same verse the same word is used for 'gather' when the Lord says He will "gather" all nations against Jerusalem. It does not mean that the city is captured but that it is surrounded without the enemy being able to penetrate its defences. This is precisely what happened in the days of Hezekiah. Sennacherib uses the same term in his account of the siege: "Hezekiah himself, like a bird in a cage, I shut up within Jerusalem royal city" What he failed to record was that he never opened the cage. Likewise in this preview of the end of the Age, the people of the Lord are hemmed in by their foes but they are not taken captive: the defences hold firm.

"... the houses rifled, and the women ravished". This is an evident allusion to Sennacherib's invasion. Prior to the dramatic defeat of his besieging armies surrounding Jerusalem, He demanded, and received, heavy tribute from Hezekiah. Says the great king in his narrative of the campaign. "I besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had

not submitted to my yoke, and I captured forty-six of his strong cities ... I took 200,150 people, small and great, male and female and horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and innumerable sheep as spoil ... I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from the city. All who came outside the great gate of the city were captured and led off ... his trusty warriors, he had brought into Jerusalem to protect it deserted him ... he made submission with thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, precious stones of all kinds, pearls, thrones adorned with ivory, sandalwood, ebony, the contents of his treasure house, his daughters, the women of his palace and his male and female slaves." All this did the Assyrian take and send to Nineveh, the treasure for the adornment of his city and the women for the rest of their lives to be at the mercy of their captors. One can hardly expect mules and camels, ivory thrones and the like, to be objects of quest in the greater fulfilment at the end of the Age. The rifling of the houses and so on seen by Zechariah was expressed in terms reminiscent of Sennacherib but in fact pointed forward to a much more "modern" despoiling of the land and people. Try to imagine the nation losing its trade potential with, and the support it receives from, other nations, finding itself increasingly bereft of the armaments with which it has heretofore established and maintained its position. Then in the losing of all those benefits and advantages and aids which it can only preserve by continued alliance with the "kingdoms of this world", the prophet's words might be given a truly up-to-date meaning. Just as in Hezekiah's day he had to give up a great deal of his treasures and possessions before coming to the point of humble and implicit faith in God for deliverance; so now, it may be, the "chosen nation" will need to lose a considerable store of "this-world" advantages before it is in a true state of mind and heart to admit the saving power of "that world".

"Half of the city shall go forth into exile" (v.31). Sennacherib's claim that many deserted the city, including the "trusty warriors" brought in to defend it, is corroborated by Isa. 22.3 *"All your 'rulers' have fled together, without the bow they were captured. All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away"* (RSV). Geikie's rendering of this passage is singularly impressive. *"Thy nobles, fleeing as a body from the bow of the Assyrian, whom they expect to see presently, are taken prisoner by their archers, the vanguard of the*

enemy; all whom they find outside the gates, seeking to flee afar, are caught and put in chains". Zechariah saw this same thing repeated at the end of this Age. The word "half" in this verse does not mean necessarily an exact fifty per cent; it has the significance of dividing a portion and the phrase would be better translated a part or a portion go into exile. As then, so now, there is at the crisis a loss of faith on the part of some and a frantic endeavour to escape before it is too late. At the last moment they change their allegiance and take their side with the kingdoms of this world, abandoning the Holy Land and its people to what they feel is certain conquest. The only ones left are those whose faith is fixed in God. These are the ones who will pass through the crisis into the new Age then to begin, and find themselves indeed the "people of the Lord" who will cause the Law of the Lord to go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2.3). These are they who are "not cut off from the

city"; immediately after the defection of the faithless, and the apparent advance of the enemy closing in for the kill. Then comes fulfilment of the stirring words in v 3. "*Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle*". There follows the awe-inspiring sight of the Most High descending in glory upon the Mount of Olives first to destroy the forces of evil and then to establish the kingdom of righteousness upon earth. All this is a picture of our Lord's Second Advent and the happenings that are associated therewith. Such things go beyond the present discussion. The Sennacherib analogy ends at verse 3 when, just as in that long-past day outside Jerusalem the angel of the Lord decimated the Assyrian host and sent the arrogant king with shame of face back to his own land, the Lord again intervenes in world affairs for the defence of his people. For the last time, the last great oppressor is vanquished and the people of faith delivered.

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE

Milborne Port is in Somerset with postal address of Sherborne, Dorset. It is in lovely rolling countryside between the larger towns of Wincanton and Yeovil. The old A30 road runs through Milborne Port and as it runs out on the west side of the town, Gainsborough is the last road off on the right. About 300 metres up from the main road there is a Victorian villa opposite some allotments and children's play area. Gainsborough House has been a Christian Retirement Home for 22 years. God led the pioneers of this project and they worked very hard. The courtyard, now an attractive garden, was surrounded by stables. First the main house was suitably adapted to give two lounges, a dining room and what is now a first rate kitchen. A fine room was adapted to be the meeting room or chapel. The stables were transformed into self-contained flats. Other buildings became useful storage areas and one became the home library.

Gainsborough has had 10 residents at one time

and today there are six, so there are several vacancies. A new flat completes the immediate plans and is suitable for a couple.

The single flats are bed-sits with kitchen area and toilet-shower room. They are carpeted, have heating and hot water and if needed furniture is available but residents may prefer their own. The centre is run by the Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust, a registered charity. Terms include Council Tax and all other rates, insurance of personal property, TV licence where applicable, and a cooked mid-day meal. Residents may use the utility room containing a washer and tumble drier. Residents make the centre attractive by caring for the vegetables and flowers gardens.

Meetings for worship and study may be arranged by residents, local friends and the trustees. God has greatly blessed this project and we look to Him to guide us into the future.

After describing the degenerate conditions in Antioch, Dean Farrar writes, "It is the darkest just before dawn. When mankind has sunk into hopeless scepticism, the help of God is often very nigh at hand. 'Bitter with weariness and sick with sin' there were many, at any rate, even among the giddy and voluptuous Antiochenes, who were ready to hail with rapture the reaching of a new faith which promised forgiveness for the past, and

brought ennoblement to the present. The work grew and prospered, and for a whole year the Apostles laboured in brotherly union and amid constant encouragement. The success of their labours was most decisively marked by the coinage of a new word, destined to a glorious immortality – in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (Act 11.26)

OUR HEAVENLY BROTHERS

A study of the angels

Part 1

Angels are mighty and powerful spirit creatures that reside in the heavens, the heaven of the heavens (1 Kings 8.27; Neh. 9.6; Mk. 12.25; 1 Cor. 15.44). One of the first references to angels is in the book of Job where it states that with the founding of the Earth *"the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy"* (Job 38.4-7 NASB). It is not hard to comprehend the magnificent spectacle that must have taken place in the heavens at that time. What singing and praise must have been given to the Most High, a beautiful majestic assembling of God's faithful heavenly sons singing in superhuman voices in superhuman language.

Then sadly, at man's fall (Genesis 3:24) two angels were posted at the eastern entrance to the garden of Eden with a flaming blade of a sword *"to guard the way to the tree of life"* barring all but perfect people from entry, because Eden was the sanctuary of God, no unauthorised person could now enter.

How long were the angels stationed there guarding the way to the garden of Eden? They were posted there 1,600 years in which they would witness the first murder, the slow fall of man into wickedness, death and dying, and they could not intervene in any way. People often complain just waiting in a queue, or because someone is a bit slow. We often get impatient and restless, but these angels were given a 1600-year, some would say, mundane task!

What restraint they showed, how patient they must have been, and what a test it would be, demonstrating how very faithful are angels in God's service. Angels have greater mental and emotional capacity, and greater spiritual powers than we possess (Psalm 8.5a LXX). They would feel all the more acutely the pain of man's fall; it would have been a greater trial to an angel. They had to stand by while it all happened. They rejoiced over Earth, they would rejoice over man. Now they had to stand guard. Their duty ended and they returned to heaven when the building of the ark was complete and Eden was obliterated by the surging waters of the flood, its location lost to man except for the divine record of its existence.

Another thing we know about angels is that they have individual personalities and individual names.

Yet only two names are known to us, Gabriel and Michael (Dan. 12.1; Lk. 1.26). In fact Gabriel is the only materialised angel to give his name. As personalities with language angels have the power to communicate with one another (1 Cor. 13.1), as well as the ability to talk the various languages of men (Num. 22.32-35; Dan. 4.23; Matt. 28.5; Lk. 1.26, 28; Acts 10.3-7). They have emotions, can be joyful, and have desires (Job 38.7; 1 Pet. 1.12), and are frequently spoken of as holy (see Ps. 89.6, 7; Dan. 8.13; Zech. 14.5; Lk. 9.26; Mk. 8.38), dwelling in a holy environment (Ps. 11.4; 29.9; 89.8; Hab. 1.13a; 2.20).

They are each unique individuals unlike one another in their spirit form, unlike humans who are basically copies of the same form. Humans are made from DNA, the blueprint for our human body, and when we reproduce, we basically make similar copies of one another. Not so with angels. Angels do not marry and reproduce their own kind (Matt. 22.30). Genetic procreation only takes place in the physical realm of existence, angels therefore do not have gender. Perhaps due to the confines of human language they are described as men, the masculine pronoun is used of them (Gen. 18.2, 22; 19.1, 5; Dan. 10.18; Mk. 16.5; Lk. 24.4, 5; John 20.12; Zechariah 5.9). They are not all stamped out of the same mould like we see in paintings, they are not of the physical form and so each must be very different from the other. They are direct creations, having spirit bodies (1 Cor. 15.44b). The variety and magnificence in angelic individuality must be truly staggering.

Another thing we learn from the book of Job is that Almighty God regularly convenes His heavenly sons in assembly, each taking their station before Him. A number of these assemblies are recorded in Job, but did you know that another is also recorded in the book of Kings? In the account we learn that angels have free will and are often presented with opportunities to serve God in special ways using their own initiative. They were created with the ability to do God's will intelligently and faithfully. It is the time of the two kingdoms, King Ahab ruled Israel in the North and Judah in the South was ruled by Jehoshaphat.

Ahab was bad; Jezebel had just had Naboth

murdered so that Ahab could have his vineyard, and he lived in an ivory palace that was stained with the blood of innocent men. So Elijah pronounces judgment upon him. Ahab was only half repentant and his days were coming to an end. His war with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead is given in 1 Kings 22. He engages Jehoshaphat to join him in taking back Ramoth in Gilead from the Syrians, and the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah are joined.

At the special request of Jehoshaphat Ahab enquires of his 400 prophets who assure him of success (Zedekiah the prophet takes the lead in encouraging the king, falsely applying a prophecy in Deuteronomy 33.7). Jehoshaphat is not convinced and asks for further counsel. Micaiah the true prophet is found and tells the truth that the war will be disastrous (1 Kings 22.17 NRSV). "*Micaiah said; 'I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, 'These have no master; let each one go home in peace.'*" Something has been going on in heaven, a heavenly counsel has also gathered, a kind of angel senate behind the scenes, a heavenly court. "*Then Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him. And the LORD said; 'Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another, until a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him. 'How?' the LORD asked him. He replied; 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. ' Then the LORD said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it. ' So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has decreed disaster for you.'*" (1 Kings 22.19-23 NRSV)

This angel was to induce Ahab to fight against Syria as a judgment from God for all the blood he had spilt and his gross wickedness over Naboth's murder. The angel used his initiative and manoeuvred the network of false prophets to bring Ahab down.

Ahab's own delusions were the means of his downfall, he preferred lies to truth and became the snare of his downfall. Here in the vision given in Kings we see God pictured as presiding over the "*council of the holy ones*" (Ps.89.7 NASB), "*in the middle of the gods he holds judgment*" (Ps. 82.1

NRSV; see Dan. 7.10). This then tells us that angels can act to change a course of earthly action, they can intervene in the events of history, but only on God's approval. As the psalmist sang "*Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word. Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will*" (Ps. 103.20, 21 NRSV).

The visitation of an angel can be alarming, can grip one with fear, and has often begun by lovingly saying, '*Fear not*' (see Lk. 1.29, 30; 2.9, 10; Matt. 28.4). A number of prophets had to be revived when an angel appeared, Daniel three times (Dan. 8.15-18; 10.8-11; 12.19). In Genesis there is little notice of angelic appearance till after the call of Abraham and from then on angels mingle with and watch over his family. Both Abraham and Lot '*entertained angels unawares*' (Heb. 13.2).

The angels of God are compassionate and often give reassurance. In Genesis 16 when Hagar ran away because of the cruelty of Sarai, it was an angel that found her in a distressed state and compassionately spoke to her by name saying "*Hagar ... where have you come from and where are you going?*" (16.8 NRSV). This angel comfortingly reassured her and helped her to return, promising she would have a great number of descendants, even naming her son Ishmael as she was pregnant at the time. It was an angel in Genesis 21 that had further compassion on Hagar when she was sent away with her quite sick son. The angel guided her to water saving her and her son's life.

It was an angel that guided Abraham's servant to find a wife for Isaac in Gen. 24.7, 40. An angel guided Abraham's grandson Jacob throughout his life (Gen. 28.12; 31.11-13). In Genesis 32.1, 24.30 a number of angels appear to Jacob, one later grapples with him and changes his name to that of a victor, Israel. Toward the end of his life he spoke of "*The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day*" (Gen. 48.15 NASB) and of "*The angel who has redeemed me from all harm*" (Gen. 48.16a NRSV).

What else do we know about our heavenly brothers? How old are they? When exactly were they called into existence is not a subject of divine revelation (Ps. 148.4, 5). The aorist tense of the Greek word translated "created" (Col. 1.16) may indicate an act (angels created all at the same time)

or, the climax of a series of creative acts. All things came into existence by means of the Logos, the Son of God, logically that would include angels (see John 1.3; Col. 1.16, 17), and indicates they were created after the Logos was begotten and before the physical creation. We know therefore they are older than the Earth, they were present when its foundation was laid (Job 38.1-7, 31-33). Scientists estimate the age of the universe to be about 15 to 20 billion years. So angels are at least 15 billion years old. Think of that! God's heavenly sons have faithfully served Him for at least 15 billion years, and yet they are so modest and humble we only know the names of two!

No doubt the lack of names of our heavenly brothers is a safeguard against undue honour and worship that could be given these servants of God. They are dispatched by God to act in His name, not their own. The word angel basically has the humble meaning 'messenger' (Gr. *angelos*, Heb. *malak*). What humility to be remembered simply as a messenger. Never, ever, do they draw attention to themselves. They won't even tell you their name. When Jacob asked an angel his name, he refused to give it, simply stating, "*Why is it that you ask my name?*" (Gen. 32.29 NRSV)

The angel that approached Joshua as he entered Canaan (at Gilgal) was asked to identify himself, and replied only that "*as prince of the host of Jehovah I am now come*" (Josh. 5.13, 14 ASV).

In Judges chapter 13 an angel appears to Manoah's wife, a barren woman, saying not only will she have a son, but also that he will save Israel out of the hands of the Philistines (13.1-5). She tells her husband saying the man did not give his name and they think he is a prophet. The angel then appears to them both confirming what he has said and they want him to share a meal, but the angel suggests an offering instead. Manoah then says (13:17,18 NASB), "*What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honour you?*" However the LORD'S angel said, "*Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?*" And he disappeared ascending in the flames of the offering. Manoah's wife later gave birth to Samson.

The apostle John attempted to worship angels and was twice reprov'd by the angel "*Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers. Worship God.*" (Rev. 19.10 NIV; see also 22.8, 9; Col. 2.18, 19). Faithful angels are our heavenly spiritual brothers (see Heb. 2.11) and

fellow servants or slaves. "*All I am is a fellow slave*". Such is their humility, and even though they have served faithfully for BILLIONS of years, they never take the credit for anything they do. So we can say in all honesty that God's heavenly sons must have very fine personalities. They delight to serve, nothing is more important to them than serving in the heavenly courts before the face of God. Nothing gives them greater joy than this one thing, serving and helping others, and they never, ever, take any credit for anything they do. Would we be content to serve our entire lives without any recognition, without being given any credit, and without anyone knowing what we have done?

Note the account in Judges chapters 6 to 8 regarding an angel appointing Gideon, the humblest man of his family and tribe, in order to '*save Israel out of Midian's palm*' (Judg. 6.14), and Gideon's self effacement in this victory toward his brothers (Judg. 8.3). The angel would not have chosen him if it had been otherwise. Amazingly the apostle Paul states of God's heavenly sons "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*" (Hebrews 1.14 NKJ; v.7; Ps. 104.4; see also 1 Cor. 4.9).

In other words they minister to you and me. Angels minister to the human disciples of Jesus Christ so that when they are raised, they are given immortality. Not only that, it seems they are given places higher than angels, and they, God's heavenly son's in their humility, are there to help us achieve this. Such is their great regard for specks of creation, whose time "*passes away like a shadow*" (1 Ch. 29.15; Ps. 102.11; 109.23; 144.4; Eccl. 6.12; Jam. 4.14). Man's duration of life is a poor pittance compared even to the life of the oldest man, Methuselah (969yrs Gen. 5.27). But what are these to the life duration of a mighty angel, begun "*before the mountains were brought forth*" (Ps. 90.2 NRSV) or the foundations of the Earth were laid? Of the billions and billions of years angels have served God faithfully, what are threescore years and ten to this?

We also know that God's heavenly sons aid us in our pilgrimage of faith down here. It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated that "*Joy arises among the angels of God over one sinner that repents*" (Lk. 15.10; see Eccl. 5.6). One person repents and joy is manifest on their countenance!

KW (to be continued)

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

12. The Vengeance of Herod – Acts 12 & 15

The prison was very quiet. The flickering lamps set at intervals along the halls and corridors cast grotesque shadows on walls and ceilings, illuminating but dimly their surroundings. Outside, the moon shone serenely, for it was Passover time, and the streets of Jerusalem were brightly lit by its radiance. Inside the cell where Peter was sleeping, between two soldiers to whom he was chained so that attempts at escape were impossible, one solitary lamp, a piece of wick lying in a dish of olive oil, sputtered feebly to reveal the gaunt stone walls and the heavy barred door. The two soldiers were fast asleep; they were accustomed to this kind of duty and would quickly be jerked into wakefulness by any unaccustomed movement of their charge, but while he was quiet and still they could sleep in peace.

There was not much hope for Peter. Herod the king, nephew of the Herod who slew John the Baptist and figured in the trial of Jesus, had already, after the mockery of a trial, put to death James the son of Zebedee and brother of John. Following the recall to Rome of Pontius Pilate four years after the Crucifixion, the Emperor Caligula had placed Judea under the rule of the Herods, and this Herod, desiring to ingratiate himself with the priesthood, had first condemned and killed James and now proposed to do the same with Peter. There was no Roman governor and no appeal to Roman justice; the will of the king was paramount, and as Peter lay in his cell he must have been feeling that this indeed was the end. Perhaps he wondered why his life of service should be so summarily cut short. He was still a relatively young man, only in his mid-forties, and had seen but eleven years' ministry of the Gospel since his Master had been put to death. "*You shall be my witnesses ... to the uttermost ends of the earth*" had been the promise, but so far he had not been outside the confines of Judea and Samaria. There was so much yet to be done, and the Church was still looking to him for leadership. Paul, the other great leader of the Church, he had not seen for seven years and in any case Paul was at this very moment setting out on his first missionary journey far away in the wilds of Asia, preaching to the Dispersion and the Greeks. After all the triumphs of faith he had known in these past

hectic days of preaching and conversion was he now to accept as the will of his Lord that his time of service was finished? The fury and enmity of the priests had been nullified and rendered impotent and the power by which the Church had gone from strength to strength in all the regions of Judea, Samaria and Galilee was wonderful but was it now for him the end? Whatever his feelings as he pondered these things, his faith in the Lord was of that calibre which gave him perfect peace, for presently he too was sleeping quietly between his guards.

It was while thus sleeping that he became conscious of his dream; at least it seemed to him that it was a dream. He was still in his cell; the soldiers were still on either side and the chains were still there. The guttering lamp still cast its flickering shadows on the rough walls, but among those shadows there was a faint light, a dim radiance, which was not of the lamp. It moved, taking shape, the appearance of garments, and a face. The cell was suddenly full of light, and Peter saw that there was a fourth person present, one who was free, one who had not been there just previously; Peter knew intuitively that he was looking upon an angel of the Lord.

Was it a voice, and had the angel of the Lord spoken to him, or was it an impression suddenly formed in his mind? The words were clear enough, "*Rise up quickly!*" He did so, and the chains with which he was fastened to his guards fell away and subsided to the ground, silently and without noise. He looked down at the still sleeping men. The movement should have awakened them, but they slept on, undisturbed, as though he was still tethered between them. He looked again towards the angel. "*Fasten your belt and put on your sandals!*" Stepping carefully over the recumbent men, he obeyed. "*Put your cloak round you, and come with me!*" Picking up his outer coat, he draped it round his burly frame. As he did so the massive door swung open, silently revealing two fully armed and very wakeful soldiers standing on guard outside. Peter waited for the denouement, but it did not come. The guards stood there unseeingly, as though nothing untoward was happening. His angelic guide was already passing between them without let or hindrance, and, after a moment's

hesitation, Peter followed. There was not a flicker of recognition in their eyes when he drew level with them. As he turned the corner of the corridor he glanced back for a moment. The bright light in the cell had gone and the heavy door was already closing. The guards were standing there, their long spears moving slightly as they stood, giving no sign that they had seen or heard anything unusual. This, thought Peter, is certainly a dream. But his guide was already well along the corridor and he hastened to follow him. At its end was another door which opened silently at their approach and closed again behind them. Two more guards betrayed no sign of perception as they passed. Now they were in the main hall of the prison. On the opposite side, the main entrance door, closed and locked, with more guards on duty; to the right, a great fire burning, around which were grouped several soldiers, evidently off duty, some sleeping and others talking together and playing some kind of dice game. No one took any notice of the intruders. They walked across the hall, the great door swung open, letting in a strong blast of cold night air, but no one took any notice of that either. In another moment they had crossed the outer court and stood before the iron gate which gave access to the city. Four armed soldiers paced slowly to and fro across the gateway but none of them appeared to perceive it slowly opening, the two hurrying figures pass out into the city and the gate as slowly closed again.

Round the corner, out of sight of the prison, Peter suddenly realised that his angelic guide was no longer with him. Moreover, he was cold; night-time in Judea is always cold. He began to realise that this was no dream; it was reality. Perhaps he pinched himself. More likely he suddenly remembered that previous occasion when the angel of the Lord had delivered both himself and his fellow apostles from prison in much the same fashion, and full realization came. "Now I know that it is really true!" he said to himself "*the Lord sent his angel to rescue me from Herod's power and from everything the Jewish people expected to happen.*"

He stood still for a while in the bright moonlight, considering this wonderful happening. Slowly he became conscious of a tremendous suffusion of new faith, faith that because his Lord was behind him with heavenly power, he was indeed invincible until his work was finished. Twice had he been delivered from the clutches of the priest-

hood who would themselves, had they the power, have had him put to death. Now he had been saved from what had seemed certain death at the hands of a king who possessed the power and would not scruple to use it. The noble words of the Second Psalm came unbidden to his mind; "*the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed ... He that sits in the heavens shall laugh ... then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure*". Silently he lifted his heart in praise to God for his deliverance and in unspoken prayer for guidance as to his next move.

The cold night air decided that for him. Also he was still in uncomfortable proximity to Herod's prison. It was true that the Lord had delivered him from that and put him down in the open street, but it was now surely incumbent upon him to take all reasonable steps to keep out of further trouble. The more he thought about it, the more he felt he would be well advised to get out of Herod's way for a while. And as an immediate first step he knew exactly where to go, to the house of Mary the mother of the lad John Mark. The house of Mary had become a gathering-place for the early Christian community in Jerusalem. It was traditionally the house in which the Last Supper took place and according to legend the first meeting-place of the first converts. It had been the scene of the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. All the indications are that Mary was a woman of sterling character who was not afraid to make her home the headquarters of the new movement heedless of possible consequences at the hands of the authorities. Instinctively, therefore, Peter directed his steps to the house of Mary. He could not have known that at that very moment a fully attended prayer meeting was in session at the house beseeching the Lord to effect Peter's release. They knew that from the human point of view Peter was doomed, but they also knew that God could deliver if such were His will and they were waiting upon Him with constant supplication that He would effect deliverance and restore Peter to their midst. Such was the intensity and fervour of their entreaty that when Peter arrived at the door in the outer wall no one heard him save the fifteen-year old Rhoda. At least, if anyone else did hear the knock Rhoda was the only one who had the courage to go and see who was there. Visitors at that time of night were

usually from the ecclesiastical or military authorities and the consequences often far from pleasant.

Peter, of course, would be well acquainted with Rhoda, and when her, probably rather tremulous, fresh young voice floated across the wall enquiring the identity of the visitor his gruff tones quickly assured her "Peter, open the door quickly". He was still looking over his shoulder for signs of Herod's soldiers in the street. But instead of entry into the haven he sought all he heard was the sound of flying footsteps and then ... silence. Rhoda, in the reaction of relief and gladness, had omitted the formality of opening the door and had run back into the house with the news that Peter was out of prison and standing outside waiting for admittance. The next part of that story is well known, how that the assembled brethren flatly refused to believe her. "*You are mad*" they said. Peter was in Herod's prison and could not possibly get out; the fact that God might conceivably have here and now answered their prayers and released him does not seem to have occurred to them at the moment. Apparently the argument went on for some time. Had Peter been safely inside the garden he might have registered some grim humour at the situation of his being presented as the answer to prayer and the supplicants refusing to believe it. But Peter was not inside; he was still outside. The more he thought of Herod's soldiers possibly searching the streets of the city the more thunderous became his knocking, until at last for very shame's sake someone went and opened the door: "*and when they saw him they were amazed*".

Peter quickly cut short the excited babble of questions and congratulations, interspersed with shouts of praise to God for the deliverance. "*He motioned with his hand for them to be quiet.*" He then related the circumstances of his release. He told them to pass the news to James the Lord's brother, who was rapidly coming into the position of acknowledged leader of the Jerusalem church, and to others who were not present, and then made preparations for his own departure "*to another place*". By this time it would be morning and Mary would be sure to insist that he partook of a substantial meal before leaving. By then the streets would be full of the Passover crowds and Peter could mingle with them and get out of the city unnoticed. Where he went is not stated. Probably it was to a Christian home in some Judean or Galilean village

where he could 'lie low' for a while until the search for him was called off and Herod had forgotten the matter. But the Lord had no intention of suspending his active service for long. Within a few months, and in that same year, A.D. 44, Herod was dead. The new Emperor, Claudius, felt that Herod's son, the Agrippa before whom Paul later appeared (Acts 26), was too young to succeed as king, and decided to restore the system of Roman governors which had ended seven years earlier with Pontius Pilate. So, late in AD 44, the Roman Cuspius Fadus arrived to take over the administration of Judea and Samaria. He was an unprincipled and rapacious tyrant, but while the civil power was in his hands that of the priesthood was curbed. Without much doubt Peter was able after only a few months in seclusion to resume his activities and his preaching, and the believers were left in tolerable peace.

There is only one more definite mention of Peter in the Book of Acts, and that is in connection with the celebrated Jerusalem Conference six years later, recorded in Acts 15. It would seem that the Apostle was able to pursue his evangelical work throughout the length and breadth of the country during that six years without interference. His headquarters was at Jerusalem but he was probably not often there. James, the brother of Jesus, became the recognised leader of the Jerusalem church and under his administration and guidance it flourished and became solidly established. But it also was avowedly Judaistic. Despite their Christianity, the believers at Jerusalem held rigidly to the Law of Moses and the rite of circumcision. Perhaps it was only natural. They had been brought up under the Law. Jesus himself had said he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They had never had contact with Gentiles and knew little about them. To these Jewish believers the teaching and precepts of Jesus constituted a reformation within the Jewish system but at first sight gave no reason for thinking that the Jewish law and ritual was out-dated and to be rejected. So, naturally enough, when some of them visited the more liberally-minded Church at Antioch and found a different current of thought there they insisted that all, Gentile and Jew alike, must conform to the Mosaic Law if they were to be saved.

This was the question that gave rise to the Jerusalem Conference, the first theological conference of the Christian church on record. Paul and

Barnabas, with several other members of the Antioch Church, were commissioned to go to Jerusalem and discuss this problem with the apostles and elders. They gave their account of the manifest manner in which God had used them to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles of Roman Asia, and of the churches that had thus been established in many cities. Against this the Pharisaic element in the Jerusalem Church set their inflexible opinion that adherence to the Mosaic Law must be accepted as an integral part of the Christian faith. Here was deadlock, and here it is that Peter comes back into the story.

The conference was under the supervision of James, himself a rigid Judaist. Peter, nevertheless, was respected and accepted by all as the senior Apostle, and when he rose to speak there was quiet attention. In a few well-chosen words he reminded his Jerusalem colleagues of his own experience of thirteen years previously, long before Paul had commenced his work among the Gentiles, when Peter had been sent to receive into the Church the Gentile Cornelius with all his house. *"You know"* he declared in his characteristic forceful fashion *"that a long time ago God chose me from among you to preach the Good News to the Gentiles so that they could hear and believe"*. God had witnessed to the fact by the visible giving of the Holy Spirit, as He had previously done to the Jews. *"He made no difference between us and them"* he

stressed. *"We believe and are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are."*(GNB). Peter's forthright championship of the Antioch cause carried the day. Peter, unlike Paul, was their own man, and even the most bigoted of the opposing party would hesitate before challenging him. Perhaps also some of them remembered that past day when Peter returned from Caesarea with his news of the Gentile converts and how, after explanations made, they had glorified God in that He had granted the Gentiles the opportunity of repentance unto life. So the entire assembly listened approvingly whilst James summed up what had been said and conceded freedom from the Mosaic Law to all non-Jewish converts. Largely the insight and resolution of the rugged fisherman avoided what could easily have developed into a major schism between the Pauline and the Petrine churches.

There was to be another twenty years of active service for Peter, but there was no Luke, as in the case of Paul, to record for posterity where he went and what he did. From this time onward nothing certain is known about Peter's life, only vague deductions from obscure references and from the epistles which bear his name, and to a lesser extent from tradition. What is definitely known about Peter is all crowded into the first twenty years of his discipleship: the second twenty years is virtually blank.

To be concluded AOH

E-mail received from CART consignee in Zimbabwe on 13 July 2003.

Greetings! We have now distributed everything that came in your last container to us. The goods have gone to our 5 ministry groups in Harare, which included two very large destitute holding camps, 2 city dump sites where families scavenge the city dumps for a living and to various families living in the open places around the city. All our people live in plastic shelters in the open places so your goods have gone to those who have no homes and no income.

In the rural area we have given to over 800 church members, 3 local schools and of course our own Agricultural Training Village for destitute families.

The blessing received cannot be told. So much hope has been generated and our church meetings

have swelled enormously and are remaining very full. People are clothed and warmed. Schools have furniture and stationery and books that they would never have afforded. Every item has been useful. The Aquaboxes have been received with such excitement, and people are always thanking me that they are now drinking 'good water'.

So it remains to say THANK YOU ... a thousand times ... and may we continue with you. I hope you have received the photos by email over time. I will continue to send pictures of interest. I will be away till the end of July.

Thank you and bless you all.

Yours in Jesus ... with our love ...

Bryony Pichanick

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD

Part 1 – Young Jacob

"I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." (Genesis 28.15). There is little in the records of Abraham's life of God making any promise that he would keep him wherever he went. It is intrinsic in the patriarchal history and in his long trek around the Fertile Crescent Abraham must have been very conscious of God's close friendship. The relationship enshrined in the covenant became clear when he interceded for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18.22-33). Isaac received a definite promise from God that He would be with him (Genesis 26.3) and he must have been aware of God's care in his rather less adventurous life. It is when we look at the life of Jacob, of whom so much more detail is given, that we find God speaks of His keeping power wherever Jacob went.

Some are scathing about Jacob's reputation. He is regarded as a schemer and a deceiver and the embittered Esau said that he was rightly called a supplanter. In the context of Jeremiah 9.4 the word supplanter is linked with stronger condemnation of Jacob's descendants. His conduct certainly led to bitterness and hatred, separation and exile, and he was to go where his father had never been, back to the land from which Abraham had come when he separated from his family. Abraham was adamant that Isaac should not go back to Haran when Eliezer set off to find the promised son a bride (Genesis 24.6). It is a lovely story, for the slave had come to know the God of Abraham and prayed to him. His prayer was heard and his mission was a success. It reflects well for Abraham that a pagan servant had learned to know the true God. Jacob did not have the same kind of long journey that Abraham's slave had enjoyed. Eliezer took camels and gifts and his retinue was worthy of the eastern chieftain or emir that he served. When Laban saw the display of wealth he greeted the slave with *"Come in O blessed of the Lord"*. It was a rather different greeting from that given to Jacob who was expected to earn his keep.

With all Jacob's apparent failures to behave as one might expect of God's servant upon whom the promises of future blessing had been given, his

story is one that should give the weakest child of God hope and encouragement. Through it all, God 'kept' Jacob and Jacob learned through his experiences. The words 'kept' and 'keep' appear all through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Hebrew word used means 'to watch' or 'to hedge about', to guard or protect. What appear to have been sad mistakes and disappointments did not frustrate God's plan for that family. They were not puppets on a string dancing to fascinate Christians who would live some thirty seven centuries later. They were real live flesh and blood people whose experiences are vivid and valuable.

The homestead at Beer-sheba should have been very peaceful and prosperous. The wonderful way in which God had led Rebekah to that home should have indicated that God was with them, providing for their need and guarding them from any danger and failure. Their marriage was a match made in heaven! When Rebekah didn't have any children Isaac prayed for her and they received the gift of two children, twins, Esau and Jacob. While pregnant Rebekah received a message from God that the two boys twisting about within her had a great destiny and *"the older would serve the younger."* In the light of events one wonders how much the couple discussed the Lord's Word and their strategy for bringing up the boys.

It was immediately clear that the children were contrasts in appearance. Later the parents were to see how different they were in other ways. Esau was adventurous, never so happy as when he was riding the hills and valleys of southern Canaan. He would be rough and tough, a good shot with the bow, and a fellow who enjoyed spending several nights away from home. He apparently gave little thought to the promises made to his grandfather. He lived for the present and the enjoyment of what was to hand. This attitude took him into the villages and homes of local Canaanite tribes until he fell in love with first one and then another of their daughters. The ways of those pagan nomads were not the same as Abraham's God demanded and it affected Rebekah. Perhaps she and Isaac had never discussed with their boys the implications of marrying outside their culture and faith in the one true God. By so doing Esau was repudiating the

covenant through Abraham and rejecting the promises made to him. Hence the expression in Hebrews 12.16 which speaks of him as immoral and irreligious. The first of these two words in the Greek *pornos* from which we get the English word pornography is translated 'fornicator' in the AV. The second is *bebeloo* and is given as 'profane' in the AV and means one who rejects the covenant. In the circumstances of his liaison with foreign women, both words are applicable. If Esau was to inherit the promise through birthright and blessing, his children must be reared according to the customs and in the faith of Abraham's God. Yet we must ponder how Esau's marriage was different from that of Joseph and Moses.

Jacob on the other hand was mother's favourite and lived quietly and contently in the happiness of home, managing the family firm. It is evident from his exploits with Uncle Laban's stock at Haran, that he had become something of an expert in the farming industry and the rearing of animals. He might have continued rearing Isaac's stock had he sought the Lord and accepted His timing for the transference of the birthright. But he was in a hurry and sought to run before the Lord. If only he and his mother had waited. How many lessons there are in this remarkable record of home life so long ago.

Rebekah was a schemer and she came from a family of schemers. Did it run in the genes? Just as Abraham had deceived Pharaoh and Isaac had deceived Abimelech so Jacob deceived his father and that was hardly surprising. Again we might ask, did it run in the genes? Its easy to blame inherited characteristics on the genetic code but we all have the same problem to a greater or lesser degree, it's called 'original sin', and its only remedy is 'the grace of God'. The more we rely on the grace of God and appeal to Him to remove our weaknesses the more success we shall have in becoming the kind of people God wants us to be. As we look at the stories of the patriarchs and the high moral code that was to develop in the next thirty seven centuries there is evidence that deterioration occurred from Genesis chapter 3 to chapter 12. They were truly times of ignorance. Yet, looking down the centuries at the nation of Israel with its Mosaic Law and the Church with the life and teaching of Christ we cannot help seeing that at times they were a lot worse behaved than the patriarchs. The light has shined more and more to the perfect day but few

have walked in that light. Rebekah was not loyal to Isaac and her schemes ended in failure for after Jacob left home for Haran, she never saw him again.

If Isaac knew anything of the revelation that Rebekah received before the birth of the twins he seemingly did little about it. For him also there was an element of bartering the blessing for a plate of venison. To satisfy his physical appetite was more important to him than making the transmission of the promise and covenant.

So Jacob left home, and one wonders how much he had with him in terms of money, clothes and food. He was a cook. His journey would lay along the great trade routes which were already well worn by the time Jacob tramped towards Bethel. That was his first stop, about 30 miles north of Beersheba. At a place near Luz, possibly close to where Abraham had offered a sacrifice, he found a comfortable place and lay down to rest his weary legs.

It was a wonderful night, never to be forgotten. If Jacob had sinned, he was now learning that God was forgiving and conciliatory. The dream must have been very real. In it God renewed the 'promise' in a way that made it a more personal contract between himself and God. Yet it was something his descendants would share. It was here that the promise of Genesis 28.15 was made. God would be with Him and take care of Him. He was learning that the God of Israel, unlike idols and gods of metal, wood and stone was not confined to one place or country. Wherever Jacob went he knew his God was with him and to prove it he had several visions of angels before he returned to Bethel.

This experience was to have a deep and lasting effect on Jacob. He was able to ponder the matter as he made his lonely way towards Haran. Before he departed however, he promised God that He, Yahweh would be his God if he were brought back safe and sound. The use of 'if' sounds like Jacob bartering again. But in the early days of our commitment to God when we first surrender our all to Him, our conception of what we are doing may be, in reality, very vague and somewhat like peering through a 'glass very darkly'. It takes many further revelations and many miles along the road and many a dint of stroke and blow in the trials and tests of the way, before those 'puzzling reflections' become clear. But this was the great moment perhaps equivalent to what Christians often call

'consecration'. This was when the covenant between God and His people was again renewed. This was establishing once more the relationship between Him and us. It is that which is so important because it's an everlasting relationship which must

go on into eternity when names and labels are forgotten. Never mind what we think we know, it's whom we know that matters and being kept by Him.

DN

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A Panorama of
the Way of Christ*

2. He knows all men

"He knew all men ... He knew what was in man"
(John 2.24, 25).

It is a peculiar fact that men and women do not know each other. The partial knowledge of human nature is responsible for much misunderstanding, bad feeling, pain and disappointment. Suspicion, jealousy, lack of trust, repression of affection, poison and destroy what might be otherwise happy human relationships. Sometimes the faulty are exalted and the worthy set aside. Deceived, disillusioned and doubtful, the greater proportion of mankind flows on its way never knowing what qualities, what thoughts or yearnings, what affections lie in the minds of all about them. The true self, hidden, inarticulate, or lacking opportunity is rarely revealed in its fulness.

While exploring, man has invented many sorts of seeing eyes. We can probe the vastness of celestial dominions, magnify the minute, penetrate solid substances but the human eye is unable to penetrate the hearts and minds, the motives and character of those with whom they are chiefly and often most closely concerned. Not only do people deceive each other they deceive themselves. The power to see and know each other as we truly are, might save a lot of trouble. A few lines written by a Scottish poet express the view –

*"Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as others see us
It wad fra' 'mony a blunder free us
An' foolish notion."*

Here is the constantly recurring problem. If only we had a true knowledge of other people, life would be sweeter. If only we had a truer knowledge of ourselves we might live more profitably, doing well the thing we can do. There are, in a way, three selves in every person, the self seen by self, the self seen by others and the self God sees. Only the self seen by the eye of the Spirit is the true one.

That is the one which, put unreservedly into the hands of God, can be trained, schooled and disciplined, its faults eradicated, its talents

developed, its weaknesses strengthened, its finest qualities gradually unfolded, until a whole new personality emerges, equipped and poised to play a useful part in life. God has taken hold of the weak things of the earth to confound the mighty. It is a tribute to faith and the working of invisible forces in human life, that confusion, weakness, wantonness and all other evils by which human nature is beset, have been overcome in a life put into the care of the Great physician, who knows what is in man. He knows the depths of doubt and despair, the pressure of events and the limitations of human judgement.

Then, if pilgrims would know peace, the self-knowledge that frees from the blunders of conceit, the self-confidence that comes from a sure repose in unerring wisdom, it is to God and to Christ they should turn for instruction. The illusions of the world will fade before the brighter realities of the City of God. Patience, understanding, tolerance and love will more and more replace the doubts, suspicions and distrust of its inhabitants. *"You search the scriptures, because you think you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness to me"* (John 5.39 RSV).

Books are a synonym for knowledge. The world's massive stores of literature provide a reservoir of information for the inquiring mind. Those who study or any who wish to know something about one particular subject, look it up in books. Books have become an essential part of life, yet for all their well packed pages they have not and cannot produce life. They are only pointers directing attention, or keys unlocking further reserves of instruction. The sacred Scriptures were to the Jews the source of all truth, the text book of rules, the manual of laws, the revelation of God and the prophetic guide-book to the future. They had entered into a dispute with Jesus over the healing of a lame man on the Sabbath day. This good deed was not according to the Law. It angered the formalists, not that a man should show mercy but

that he should set aside the written rules. They observed the words but not the spirit of the words, as St. Paul was later to say, *"the letter kills but the spirit gives life"*.

The disputers, like many more since, set great store on what was written in the books. Jesus told them to search their books, to discover their true meaning. A formal adherence to these sanctified writings had no life-giving effect. It was an illusion to think that they had. From beginning to end the Scriptures, by their historical narrative, their recorded laws, their prophetic utterances, pointed forward to a Person, a living Word who would be far greater than the written word, by His deeds He would demonstrate His power of life. He who could heal the sick was greater than the book, however hallowed, as he who by his deeds fulfilled the spirit of the law was greater than the law. Christianity was not founded upon a book but upon a Person, the man Christ Jesus. Since His day, books by the million have been expressing a wide variety of views, giving interpretations and theologies over which men have wrangled, debated and fought with stubborn certainty and intolerant bigotry. The book invariably produces the creed and the creed the sect, while Christ and the spirit of Christ are lost sight of in a welter of words, in empty ritual and formal lip-service.

The written word is still searched and studied, as though the printed page contained some life-giving power. Authors of great books as well as the books they have produced are regarded with reverential awe, as minds incapable of error, while still there stands the One who is greater than all the books, who declared Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus eclipses all books, for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Books instruct and educate but they do not have all the answers to the vast problems of life. Knowledge passes away; what was new last year will be old next year. Even the Book of books, the world's best seller, is only a valuable collection of ancient words unless the reader of its pages is led by the Spirit to link his life with its central figure, Jesus Christ, and to place his unshaken trust in the Living God.

The Bible makes a strong person to person appeal. *"Look unto me and be saved; all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else."* *"Without me you can do nothing."* *"My word shall not pass away till all shall be fulfilled"*. I, Me and

Mine predominate the sacred pages. The living, life-giving all powerful personages are greater than the book. The printed page may teach and inspire but it is to Christ that all must look for life. *"On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand."* *"How can you believe which receive honour one of another and seek not the honour which comes from God only"* (John 5.44).

Civilized society has always had a strong mental inclination for titles. Men bow before lords and bend before kings for no other reason than that they bear illustrious names. 'Your grace', 'your excellency' and 'your majesty' have a ring to them which titillates the vanity of those who wear them and those who court their favour. To be tapped on the shoulder by a monarch or to be patted on the back by a high sounding name, to be given a title of any sort, is an honour and distinction sought after and cherished by the ambitious and discerning sons of men.

Had Jesus come to the world of His day with a fine title or a row of scholarly letters after His name, He would have been received with honour and listened to with rapt attention, even though what He said might not have been worth listening to. Coming as He did, without pomp or ceremony, from a village carpenter's shop, even though His deeds showed astonishing power and His words were weighty with truth and wisdom, He was not received except by the poor who heard Him gladly. He knew what was in man, the trend of the human heart towards honours and titles and the high places and toward fine raiment and wealth and the respect which these things win from the fawning and the gullible. They see only the outward show and He knew they could not believe on Him as the sent of God, who had none of these things. He made Himself of no reputation. Simplicity was the keynote of His life. He called on His hearers to *"Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly of heart"*. The only title He ever bestowed upon Himself was 'Son of Man'. To Him a man was a man, no more and no less. The titles and honours by which they set such store were only trappings. It was not what a man had but what a man was, that was the core of His teachings and example.

The Scottish poet who wrote *"The rank is but the guinea stamp; the man's the gold for all that"* was but expressing the essence of that teaching which set at nought the mighty. They sought after

the perishing glories of this world but He exalted the humble and meek to the glory of the sun and the brilliance of the stars in the kingdom of God. The kingdoms and empires of earth pass away. The pomp and vanities of the world perish. Kings and lords return to the dust as does the pauper and the outcast of a proud society seeking the dazzling prizes and the glittering places for a few brief years. How transitory are all these things when weighed in the balances with eternal life. How few and how rare the discerning souls who in Christ and through Him have seen the invisible treasure, have glimpsed a kingdom that is yet to come, which will overthrow and outlast all the unsatisfactory kingdoms of men.

He who sought no honours at the hands of men, who came without a title, who elected to be homeless, who found His friends among the poor, who consorted with sinners and laid His hands upon those with leprosy, is yet to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over the nations and before Him every knee shall bow. Those true followers of His, that little band of pilgrims who have followed Him in every age, despised, persecuted, obscure, unknown, their qualities and worth like His, unguessed at by the indifferent world, what shall their name and place be then? To be called the sons of God, the brethren of Christ, will be greater honour than this world can bestow. Its best baubles will be poor beside that pearl of great price.

"This is the work of God that you believe on him who he has sent" (John 6.29). Works versus belief. This was the theme on which the inquiring people sought information as they followed Jesus round the shore of Galilee. He had by now healed their sick and fed the hungry multitudes with bread. Looking upon them with that penetrating wisdom which saw through their seeming eagerness, to their real motives. He faced them with themselves as they were, seekers after personal gain. Their interest lay no deeper than the need of the moment. Their desire to please God or fit themselves for the future was superficial. Life was full of confusing issues. Few had recognised in Christ the greater than Moses, or had grasped the idea that there might be more to living than bread and temporary freedom from pain and anxiety. The certainties of life were more real and urgent than the uncertainties of faith. Everlasting life was a nebulous future beyond the reach of the average

mind concerned with lesser things. Nevertheless the idea of pleasing God, of being on the right side of improvement, of any possible advantage, did strike a chord. What had they to do, what works did God desire of them?

Here was the touch-stone, the standard, the requirement which brought man into harmonious relationship with his Maker. Not works of the hands but of the mind, belief, a strong belief that Jesus was sent to them from God. He had given them bread in the wilderness as God had given their fathers manna in the desert but still they doubted His credentials. They would see some other work. When no work was forthcoming, when faith and acceptance was expected of them both in His power and authority to grant them ages of life, they murmured and made difficulties. In the end they were offended that one man should make such claims for Himself, that He should demand and expect their belief in Him as the long awaited One.

Had he asked of them a busy activity, an Outward service, no doubt they would have done something. To believe was a different matter. So St. Paul says that the people of Israel failed to attain the gift of God because they sought it not by faith but by works of the law. They could not believe and they lost the boon and blessing of life. Works have provided the same stumbling stone down the centuries since that day on which Jesus declared Himself the living bread that came down from Heaven. It has become a common illusion that the Christian must work His passage to Heaven. There must be something to do, something to offer. Engagement in some frenzied activity or even a courted martyrdom have seemed to the work-minded the passport to heavenly realms and honours. In the midst of much misguided zeal these Christian candidates have lost sight of the central Figure. Whatever else they have believed in they have not believed in Him, for His Spirit has been lamentably absent from many deeds done in the name of Christ.

That whole-hearted belief, that heart-winning love which quietly waits, which meekly gives itself to discipline, to sanctification and transformation, from the image of the earthly imperfect man into the likeness of the Son of God, is a rare frame of mind that has in it the imperishable seed of life. It has the Lord's *"Verily, Verily. He that believes on me has everlasting life. I am the living bread."*

*"Break thou the bread of life, O Lord to me
As thou didst break the loaves beside the sea,*

*Beyond the sacred page I seek thee Lord;
My spirit pants for thee, O living Word"*

To be continued AOH

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

11. Amnon and Tamar 2 Sam. 13-14

Intrigue, rebellion, treachery, outrage, murder: this is the sad catalogue of happenings which was to fill David's life for the remaining years of his reign following the episode of Uriah. Almost every year brought a fresh calamity; David must have wished at times that he had never forsaken his simple life as a shepherd for the chequered career of a king. And yet, despite the dark shadows of that same chequered career, he had been the Lord's choice for the founder of a royal dynasty that is eventually to culminate in Jesus Christ as ruler over the Divine kingdom on earth, and the Lord never makes mistakes. Despite his evident weaknesses and failures, David's heart was right with the Lord and his loyalty never wavered. The Lord never had to say of David, as He did say of Saul *"I am grieved that I made Saul king"* (NIV).

Less than a year after Nathan's condemnation of David, and the subsequent birth of Solomon, and the end of the war with Amnon, and David's settling down to a hoped-for peaceful life in Jerusalem, disaster struck. The tragic story is related in 2 Sam. 13. Amnon, eldest son of David and prospective heir to the throne, became violently infatuated with his half-sister Tamar, daughter of David by another wife. Amnon was just about twenty one years of age and Tamar seventeen. His mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel, the third of David's wives and almost certainly a woman of Israel. Tamar's mother was Maacah, daughter of the King of Geshur, an independent people of Amorite extraction on the northern borders of Israel whom neither Joshua nor any subsequent leader had been able to subdue. In marrying Maacah, David had transgressed the Mosaic Law. Now there was this incipient scandal threatening the serenity of the royal house. The story goes on to relate how Amnon inveigled Tamar into his house and, despite her resistance, violated her. In her distress the girl went to her own brother, Absalom, third son of David, and there found refuge. In the ordinary way such an outrage would be avenged by the shedding of blood, starting a murder feud which sometimes went on for generations, and Absalom as the

injured girl's own brother was the one whom custom demanded should be the avenger. But at the moment he bided his time. The chronicler merely states *"Absalom spoke to Amnon, neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar"*.

The chronicler also says *"when King David heard of all these things, he was very wroth"*. Since Tamar was his daughter one would have expected a more decided reaction. The fact that there was not may well have been due to an inward realization that his own transgression of two or three years earlier had rendered him of all men unfit to pronounce judgment on the offender. David must have been sick at heart as he pondered over the disorder into which his life seemed to be slipping; perhaps now he did enter into a deeper and more sincere repentance than he had known before. In his dilemma, maybe he thought that Absalom, as Tamar's natural guardian, always the system where a king or nobleman had a multiplicity of children by a number of wives, was apparently going to allow the matter to rest and therefore he himself could do so without further apprehension. If he did so conclude, then he was gravely mistaken, as subsequent events were to prove. For the present, however, he took no further action. Under the Mosaic Law, of course, he should have had the offender, king's son or no king's son, put to death.

The Septuagint adds an extra phrase to the statement of David's wrath *"but he did not grieve the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his first-born"*. There may be something in this. David was at this time evidently expecting Amnon to succeed him as king, may even already have been grooming him for the kingship, and this might have been an additional justification in his mind for taking no action. But what he did not know was that the Lord had other ideas as to who should succeed him as king. In His infinite wisdom a man who would combine something of the qualities of the gentle Bath-sheba with those of the Bethlehem shepherd-boy was needed to lead Israel into the next stage of its national life.

Two years later the second episode occurred in the tragedy. Amnon had accomplished his crime with the unwitting connivance of the king, who had been deceived by a pretext invented by Amnon into sending Tamar to his house. Now David was to be deceived again, this time by Absalom who although only twenty years of age, had his own estate at Baal-hazor, eighteen miles north of Jerusalem. He was due there to superintend his annual sheep-shearing, which was always made a kind of ritual and accompanied by feasting and celebration (Gen. 31.19 and 38.13 are examples, in the lives of Jacob and Judah). He went to the king and requested the favour of his presence at the feast, knowing his father well enough to be certain he would refuse the presence of the king would involve a numerous entourage of court notabilities and servants which could be an expensive matter for Absalom. As anticipated, David declined on those grounds. "Nay, my son", he said "let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable to you". To disarm suspicion, Absalom pressed him further; he still declined but gave him his blessing.

Absalom now produced his second card. *"If you will not go"* he suggested *"then let my brother Amnon go with us."* Amnon as heir apparent would then represent his father at the feast. David demurred a bit; he obviously could not see why Amnon should go, but Absalom pressed him and eventually he consented. So Amnon received what amounted to a royal command to proceed with Absalom, accompanied by most of David's other sons, to the feast at Baal-hazor.

Absalom's servants, briefed beforehand by their master, fully loyal to him and doubtless equally indignant at the outrage perpetrated upon his sister, waited until the feast had progressed to the point where the wine was flowing freely, the guests not quite sure what was going on, and Amnon himself in a condition of semi-stupor, fell upon him and assassinated him. *"Then all the king's sons rose, and each mounted his mule and fled"*.

It would seem that in their semi-inebriated state they did not make very good progress, for news of the affair reached Jerusalem before they did. Probably some of their servants, having less opportunity for revelling and carousal, got there first and in their panic asserted that all David's sons had been slain, to the consternation of David and his court. But the ensuing lamentation was quickly

interrupted by David's nephew Jonadab, a *"man about court"* who seems to have known more about the whole affair than would appear on the surface. He assured the king that Amnon was the only one slain and the rest would certainly come safely home. It had been Absalom's intention, he explained, to kill Amnon from the very day Amnon had committed the offence. Sure enough, the party arrived at length, by now sufficiently sobered up to realise the enormity of what had happened, to add their quota to the general expressions of grief pervading the royal court.

In the meantime, Absalom had fled for refuge to his father-in-law, the King of Geshur, and there he remained three years. David seems quickly to have got over the death of Amnon, judging by 2 Sam. 13.39, and began to fret at his third son's continued absence. Later events show that he developed a greater affection for Absalom than any other of his grown-up sons, and now that Amnon was dead may well have begun to think of him as heir to the throne. Of the second son, Chileab, by David's wife Abigail the Carmelitess, widow of Nabal, nothing whatever is known; it is possible that he died in infancy or early youth. What is obvious is that David now pinned his hopes on Absalom, yet could not see how he could allow him back into the realm without exacting some severe and deserved penalty for his act. It is very possible that others of his sons were putting pressure upon him; with Absalom permanently out of the way the succession would pass to one of them. There is some basis for thinking that of the first six sons, those born at Hebron during the first seven years of the reign, or earlier, Absalom was the only one of a non-Israelite mother and there might well have been family hostility to him on that account. David evidently wanted to be reconciled to his exiled son but could not find the way.

That way was eventually found by another crafty politician at court, Joab, nephew of David and commander-in-chief of the army. For reasons which do not readily appear in the narrative, it does seem that Joab was more favourably disposed towards Absalom than to David's other sons. He may have had in mind his own position in the framework of the kingdom after the death of David. He therefore was not averse to ingratiating himself with the man who would succeed the king so that any favour he might show Absalom in his time of

distress might well be to his own benefit later on. At any rate, perceiving David's dilemma and his longing for reconciliation with his son and perhaps remembering how Nathan had gone to the king with a fictional tale of injustice in order to bring the king to a recognition of his own wrongdoing, Joab concocted a similar scheme.

The story is in 2 Sam. 14. He procured a "wise woman", probably a prophetess, from Tekoah in the highlands of Judah, and sent her to David with a plausible tale of woe and plea for the king's intervention. As a prophetess she would have ready access to the royal presence. Being thus admitted, she made the customary obeisance and voiced the usual plea "Save, O king", to which she got the usual answer "What is your trouble?" and the king composed himself to listen. The story was simple. She was a widow woman left with two sons and a small farm, her only support. The two sons had quarrelled and in the quarrel one of them had been accidentally killed. Now the family relatives were demanding that the guilty brother be handed over to them to be slain in revenge for the deed. So, she said, there would be left to her dead husband no heir and his name blotted out of Israel and she herself left destitute and alone.

The king was sympathetic, he was also not greatly interested. There were always men getting slain in Israel. He saw no harm in granting the old woman's request. "Go to your house", he said, "and I will give orders concerning you."

She was not quite satisfied, there was a point to press. "My lord O king", she responded "On me be the guilt my lord the king and on my father's house, let the king and his throne be guiltless" (v.9 GNB). What she meant was that the king, by agreeing to set aside the customary practice of vengeance against the murderer, could be accused of an injustice, a breach of the social code. She would take the blame, if the king would but protect her son. David did not seem to think the point a very serious one. "If anyone says anything to you bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again".

If David thought the interview was over, he was mistaken. There was a more subtle thrust to come "Please may the king keep the Lord your God in mind so that the avenger of blood may kill no more and my son not be destroyed". David was getting a little impatient; he could not see where all this was leading and he spoke somewhat hastily, "As the

Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground" (NRSV). He motioned with his hand to indicate that the interview was at an end.

The woman stood her ground. "Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king." Resignedly, David assented. "Speak".

The woman stood erect and looked the king straight in the face, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch that the king does not bring his banished one home again. We must all die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up. But God will not take away a life, he will devise plans so as not to keep an outcast banished forever from his presence."

There was a long silence. David realised there was more to the pleas of this supplicant than he had thought. There was a reproof in the woman's words and a summons to act. He had pardoned the woman's mythical son for his crime and promised his protection. He had sworn to that by the Lord God of Israel. Now he stood convicted, out of his own mouth, of refusing to pardon his own son for the same crime. He was not afraid of the woman's relatives clamouring for the death of her errant son and had told her to bring them to him to be dealt with; yet he was afraid of his own family thirsting for vengeance upon their exiled half-brother. God had forgiven him for his own crime of the murder of Uriah; he had not forgiven Absalom for his murder of Amnon. And above all things, this woman had revealed to him something he had never realised before; God is not really a God of vengeance. He is a God who must and does exact retribution for wrongdoing but with that retribution devises means of giving the wrongdoer an opportunity of reconciliation. "God will devise plans so as not to keep an outcast banished forever from his presence."

Therein lies one of the fundamental principles of the Divine Plan. Notwithstanding the grievous sin of man, God has provided that the man cannot be irretrievably lost whilst any hope or chance of repentance and reconciliation remains. Because of sin, man is banished from the Divine presence but God has devised means whereby the banished one can come back, if he will. And the Father stands ready to meet him; the parable of the Prodigal Son tells us that. Perhaps at this point in his life David

began to see that there was a higher plane of understanding of God's character than that of a vengeful Deity intent only in the destruction of His enemies and the punishment of offenders against His laws. Perhaps he began to perceive that the One who would one day "rule upon the throne of the Lord with justice and judgment even for ever" would not, could not, partake of the conception of God he himself had nourished all his life. Rather He would be more as he himself had been at the beginning, a shepherd who would "carry the lambs in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young". He looked at the woman still standing silently before him, and his thoughts came back to the present.

"Tell me", he said gently, keen eyes searching the woman's face, "is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" She looked at him, realizing that he had seen through her story, and admitted the fact. David nodded thoughtfully, and dismissed her with the assurance she sought. He sat and ruminated a little longer, then summoned an attendant.

"Command Joab that he attend upon me" he ordered.

The attendant bowed silently and withdrew. The king was still sitting, wrapped in thought, when his Commander-in-chief strode in. David looked at him speculatively.

"You know why I have sent for you?" Joab bowed respectfully.

"Yes my Lord the king".

"You have engineered this thing. You have shown me my fault." He paused a moment "Go to Geshur and bring my son Absalom back to Jerusalem again. Joab bowed again, a light of triumph in his eyes. "This day I know that I have found favour in your sight, my lord the king". He turned to go; he was arrested by an imperious gesture from David.

"Let him dwell in his own house in Jerusalem and let him not see my face." Joab inclined his head slightly in token of mute assent and strode out of the throne room. David listened to his footsteps, clattering over the courtyard and dying away in the distance. He remained a long time thus, along with his thoughts.

And so Absalom came home again.

(To be continued)

AOH

SWORD AGAINST ALL NATIONS

In 1942, the booklet 'Jacob's Trouble' was published with a preface that hoped the booklet would "revive interest in the study of an important subject – the manner in which the kingdoms of this world are to become the Kingdom of our God." It was thought then to be just an interim statement but it has stood the test of time. It was about that time the author of 'Jacob's Trouble' also wrote what has recently been called 'an apocalyptic novel' on the same subject. It was rejected by a Christian publisher and with one exception the novel was put under wraps and never seen again until Albert Hudson's effects were sorted out during the year 2000.

The author was a perfectionist concerning technical detail and always updated his own articles when they were reprinted. To update this novel would have required much of it to be re-written as the decades went by. A little reflection will recall that the technological and international political scene has vastly changed since then. The author enjoyed a humorous 'dig' at the social

political stance of both east and west as it was in the 1930s. Mechanical technology has been upstaged by electronics. The book is very well written indeed and to try to bring it up to date would spoil the story. There is something of a romance behind the plot, quite beautifully written. The value of the book lies in the attempt of the author to suggest in story form the way in which the principles of God's kingdom will confront the nations of the world. We believe it is worthy of a wider reading public but there is only one copy of which we are taking great care.

We have pondered a fully printed and bound volume for dissemination but it is impossible to gauge interest that such a book would attract. The book comprises nearly 70,000 words in 17 chapters. An order form will be inserted in a future issue of the Bible Study Monthly for those who are interested in reading it. The book will be sent free as with all our literature but BFU would be grateful for help towards postage.

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