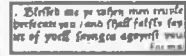
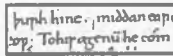


BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY



Vol. 81, No. 1

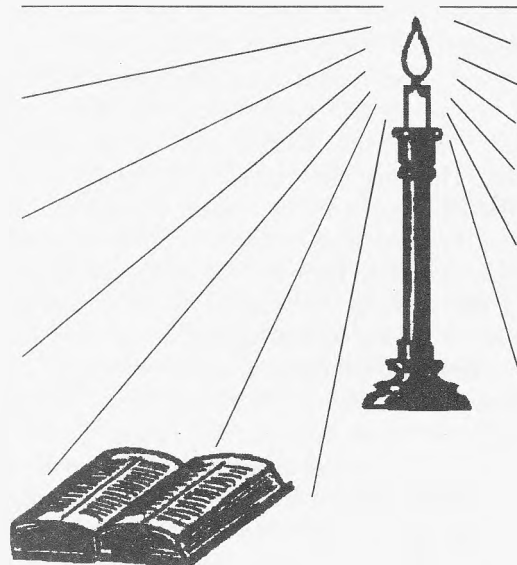
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2004

Published January 1st

Next issue March 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	2
SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN	
13. Into the Unknown	3
UNITY	
Part 1	7
KING DAVID OF ISRAEL	
12. High Treason	10
OUR HEAVENLY BROTHERS	
Part 2	15
KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD	
2. Jacob, Father of the Family	18
LIGHT OF THE WORLD	
3. I've Found a Friend	21



This Journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers.

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union (Registered Charity 1064607)
4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, England.

Email: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Editor & Secretary: DERRICK NADAL (*Nottingham*)

Treasurer: JOHN HAINES (*Gloucester*)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Man's conscience is the lamp of the Eternal, flashing into his inmost soul." (Prov. 20.27 Moffatt)

A dictionary definition of conscience may be "the moral sense which determines the difference between right and wrong". Put like that, it could be no more than the net effect of the individual's education and experience. These incite a course of action from an inward realization that it is right or inducing guilt because it is wrong. In either case it is a personal matter with no sense of feeling accountable to an external authority. Only when there is a conviction of one's own relation to the whole creation and one's own position in the Divine creative plan, does conscience become a matter between one's self and God. Even that does not completely fulfil the nature and purpose of conscience. The wise man in Proverbs brings us up against the fact that it is the means whereby God probes into the innermost recesses of our hearts and minds. It shows us up for what we really are, not to condemn but to help, to lead us away from the things that are wrong to the way of things that are right. The New English Bible does not use the word 'conscience' but translates *"the Lord shines into a man's very soul, searching out his inmost being."* The very first story in the Bible presents us with a man and woman smitten by conscience, realizing that they had severed the link which before had united them with God. Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord as He walked in the Garden in the evening, and they were afraid and hid themselves, afraid of the searching light which already was flashing into their inmost souls. Many a good person has experienced that searching light since then - Abraham when he faced the consequences of his denial of Sarai, blind Samson as he turned the heavy treadmill at Gaza and David while he listened to the stern denunciation of Nathan over the matter of Bath-sheba. But it has always been a

purifying light that dispels darkness, heals corruption and illumines the way from death to life. When Adam was created he possessed enduring, undying life, in perfect union with God but when he sinned he lost that life and became subject to death like all other terrestrial creatures. Nevertheless a little of the Divine gift remained in him and that life was conscience. That little is in all his descendants and therein resides the lifeline that will at the end enable every man who so wills to recover full unity with God. This unity is inherent in the word itself. The basic Greek word that gives us 'conscience' in the New Testament has as its underlying source the idea of a knowledge shared with another, a participation of two minds, as though each is privy to the thoughts of the other. The Father Himself is privy to our thoughts and cognizant of our actions. The voice of conscience is that which conveys to us the knowledge of His approval or disapproval, of His guidance away from the things that are wrong and towards those that are right.

(Adapted from BSM 1977)

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984: Bible Fellowship Union uses computer files to record names and addresses of all readers of the Bible Study Monthly. This is the quickest and most reliable way of keeping records. It saves many hours of work each month. The information so stored is on the label of each magazine sent out, recording BFU reference number, readers' name and address, number of copies sent and date for which renewal has been received. This information is confidential to Bible Fellowship Union and is never passed to any other organisation. If any reader objects to his/her name being recorded in this way please notify us. Such a reader would still be able to receive the Bible Study Monthly regularly.

SIMON PETER – FISHER OF MEN

13. Into the Unknown

With the close of the Jerusalem conference of AD50, recorded in Acts 15, Peter drops out of New Testament history. A few brief allusions in one or two of the Epistles afford some slight clues to his later movements but that is all. There are plenty of traditions, based on recollections handed down from generation to generation of the Early Church, but most of them are too fanciful or improbable to take seriously. The two items which do stand out are that he spent some years with the church at Antioch and after that went to Rome where he was eventually martyred. The Second and Third century writers are so unanimous on these phases of Peter's life that they are very generally accepted as factual. A sensation was caused in 1949 when the discovery of what was claimed to be the tomb and bones of Peter in a hitherto unknown crypt, deep under the basilica of St. Peters at Rome, was announced. Expert archaeological examination since then has endorsed the validity of the claim and it is now accepted in most quarters that the Apostle's last resting-place has in fact been discovered.

With the aid of this admittedly slender store of data it is possible to frame a very tentative outline of Peter's probable activities during the last twenty years of his life. Nothing definite can be claimed, but the outline is at least consistent with what is known and with what could be expected of a man of Peter's character and calibre. From the Day of Pentecost to the conference at Jerusalem, Acts 2 to Acts 15, was a period of seventeen years. During the whole of that time Peter had laboured tirelessly and zealously to build up the church in Judea, Samaria and Galilee. He had worked virtually entirely inside the Jewish community whilst Paul had been travelling the wider world taking the Gospel to the Jews of the Dispersion and the Gentiles. Now the Jewish-Christian churches in Jewry were well organized and ably led. James the Just was leader of the central church at Jerusalem and had many efficient helpers. Some of the original twelve apostles and others were beginning to make their way into distant lands in the discharge of their mission – Thomas to Parthia and India, Andrew to Armenia, Mark to Egypt, and so on. The active mind of Peter must have been questing for a sphere of service offering more

scope for his energies than was now afforded him in Judea.

The first move appears to have been to Antioch. Paul's reference in Gal. 2.11-14 to a difference he had with Peter at Antioch concerning the latter's alleged 'separation' could only have taken place in AD 54, four years after the Jerusalem conference. Paul was with his home church at Antioch for about six months in that year, between his second and third missionary journeys, and after that he never returned to Antioch. It could be inferred therefore that Peter spent the next few years as leader of the Antioch church. There might have been a real need for his service. Not only Paul, but Barnabas, Silas, Lucius and possibly others of the church presbyters had all gone off on extended missionary tours.

The next clue to the Apostle's movements is afforded by his First Epistle, written from Rome a decade later and addressed to "*the strangers*" (a term for Jews living in Gentile lands) "*scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*" (1 Pet. 1.1). These provinces were adjacent one to another in what is now modern Turkey, and some of them were areas into which the Apostle Paul never penetrated. The inference is obvious that Peter wrote to these particular brethren because he himself had been the means of their conversion and that he had undertaken an extensive missionary journey in these lands similar to those conducted by Paul farther west. This would account for Peter's writing to them later on in life when he realised that his own end was approaching and he could not expect to see them again in the flesh. It is certainly a fact that Christianity was very strong in these provinces at a very early date, especially in Bithynia where Luke is reputed to have ended his days twenty years after Paul's death. It is difficult to account for this fact except on the supposition that they were evangelised by Peter. Antioch was the great missionary church of the times. Antioch had sent Paul and others on many such journeys. It is quite in keeping to think that after Peter had spent say three or four years at Antioch he too, with the blessing of that church, should set out on this enterprise, the result of which was the establishment of so many Christian communities in

these five provinces. On the basis of the time taken by Paul's similar journeys, this tour by Peter would have occupied at least three years. It would in such case have extended over the years round about 58 to 60, so that Peter could have returned to Antioch at about the same time that Paul, as a prisoner, was being sent by Porcius Festus to Rome to stand trial before Caesar the first time.

This brings us to the most difficult and most debatable period of Peter's life, his residence and martyrdom at Rome. The accounts and statements of so many Early Church writers are so contradictory and confused that it is very difficult to create a consistent sequence of events from them. The time of his arrival is indeterminate over a period of about six years and so is the time of his death. Rather than attempt the hopeless task of sifting fact from fiction, probabilities from improbabilities, in this mass of tradition and legend, it is perhaps better to construct a feasible narrative from the few hints and allusions found in the New Testament. In doing so we must take into full account the known characteristics of the leading figures in the story and how they could be expected to act in the prevalent situation.

One significant point does present itself. There is no indication or inference anywhere in the New Testament that Peter and Paul were present in Rome simultaneously. In fact the evidence is to the contrary. The Book of Acts closes with Paul's time in Rome ending in AD 63 after which he left Rome. If Peter had been present at any time during the two years when Paul was awaiting trial, living "*in his own hired house and receiving all who came in unto him*" (Acts 28.30) it is most likely that he would have been mentioned. This could have been either by Luke in the historical account or by Paul in one of the many letters dating from this time in which he sends greetings from his fellow brethren. Luke, Mark, Timothy, Aristarchus, Demas, Onesiphorus, Epaphras, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, all visited the Apostle during that two years and all are mentioned, some several times. Had Peter been present with them it is certain that he too would have been mentioned. It must be taken therefore that Peter arrived in Rome after AD 63, when Paul had already left Rome on the unrecorded journeys which culminated in his arrest at Troas five years later, and his return to Rome for his second trial.

Paul was, in all probability, condemned and executed in the spring of AD 68 – certainly not

later, for it was in the reign of Nero and Nero died in June of that year. The trial would be within a few months of his arrival and he probably arrived in Rome in late AD 67, alone except for Luke. Here again it is certain that Peter was no longer there. Writing his last letter to Timothy, then at Ephesus, after the first indecisive hearing, Paul says "*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me*" (2 Tim. 4.16). Can it be imagined that if Peter was then in the city, he who in time past had defied the rulers of his own country to do their worst, would not have rallied to the support of his fellow-Apostle?

The native Christians of Rome, who had so recently endured the horrors of the Neronian persecution of AD 64 following the Great Fire of Rome, might perhaps be excused for not wishing to be involved in the trial of Paul, but not so one of Peter's calibre. Moreover, on the authority of Peter's First Epistle, both Mark and Silas were with Peter in Rome. Would anything have kept Silas, that stalwart companion and fellow-traveller of Paul in bygone day, from standing by his old friend, if he was in fact still in the city? And on the strength of 2 Tim. 4.11, at the time of Paul's trial Mark was away in Ephesus and not in Rome at all. The logical inference is that Peter arrived in Rome after Paul left the city in AD 63 and was martyred before Paul was brought back in AD 67/68 for his own trial and death. Silas had already gone, bearing Peter's First Epistle to the churches in Asia, and Mark would obviously go immediately after Peter's death, so that when Paul arrived there were none of his old friends in the city. That is what all relevant Scripture allusions seem to indicate.

On this basis events begin to fall into place. If, after his return from his missionary journey into the Asiatic provinces, Peter spent a few more years as the leading presbyter at Antioch, which is what the traditions insist, one comes to AD 64, when Nero instigated the first and most terrible of all persecutions. The Church at Rome was decimated and most of its leaders martyred. What more natural than that Peter, fired by his ever-present burning zeal, upon receiving the news should decide to proceed to Rome himself to help his suffering brethren? He would probably arrive as the persecution was ending. Although terrible, it lasted less than six months and was virtually over by the end of AD 64. Peter would find much to do in re-organising and encouraging the scattered

remnants of the Church and he took Silas with him. Silas was an old stalwart of Antioch who had originally come from Jerusalem so that Peter had known him from the beginning. It is quite likely that Silas, who had accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey, had also shared Peter's missionary tour to the five provinces. He is described in Acts 15 as one who had "*hazarded his life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*"; just the kind of man Peter needed by his side. The couple were accompanied by Mark, and this is where certain scraps of history fit the picture. Mark is known to have founded the church at Alexandria in Egypt, at a much earlier time. He was at Rome for a short time during Paul's first imprisonment in AD 60/62 according to Col. 4.14 and Philemon 24. This coincides with the statement of Eusebius, the learned 4th Century church historian, who says that Annianus succeeded Mark in AD 62 as the bishop of Alexandria. After Paul's acquittal and departure from Rome with Luke and Aristarchus, Mark, as the only one left, would not be likely to stay. Moreover, Paul would want his home church at Antioch to be apprised of the turn of events, most likely, therefore, Mark was sent there for that purpose, and so was available two or three years later when Peter was ready to set out.

Thus, one day in late AD 64 or early the following year, the three friends stood on the deck of a merchant ship as it ploughed the waves of the Mediterranean, heading westward for Rome. Peter, Silas and Mark were following in the course of those other three stalwarts five years earlier, when Paul, Luke and Aristarchus stood on just such a ship bound for the same destination. What experiences lay before them they did not know, only that many of the friends Paul had made during his two years' sojourn in Rome had suffered martyrdom at the hands of the mad emperor Nero. Where Paul and his two companions were now serving they did not know either, only that Mark would have been aware of Paul's intention to carry the Gospel to the "furthest limits of the west" and that meant Spain, Gaul, Britain. None of them knew that three years later Paul would, in his turn, follow them, this time in chains, and that both Apostles would within a year of each other seal their testimony with their blood.

For the present this was hidden from their sight. The sun shone warmly and the wind filled the great sail as the ship made its way steadily towards

Rome. And Peter talked vigorously and enthusiastically of the work they must do in rallying the remaining brethren, binding up the wounds they had suffered, and encouraging them to hold fast to their faith. The prospect of persecution he probably dismissed as unimportant; he had already had many conflicts with the authorities and miraculous deliverance several times. He was now quite persuaded that he was immortal until his work was finished. It was almost certainly with intense interest and eager expectation that the Galilean fisherman set eyes upon the great city which was the capital of the world, impatient to begin his labours under the shadow of its walls. Perhaps he dreamed of a repetition of Jerusalem at Pentecost here in Rome: perhaps of another missionary Church like Antioch.

It was not so to be. About three years at the most seems to have been the limit of his service for the scattered brethren in Rome. Assuming that he commenced his work there in AD65, he must have written his First Epistle a year or so later and dispatched it by Silas to the Asiatic brethren to whom it was addressed. That left only Mark with him (1 Pet. 5.13). That the shadow of persecution was over the church is evident from his use of the symbolic term "Babylon" for Rome when he said in the same verse "*the church that is at Babylon salutes you*". If the letter fell into the authorities' hands before Silas got clear away from Rome there would be nothing to incriminate the writer or his brethren. Peter must have known, though, that he was a marked man, and in that knowledge wrote his Second Epistle very soon after the First. From the Second Century onwards there have been doubts as to whether this Second Epistle really was from Peter's own pen, but many of the arguments used to discredit its authenticity do not seem to take into proper consideration the circumstances of the time. If Peter did in fact write this Epistle, it must have been within a few months of his death, which he realised was imminent. That is definitely stated in 2 Peter 1.14-15. It would certainly have been written as his last message to all believers everywhere whom he had known and among whom he had laboured, hence the absence of any special recipients as was the case with the First Epistle. His words are urgent. His strictures are severe against false teachers he knew would invade the Church after his decease. These and vivid visions of the end of the Age and Second Advent, and the exhortation

to steadfast faithfulness, are all consistent with the mental state of a man who knew his earthly course was nearly run and he could do no more. We can read this Second Epistle as the last words of a man who, like Paul, felt that he had fought a good fight, had finished the course, had kept the faith, and now was ready to be offered. Then it becomes much easier to accept it as the parting message of the Galilean Apostle to all Christians of every generation everywhere. Clement, Bishop of Rome in succession to Peter, appears to allude to several passages in this Second Epistle in his own "Epistle to the Corinthians" which was written at some time between AD 70 and 90, and this gives ground for thinking that it must have existed at this time.

If then Peter did write this Epistle, he would obviously entrust it to Mark to convey to Antioch or Ephesus immediately after the Apostle's death. Perhaps a copy was made for the use of the Church in Rome for they stood in need of the exhortation and encouragement it contained. Tertullian says that Peter ordained Clement to succeed him as leader of the Church. There is some confusion in the traditions here for Eusebius records that the first Bishop was Linus and Clement came third. The conclusion which has found most favour is that at the beginning there was a Latin Church and a Jewish Church in Rome. Clement became the first Bishop of the Jewish Church after Peter's death, and Linus, known to Paul, (2 Tim. 4.21), followed by Anencletus bishop of the Latin Church. Upon the death of Anencletus in AD 93, Clement became the accepted leader of both churches and from then dates the regular succession of the bishops of Rome.

Then the darkness closed in. There was no general persecution of the Church in AD 67 but because Christianity was now an illegal religion prominent leaders were liable to be arrested and executed whilst the general mass of believers were

left alone. That was probably how Peter came to suffer martyrdom although Linus and Clement and others of the Roman Church escaped unscathed. The general impression of the early historians is that Peter died a year before Paul. That means he came to his end in early AD 67, Mark thereupon left Rome, and Paul, a prisoner, arrived about a year later for his own trial and condemnation. Writing to Timothy his Second Epistle. Paul asked Timothy to try and reach Rome speedily and to bring Mark with him. He must have learned of Mark's whereabouts from the Roman brethren, who seem to have had access to Paul to the end. So Paul arrived in Rome too late to see Peter.

At last, the stalwart Galilean came to the end of the way. Most of the colourful legends associated with his death, especially that of his being crucified upside down, are fairly certain to be inventions and the elaboration of later ages. That he suffered death by crucifixion is highly probable, but nothing is really definite. All that is known for certain is that after thirty-seven years of zealous and faithful service for the Master he loved, Simon Peter, fisher of men, laid down his task and resigned his turbulent spirit into the care of his Lord. It had been marred at times by some very human weaknesses and failings but stamped all along with the impress of a personality of strong faith and fixed determination. It was the power of the risen Christ that he preached and in the power of the risen Christ that he conquered.

"And this voice which came from heaven we heard; when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn". (2 Peter 1.18, 19)

*The End
AOH*

Speaking of ancient Babylon, which was a prototype of this modern world, the Lord through Isaiah said caustically, *"Your wisdom is betrayed you, omniscient as you were, and you said to yourself 'I am, and who but I?' Therefore evil will come upon you and befall you, and you will not be able to charm it away. Ruin all unforeseen shall come suddenly upon you. So much for your magicians, with whom you have trafficked all your life. They have stumbled off, each his own way and there is no one to save you."* (Isa. 47.10-15) Is

modern Babylon heading in the same direction?

"One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendour of your majesty, And on your wondrous works, I will mediate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness."

(Psalm 145.4-7 NRSV)

UNITY

Part 1

*A discourse on our
oneness in Christ*

"Through faith you are all sons of God in union with Christ Jesus. Baptised into union with him, you have all put on Christ as a garment. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus. But if you thus belong to Christ, you are the issue of Abraham, and so heirs by promise." (Galatians 3.26-29)

Christian unity is something that is repeatedly stressed throughout the scriptures, and no where more so than in relation to the Body of Christ. The lovely passage from the message sent by Paul to the Galatian church tells us that when we were baptised into Christ we received and acknowledged Him as our Saviour. Baptism is, by our immersion in water, the outward sign of the consecration we've made of our lives to God. It is a public declaration of our faith in the Gospel, which He delivered to us through His Son and a demonstration of our belief in the saving power of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. It is not just a physical cleansing but a spiritual cleansing of our whole mind and life. As Peter tells us; *"Baptism is not the washing away of bodily pollution. but the appeal made to God by a good conscience; and it brings salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 3.21) while Paul asks; *"Have you forgotten that when we were baptised into union with Christ Jesus we were baptised into His death? By baptism we were buried with Him, and lay dead, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendour of the Father, so also we might set our feet upon the new path of life. For if we have become incorporate with Him in a death like his, we shall also be one with him in a resurrection like his."* (Romans 6.3-5)

The whole idea and effectiveness of baptism depends on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's by our belief in our risen Lord that we are cleansed. It's to Him that we pledge ourselves and our life, and from Him that we get the strength to keep that pledge. In consecrating ourselves to Him we took to ourselves His sentiments, His opinions, and His characteristics: in fact we are trying so hard to be like Him that Paul says, we have clothed ourselves in Him. What's more it doesn't make any difference whether we are Jew or Gentile, slave or freeman, man or woman, everyone is saved in the same way. Everyone in the Church is entitled to the same

privileges. There's no favouritism on account of blood or birth or beauty. Whatever our birth or rank, whatever our nationality, colour or complexion, under the Gospel we're all on one level. So as Paul told the Ephesian church; *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in him before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood; the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding and he made known to us the mystery of His will according to his good pleasure which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment, to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, which is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his Glory".* (Ephesians 1.3-14)

In the Ephesian letter the apostle gives a shout of praise to our Heavenly Father for all the blessings He has given to us, and exalts the oneness, the unity and the grandeur of the Body of Christ, and we can see from the passage that they weren't chance occurrences but were given of intention and by design. What makes them even more valuable and special is that it's quite clear that it isn't a recent plan or an after-thought but has always been a part of our Heavenly Fathers' eternal design. Paul tells us that God had chosen us before the foundation of the world, before this earth on which we live had even been started to be formed.

This was not as individuals of course, although in His fore knowledge our Heavenly Father knows everyone who will be His heirs. We have been chosen as a group, a body of faithful ones who have been *"taken out for his name,"* to be *"conformed to the image of His Son"*. Thus we are to be partakers of the divine nature and fellow heirs with Christ Jesus, priests in the Millennial Kingdom for the establishment of universal righteousness and peace. As Peter tells us; *"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to GOD, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2.9)

And just so that we don't feel any pride at being a part of that very special group, which God has chosen, we're told that; *"Not many of you were rich by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before Him."* (1 Corinthians 1.26-29). Our Heavenly Father has chosen us for special blessings which only He can give and which are only to be had by those who fully respond to the Heavenly calling, which is made to many, but only accepted by a comparative few. However, just saying that we accept the call isn't enough. We have to do our part so that; *"we may be found in Him, not having our own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that we may know Him and the power of his resurrection"* (Philippians 3.9-10). We've been chosen to be different from and set apart from all others. This difference isn't one that takes us out of the world, but which makes us different in the world. We're citizens of Heaven who, for the brief span of life that is left to us, are compelled to live in an alien country. It is a country whose laws we must obey even though our heart is in Heaven. We are not to shut ourselves away in isolation: not for us the cloistered quiet and seclusion of the monastery. We're to stay in the world without being of the world. But as we do, are we letting our light shine so that our friends, neighbours and work mates can recognize us for what we are?

Because our minds are on higher things, rather than on the state of the stock market or the latest 'soap', do you sense a lack of interest, by these

people, in what we have to say? Have you noticed that the world turns its 'cold shoulder' to us? If you have, then you know that the Spirit of God is bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

So we haven't just got to be respectable. Our aim must be to live according to the perfect example set for us by our Lord and Saviour rather than according to the accepted morality of the world, *"because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered; he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly"* (1 Peter 2.21-23).

In doing this we will have to endure conditions of severe trial, of faith, of obedience and the sacrifice of earthly privileges, even being prepared to give our lives for our faith if necessary. So the point Peter is making is that; *"it is God's will that your good lives should silence those who make foolish accusations against you. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you"* (1 Peter 2.15 and 20). It is by individually overcoming these trials that we'll be found worthy to be a part of that predestined group and receive all the blessings and benefits which were fore-ordained by God for this body of faithful ones.

We're told that we must be blameless. The Greek word, which has been translated blameless, is *amomos* and it's a sacrificial word. Any animal, which was offered in sacrifice to God, had to be a perfect specimen. It was carefully inspected, before being offered, to make sure it was without blemish and it would be rejected if any fault was found. So this word blameless carries the thought of our lives being an offering to God; an offering that must be without blemish. It means that we have a standard of perfection set before us at which we must aim. Although we can't be perfect in our own strength but only by the grace of our Heavenly Father, we shouldn't think in terms of human worldly standards but only of how our lives should be lived if we're to be pleasing to Him.

The first chapter of Ephesians tells us that; *"In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will"* (Ephesians 1.4-5). Now we're told that predestination is the effective exercise of

the will of God, by which things before determined by Him are brought to pass. It enforces upon us the essential truth that salvation is entirely of grace. That no one can either complain if he is passed over, or boast about himself if he is saved; and that it illustrates the riches of God's free grace and His just displeasure with sin.

It was love for us that prompted our Heavenly Father to predestinate the Church, the body of Christ, and it's one of the highest expressions of His love that ordained, "*before the beginning of time*," (Titus 1.2) that the members of that body should have immortality. We have no claim on predestination, because no-one has any merit of his own, neither do we deserve it. But in His love for mankind God determined, before the world was ever made, that He was going to "*take out a people for His Name*," and that He would do so by offering the opportunity of being adopted by Him as His children to all who would accept, through their belief in the saving grace of the death and resurrection of His Son.

This figure of adoption gives us a beautiful picture of what God, in His love, has done for us. Under Roman law a father had complete control over the life of a son. This power even gave the father the legal right of life and death over his son, and that power continued as long as the father lived, even if the son rose to one of the highest positions in the realm. Therefore it was quite a serious step for a boy to be adopted and taken out of the authority of one father and given into the power of another. However, when the legal stages of such an adoption were complete, the boy had all the rights of a natural son in his new family and all the rights that he had in his old family were abolished. He was in effect a new person, even to the extent that any debts or obligations connected with his old life and his old family were cancelled.

Now the picture that Paul paints for us is that we were in the complete power of sin, in the power of the prince of this world just as a son was in the power of his earthly father. God in His love for us through the sacrifice of Jesus and by adopting us has taken us out of that evil power, into His own family and into His loving care and authority. Thus, by adopting us, He has cancelled all of our past, – all our sins and made us new creatures in Christ; "*Who have been chosen according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood*." (1 Peter 1.2)

The passage, from Ephesians closes by telling us that we have been marked by our Heavenly Father with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Paul sent a similar message to the Corinthian church telling them that God had; "*set his seal on us, and put his spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*" (2 Corinthians 1.22). Paul is telling us about two things here. First, he says we're sealed. A seal was put on an article to show who owned it, and we bear God's seal. Then he talks about what the King James version calls the "*earnest of the Spirit*". The Greek word is *arrabon* and it is really a business word meaning the payment of a first instalment as a guarantee that the balance will be paid on completion of the contract. What Paul is saying is that in putting His seal on us God is showing that we belong to Him. By giving us the Holy Spirit to help us live as we ought, He is giving us the first instalment towards a Heavenly life as a guarantee that, in due time, the fullness of that life will be opened to us. In human terms it's Jehovah's token and pledge that, for us, there are greater things to come.

RJH

Neither in Egypt nor in Babylonia has any beginning of civilisation been found. As far back as archaeology can take us, man is already civilised, building cities and temples, carving hard stone into artistic form, and even employing a system of picture writing. Of Egypt it may be said, the older the country the more perfect it is found to be. The fact is a very remarkable one, in view of modern theories of development and of the evolution of civilisation out of barbarism.

Whatever may be the reason, such theories are not borne out of the discoveries of archaeology. Instead of the progress we should expect, we find retrogression and decay; where we look for the rude beginnings of art, we find an advanced society and artistic perfection. Is it possible that the Biblical view is right after all, and that civilised man has been civilised from the outset?

Dr R Bell Dawson, FRS
(September 1961)

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

12. High Treason

Two years had passed since Absalom returned from Geshur. He was now reconciled to David and so far as the king was concerned the past was forgotten. At Joab's instigation, Absalom had appeared before the king, received full forgiveness and allowed to resume his former place at court. It is almost certain that David looked upon Absalom as the one to follow him as king. Solomon would be about eight years of age but it is not likely that David was at this time thinking of him as his successor. The original promise retailed to him by Nathan (2. Sam. 7.12-15) was that one of his sons would build the Temple after his own death without stipulating which one it would be. It was only towards the close of his reign that Solomon's name became coupled with the promise. So at the moment it would seem that David was resting content in the feeling that the succession was assured in the person of Absalom. He, at fifty-eight years of age, could look forward to a reasonable term of years of peace and tranquillity as king over the nation before his time should come. But there was to be no peace and tranquillity for David.

Absalom, at twenty-seven years of age, was not taking kindly to the idea of waiting perhaps another twenty years before succeeding to the throne. His history to date shows him to be headstrong, assertive and ruthless. He was only half Israelite. His Amorite blood through his mother had evidently infused something of the warlike qualities of the invincible Geshurites into his nature and he was thirsting for action. Maybe David had looked speculatively at the young boy, Solomon, son of his beloved Bathsheba, and Absalom had intercepted the glance. He had already disposed of one rival for the throne, Amnon; he was not going to risk the appearance of another as this lad grew up to maturity. So once again there was scheming and plotting in the political sphere of David's kingdom.

The conspiracy was carefully planned and very circumspect at first. Absalom surrounded himself with a retinue of chariots and men, calculated to impress the people with his importance and splendour. He probably spent some time driving around Jerusalem and the adjacent countryside until the people became thoroughly accustomed to him and knew him better than any other of the king's sons. Then he formed the habit of stationing

himself by the outer entrance to the royal court at the times appointed for litigants and complainants to seek audience of the king for the redress of their wrongs, and intercept them as they passed in, to ascertain the nature of their troubles. Irrespective of the apparent justice or otherwise of the man's case, Absalom would say sympathetically "*See, your matters are good and right, but there is no one deputed of the king to hear you.*" Then, he would lift his eyes to heaven and remark piously "*O that I were made judge in Israel, that every man that has any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice.*" Thus did he foster the impression that he was much more concerned with the welfare of the populace than was his father, and in consequence, says the historian, "*Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*"

It might well be that there was some substance in Absalom's claim. David could well have been losing interest in the day-to-day affairs of his people, and the administration of justice in petty affairs becoming increasingly neglected or delegated to negligent minor officials. David was always more a man of war than a man of peace and his almost continual pre-occupation with military affairs, added to his own domestic troubles, might have led him to relegate other matters to the background. The eventual outcome of this particular series of events shows that he had lost much of the earlier enthusiastic allegiance of the people. Absalom may well have judged rightly that this was the time to act and so he commenced by ingratiating himself with the people at large.

So passed four years during which Absalom insinuated himself into the hearts of Israel (2 Sam. 15.7). The AV says "forty years" but this is a palpable error; forty years from this point would have set the event in the middle of the reign of Solomon. The Syriac, Arabic and Josephus all give four but the Septuagint has forty so the error must be of very old standing in the Hebrew manuscripts. It is likely that the original text was *arba*, four, a singular noun, and that by mistake a copyist changed this to the plural form, *arbaim*, which means forty. Most modern translations now give four. It would seem that Absalom was in no hurry: he intended the groundwork to be well and truly laid. David, apparently, was quite unsuspecting,

and feeling that his reconciliation with his son had cleared the way for the future, with no more wars in prospect, he probably congratulated himself that life would from then on be serene and peaceful.

At the end of the four years Absalom made his bid. He first went to his father with a plausible tale of a vow he had made while exiled in Geshur to the effect that if the Lord brought him back to Jerusalem he would serve the Lord and would ratify his vow in Hebron. This was sacred as the burial place of Abraham and the patriarchs, and where the kingdom of David was first instituted. Now he wanted permission to go to Hebron and there make formal acknowledgement of his conversion before the Lord.

David was, apparently, pleased. It would seem that Absalom had not heretofore made any profession of allegiance to the God of Israel; his alien descent was probably partly accountable for this but there does seem to have been some lack on David's part in the early training of his sons. But he now assented, very readily, and Absalom went out from his presence well satisfied with progress so far. David was blissfully unaware that he was being grossly deceived for the second time by his turbulent son.

The conspiracy had been well organized. Whilst Absalom was on his way to Hebron twenty miles away; messengers were speeding to the northern ten tribes telling them to accept and declare Absalom as king in place of his father, so soon as they heard the trumpets sound. It is plain that he had supporters posted in every part of the country waiting. Directly he arrived in Hebron the trumpeters there sounded their trumpets and the peal was taken up by one and another until it reached the most northerly bounds of the kingdom. The bulk of support for Absalom was clearly among the ten tribes, previously supporters of Saul. The cleavage between the ten tribes and the two, Judah and Benjamin which became a reality at the death of Solomon, fifty years later, was already in evidence now during the latter part of David's reign. His hold on the people was not so strong as is often supposed. Now a considerable proportion of the population was prepared to follow Absalom; *"the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom"* (15.12).

Too late, David found out what was going on and realised that he had lost the allegiance of his people. It must have been a bitter moment. All that

he had suffered and endured and achieved since his youth was gone as it were in a moment. In the past his enemies had been aliens of other races and he had gone out against them with the sword, and with the sword he had conquered them and slain them. Now his enemy was his own son; he could not lift his sword against his own son.

Absalom, he knew, would soon be coming to Jerusalem to assert his rulership, and the people in large measure were behind him. There was only one course open if he was to avoid open conflict; an ignominious flight out of the country without delay, thus leaving the field clear for the usurper.

The pitiful journey of David with his principal officers of State, his palace retinue and a considerable body of loyal warriors is strangely out of accord with the known martial character and strategic skill of Israel's most famous warrior king. They crossed the Jordan and went on sixty miles to Mahanaim in Gilead, where he would be out of the immediate reach of his rebellious son. This part of the narrative, as told in 2 Samuel 15-17, has all the signs of panic in the face of an overpowering threat. There is an anxious desire to get away from the enemy at any cost irrespective of the consequences for those left behind. This is the first occasion in David's reign when he is depicted retreating before the enemy. The contrast is so great that one is compelled to look below the surface of the account to discern the underlying motive. It could not be cowardice; it could not be lack of confidence in his own ability to hold his own and gain the victory if it came to a fight; David's whole past history militates against that conclusion. David's flight to Mahanaim must have been dictated by some other vital consideration.

Did his mind, at this crisis in his career, go back to the early days of his flight from Saul, and his rigid refusal to accept the opportunities he had to encompass Saul's death, insisting that the Lord would give him the kingdom in his own due time? Did he feel that the battle was not his, but the Lord's, and he would do well to remove himself out of the land in peace and wait for the Lord to intervene in His own way? As he left the city behind him on his way to the Jordan he did say to Zadok the priest (15.25). *"If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord he will bring me again, and show me both it (the city) and his habitation"*. It does look as though David left the city, not through fear, but in faith that the Lord would direct the

issue and shape his future. It might well be that David was now accepting these successive disasters in his life as just retribution for his crime of the past and was saying, as did Joab some years before him, *"May the Lord do what seems good to him"*. He must have reflected, grimly, as he entered the little town of Mahanaim in Gilead, where he and his were to find refuge, that this was the place where Saul's son Ish-bosheth had set up court to keep out of the reach of David some thirty years before. Now it was David who was the fugitive, awaiting his Lord's good pleasure. In the meantime Absalom had entered Jerusalem and declared himself king, accompanied by Ahithophel the Gilonite. On the surface this seems strange. Ahithophel was David's chief counsellor, a sort of "Prime Minister" to the nation, high in office and highly esteemed. One would have thought that he, like all the other Ministers of State, would have accompanied David into exile, but here, without explanation, he is revealed as siding with Absalom. A comparison of various scattered texts in Samuel and Chronicles yields the clue. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. His son Eliam, her father, was one of the stalwarts who had endured the wilderness hardships with David, as had Uriah, in the days of Saul's enmity. It looks very much as though Ahithophel ended his friendship with David over the affair with his granddaughter and espoused the cause of Absalom. As the narrative unfolds it is clear that he intended the death of David. It is indicated in 16.23 that his advice, both in the days of David and now of Absalom was so highly regarded that it was *"as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God"*. Absalom was probably congratulating himself upon obtaining such a useful adherent to his cause.

There was another apparent convert, Hushai the Archite, another close friend of David, who suddenly appeared at Jerusalem, professing allegiance. *"God save the king; God save the king"* he exclaimed as he came before him. Absalom was more than a little suspicious of this one; he had not the same excuse for breaking with David as had Ahithophel, and he too had been high in honour and a close adviser of the king. *"Is this your loyalty to your friend?"* he queried. *"Why did you not go with your friend?"* "No" responded Hushai *"but the one whom the Lord and this people and all the Israelites have chosen, his I will be and with him remain ... Just as I have served your father, so I will*

serve you." Absalom was satisfied; he would not have been so satisfied had he known that Hushai was professing allegiance in order to acquire details of Absalom's intentions and movements so that he could pass them on to David.

So far, so good. Absalom was in possession of the palace at Jerusalem and surrounded by an appreciable company of supporters. But an element of uncertainty seems to have pervaded the assembly. He, and they, were not quite sure what to do next. The would-be king was dubious as to his next move. He appealed to Ahithophel for advice, and that worthy, an experienced politician thirsting for personal revenge, knew just what the first move ought to be so that an irreparable breach between Absalom and his father might be created. He knew that in his flight, David had left behind his ten concubines to "keep the house", and here they were in the palace. *"Go in to your father's concubines, the ones he has left to look after the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father; and the hands of all that are with you will be strengthened"*. So they erected an open pavilion on the roof of the palace in the sight of all Israel, and David, when he heard of the deed, must have remembered the prediction of Nathan in 12.11 and realised that the judgments of the Lord were not finished yet.

But this was only part of Ahithophel's revenge. He now had the ear of Absalom and outlined the scheme he had formulated to give himself the satisfaction of slaying David. *"Let me choose and take twelve thousand men"* he suggested *"and I will pursue after David tonight and come upon him when he is weary and weak. I will smite the king only and bring back all the people who are with him so that your kingship may be established without loss of any other life"*. What fiendish plot he had devised to get access to David and assassinate him before anyone could interfere no one knows, but he evidently felt he could do it and so satisfy his personal enmity over the matter of Bath-sheba.

The plot won general approval, but Absalom was still irresolute. The plan seemed too simple to be workable. He knew his father; he was not at all sure that it would succeed. *"Call Hushai the Archite"* he ordered *"and let us hear what he has to say"*. So Hushai came in and listened impassively while the plan was outlined. He pretended to be thinking deeply, while all present waited in silence. At last, with a friendly glance at Ahithophel, he

spoke. *"The counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time"*. What he meant by the last few words was that while Ahithophel's advice was normally wise and beyond reproach, in this particular instance his judgment was at fault; he had not given due weight to several important considerations. "You know your father and his men" he said to Absalom "that they are mighty in battle, and furious at being exiled out of their land. As soon as there is a conflict some of your men will be slain and immediately the word will go round that there is a slaughter among the men that follow Absalom. With the people's knowledge of your father's prowess there will be a weakening of their loyalty to you". He paused and looked round the circle of faces, listening intently. He resumed "My advice is that you do not act precipitately, but that you gather together all the fighting men in Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, an invincible host, and that you then lead the army in your own person. So you will overwhelm him and his followers by sheer force of numbers, and of him and all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one".

Hushai looked around him again and saw in the eyes of his hearers what he wanted to see and expected to see. He knew that the supporters of Absalom were mainly from the ten tribes of the north while those who had accompanied David in his flight were principally of his own tribe, Judah. These men surrounding Absalom were not at all keen upon an outcome that would bring men of Judah back to Jerusalem to compete for places of favour around the new king's person. Much better to adopt Hushai's suggestion of eliminating them and ending the Judean influence in the royal court. The antipathy even then existing between the Ten Tribes and the Two rendered the idea of a massive showdown an appealing one. Hushai's plan was vociferously endorsed by Absalom and his supporters as the better of the two. Then Hushai turned aside that no one might perceive the gleam of triumph in his eyes. He knew, none better, that there could be only one end to a battle led on one side by the hardened campaigner, David, and on the other by an untried fledgling like Absalom.

Ahithophel knew that also. The narrative (17.23) says that when he saw that his advice was not to be followed, he saddled his ass, went home to his own town, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself. He was not going to be there when David returned in triumph. His ploy had failed, and

he knew it.

Hushai left the palace so soon as he could without arousing suspicion, for there was much to be done. David and his company had not yet crossed the Jordan on their way to Mahanaim. For the present they were safe while Absalom sent to collect all the fighting men of Israel; that much had been attained by Hushai in effecting the acceptance of his suggestion, but David now had to be advised of progress. Hushai went to Zadok and Abiathar, the twin High Priests, who, themselves loyal to David, had remained in the city under cover of discharging their sacred office. They passed the message to their young sons, and they in turn set out to find David and tell him the outcome of Hushai's work and what to expect from Absalom. By the following morning David and his forces were across Jordan and well on the way to Mahanaim, which they must have reached after two or three days' journeying. Upon arrival he immediately began to dispense his men for the ensuing battle. It would seem that his apparent former willingness to leave the outcome in the Lord's hands had rather quickly evaporated when faced with his enemies. Quite likely his commander-in-chief Joab pressed him into it. Joab knew only one language, the language of armed combat, and as a man of Judah himself, he was David's nephew, he was not going to allow men of Israel to gain the ascendancy.

Absalom and his army crossed Jordan into Gilead and before long battle was joined. The issue was not long in doubt. David's hardened veterans made short work of their northern countrymen and it was not long before the latter were in full flight. David had foreseen the outcome and he had ordered Joab and his other leaders to take care that Absalom himself should come to no harm. Despite his son's treason and designs against his own life, he still loved him and was in the mood to forgive him all that he had done. But Absalom, riding a mule in frantic flight to get away, was caught in some way by his head, or perhaps by his luxurious long hair, in the boughs of a great tree in the forest, and hung there, unable to free himself. Joab, apprised of the fact, and in crass defiance of the king's wishes, took some of his men and killed Absalom as he hung there helpless. He had no intention of risking David's soft-heartedness paving the way for perhaps a second rebellion of this nature and what he did was probably dictated

by self-interest as much as anything else. Absalom had appointed Joab's cousin Amasa to command the army in his place and he was not going to risk the loss of that position when all was over.

It now remained to acquaint David with the result of the battle and of the death of his son. David had remained at Mahanaim with one section of the force to defend the city; Joab and his men were in the plains of Gilead near Jordan twenty miles away. Two runners were sent to convey the news. The first gave his message *"Blessed be the Lord your God; who has delivered up the men who raised up their hand against my lord, the king"*. David received the welcome news with equanimity but with one overpowering anxiety. He leaned forward. *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* The runner gave an evasive reply; he knew not how to tell the king the truth, and then the second runner arrived.

"Good tidings for my lord the King, for the Lord has vindicated you this day delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you". With increasing apprehension came the question again *"Is it well with the young man Absalom?"* The runner looked round at the circle of strained faces, then again at the king, and replied in a lower tone of voice *"May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise to do you harm be like that young man"*.

At those words the king broke down. Rising from his seat, he made his way blindly through the throng towards his own room and as he went they heard his voice rising high in lamentation *"O my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom. Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

(To be continued)

AOH

Brighter than the noonday,
More brilliant than the sun,
Your face outshines all earthly light,
O incandescent One!

Purer than the snowflake,
More fragrant than the rose,
Your glory fills all beauteous things,
Yet lovelier far than those.

Dearer than all treasure,
More tender than a kiss,
Your love outlasts all earthly love
And leads to heavenly bliss.

Closer than a heartbeat,
More hushed than indrawn sigh
Your presence in my inmost soul
Suffuses me with joy.

O beauty that arrests me,
That holds me now in thrall,
I own the conquest of my heart
And make You Lord of all.

Margot King-Smith
Taken from 'The Quest'

What shall I wish thee?
Treasurers of earth?
Songs in the springtime
Pleasure and mirth?
Flowers on thy pathway
Skies ever clear
Would this ensure thee
A happy new year?

What shall I wish thee?
What can be found,
Bringing thee sunshine,
All the year round?
Where is the treasure,
Lasting and dear,
That shall ensure thee
A happy new year?

Faith that increaseth,
Walking in light,
Hope that aboundeth,
Happy and bright;
Love that is perfect,
Casting out fear;
These shall ensure thee
A happy new year!

Peace in thy Saviour,
Rest at His feet,
Smile of His countenance,
Radiant and sweet;
Joy in His presence!
Christ ever near!
This will ensure thee
A happy new year.

(BSH 434)

OUR HEAVENLY BROTHERS

Part 2

A study of the angels

This is the second of three parts of a convention discourse.

In the book of Daniel the prophet (4.13, 17, 23), angels are called "watchers" in the sense of watching or guarding. A number of texts have led some to believe that we each have a guardian angel. There are certainly enough! As an example, Acts 12 relates Peter's release from prison (12.7-11). He goes to the home of Mark, knocks on the outer door and calls to be let in. The servant girl Rhoda is so excited to hear Peter's voice that she runs in to tell everybody, overlooking to let him in. They do not believe her and say something quite remarkable (v.15), *"It is his angel."*

Our Lord also said something very interesting in Matthew 18.10, pointing out the protective duties and abilities of angels to warn men against despising the little ones in His Kingdom. *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven."* Beware! Jesus states. It is a remarkable thing to reveal, for such angels must be of the highest rank because they 'always behold the face of my Father'. The book of Kings (2 Kings 25.19) uses a similar expression when it speaks of certain ones having *"access to the king"*, being close to the King, and they must therefore be of royal rank and have a degree of familiarity which even the highest state ministers dare not assume (see John 1.51; Ps. 34.5-9; Is. 63.9).

And yet even though angels are so close to God, there were some things revealed only to man, even before angels, and hence Peter states that into these very things, *"angels long to look into"* (1 Pet. 1.12 NIV). The Greek word translated "look into" is *para-kupto* and means 'to stoop beside', stooping down in order to scrutinise and carefully examine (see also James 1:25 where the same Greek word appears). Hence Weymouth, *"Angels long to stoop and look into these things"*. The Modern Language Bible (New Berkeley Version), *"things into which the angels long to stoop and look."* Though powerful, their knowledge has limits (Matt. 24.36; Mk. 13.32). How much they come to know and what is revealed to them is only given to man with God's approval (see Rev. 7.13; 17.6; 21.9, 10; 22.1; Gal. 1.8). Certainly their messages contributed to the writing of the Bible (Gal. 3.19).

Angels are, then, deeply interested in man's salvation. The angel who brought the tidings of great joy at Jesus' birth (Lk. 2.10) clearly felt the joy himself and the song that angels sang in praise of God was the outcome of joyous hearts. God's heavenly sons have a very great love for the Son of God and many times in the book of Revelation they are seen singing praises to God and the Lamb for the salvation of man.

It is staggering to have revealed to us that not only do angels assist us but as Paul writes (Heb. 1.14) they are *"sent to minister"*. Such is their faithfulness, humility, and self effacement, they help and assist and aid and serve those on Earth who will receive immortality (Rom. 2.7; 1 Cor. 15.50-54), and who will be placed over them as may be indicated when 1 Cor. 6.3 states *"do you not know that we shall judge angels?"* That the Christian is 'in Christ' has led some to suggest this means 'above angels' (see Eph. 1.22, 23). God's faithful heavenly sons know that the promise given is that we will share in the likeness of Jesus Christ's resurrection with all the glory that entails, and yet angels are happy to help us attain this glory and immortality, that's humility (Rom. 6.5). We've served faithfully for a fraction of time, they billions of years, and not a speck of jealousy do they have. Would we be willing to have someone 'promoted' above us who has only a fraction of the experience we have gained? Would we resent it? And that is something more we know about our heavenly brothers, that they themselves do not possess immortality, they do not possess what Jesus called 'life in itself' (John 6.53), life within life as far as we know. Angelic mortality is indicated by the fact that they can die even though they are spirit creatures (Lk. 4.33, 34; Jude 6).

They are mortal in their world as we are in ours. We require oxygen, water and food to sustain our lives; so also angels must take something that God has provided from their environment, as we do, to sustain their lives. (Ps. 78.25 speaks of 'the bread of angels', manna provided by the angels for the Israelites. See 1 Kings 19.5-8; Matt. 4.11). An immortal person does not depend on the external environment for life. Immortality is 'life within itself' life from God, God-given 'self-existence'.

Angels were created, like humans, with a dependence on external means as a part of their makeup to keep them alive. Because of this, like ourselves, angels can get tired. An immortal person does not require sustenance, would not get tired, and would not need rest to recuperate. It is life on a completely different and higher plane. This is confirmed in the book of Daniel chapter 9 where Daniel prays for the release out of Babylon of his people. Verse 21 states: *"while I was speaking in prayer the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering"* (NKJ).

The two Hebrew words translated *"being caused to fly swiftly"* may also be translated *"being weary with weariness"*. The AV, like the NKJ translates Dan. 9.21 *"being caused to fly swiftly"*, which implies exertion, the note in the margin *"Heb. 'with weariness'"*, (LXX, Vg. *"being borne along speedily"*). Of the two Hebrew words, *mu'ap bi'ap*, the issue is whether the verb derives from *up* (*"to fly"*) or from *y'p* (*"to be weary"*). Most translations opt for the former whilst noting the alternative in footnotes. Perhaps this is due to the bias of translators who may not think it possible for an angel to get tired, even less exhausted. RV margin records *"being sore wearied"* according to the Masoretic Hebrew text". ASV footnote *"being sore wearied"*. NEB footnote Heb *"thoroughly wearied"*. Peake's Commentary on Daniel 9.21 and the translation *"in swift flight"* states, "a probable translation of an obscure phrase *'in great weariness'* would also be possible." Byington footnote (p. 1185, 1186) *"lit. 'being fatigued in exhaustion'"*. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible states, *"literally, 'with weariness' that is, move swiftly as one breathless and wearied out with quick running [Gesenius]."*

Gabriel was sent appearing in human form yet exhausted and weary. What caused the angel such tiredness? It was due to his exertion in the heavenly realm. A struggle was going on in the heavens for the release of Daniel and his people from the world power of Babylon. Babylon had to be overthrown and no doubt this would involve fighting the demon princes controlling Babylon, and possibly involved an attempt to prevent communication with Daniel so that Gabriel was sent in person. Angels exert themselves in their Fathers service, and toward humans, so much so that they can indeed and prob-

ably frequently do get exhausted. Despite Gabriel's tiredness he gives Daniel complicated yet vital prophetic information concerning the Messiah's appearance, the 70 weeks of year's prophecy, also recorded in Daniel chapter 9.

This conflict between angelic rulers of empires on Earth is also unveiled in chapter 10 of Daniel and tells us something further regarding angels. Dan. 10.10-13 (NRSV) *"But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees. He said to me, 'Daniel greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you.' So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. He said to me, 'Do not fear Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me twenty-one days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him here with the prince of the kingdom of Persia.'"*

Here is revealed a conflict between an angel and the spirit prince of Persia, who was probably attempting to prevent the release of the rest of the Hebrew captives. The struggle was so difficult it took the intervention of *"Michael one of the chief princes"* (v. 13) before the angel could reach Daniel, being held up for 3 weeks, 21 days, and the angel is not too proud to reveal this to Daniel. Michael intervenes, the angel was not then needed (v. 14) allowing him to go to Daniel, after which, in verse 20, this angel returns to the war in the heavenly realm.

One of God's own heavenly sons had to fight to get a message to Daniel. In this account we learn that some angels are more powerful than others, Michael here having to intervene on behalf of another angel in order to restrain a demon spirit prince opposing him. This demon prince must himself have been powerful enough to restrain an angel, but not enough to stop Michael, an archangel, 'one of the foremost princes', one amongst possibly many, and possibly a high ranking seraph. Revelation 12.7 also depicts Michael and his angels battling against evil angels.

We also know that angels have great power and strength. The psalms speak of angels as *'excelling in strength'* (Ps. 103.20; see 2 Pet. 2.11). They may appear like lightning (Matt. 28.3), and have supernatural appearance (Lk. 24.4). Demonstrating just how powerful angels are, was the fact that an angel

merely touched the socket of Jacob's thigh putting it out of joint (Gen. 32.25). Two angels restrained the men of a city in Gen. 19.1, 10, 11 and had the power to strike them with blindness. These same two angels brought destruction upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19.13, 24), and one angel single-handedly killed an army of 185,000 Assyrians (2 K. 19.35). In another account Zerah, an Ethiopian, led an enormous army of one million men plus hundreds of chariots into Judah during Asa's reign. They would have made mincemeat of Judah, yet they met with complete and miraculous defeat, and in this account not a single angel is given or takes the credit (2 Ch. 14.1, 9-15). An unknown angel protected Daniel's three companions in a superheated furnace of fire (Dan. 3.24-28; see also Dan. 6.20-22). Obviously our heavenly brothers are content to serve Almighty God without any special honours.

How unlike man who has invented awards for just about every arena in life. And how also unlike man, who often relishes the thought of punishing his fellow man and likes to deal out the judgement of life or death, and cover himself with all kinds of military honours. It cannot be easy for an angel with superior moral powers to have given out punishment. Many times they have had the unpleasant duty to execute those who also had families. The Psalms (78:49) inform us that angels were used to bring the plagues on Egypt and that had effects upon the Israelites. (See also 2 Sam. 24.14-17; 1 Chron. 21.15; Ex. 12.23; 1 Cor. 10.10; 2 Thess. 1.7, 8; Heb. 11.28). They are powerful, but who gives a thought for the angel that had to do it, knowing that there were perhaps grieving families left behind? It could not have been easy. Though they preside over enormous powers, never once in the billions of years they have faithfully served have they misused their powers. How unlike man who finds it difficult even to control the tongue! (See Acts 12.23)

The text at 2 Peter 2.11 indicates how respectful angels are of God, not becoming abusive even towards wicked ones (Jude 9; see Matt. 5.39). How difficult this may be for us! Let us imitate angels. We can get justice in courts higher than man's. If we complain let it be to God, and with compassion, not with bitterness.

The Hebrew word *elohim*, 'mighty one', is also applied to angels (see Ps. 8.5 Heb. 'god-like ones') in that they are in a class of being higher than man,

a class of mighty ones. Psalm 29.1 has the expression in Hebrew 'sons of the mighty' (Heb. *elim*; see also Ps.89:6; 103:20). The expression "sons of God" (Heb. *elohim*) are also used of angels (Job 1.6; 2.1; 38.7; Gen. 6.2, 4).

A name for God, Yahweh of Hosts, or of Armies (Heb. *tsava*) is found over 280 times in the Bible. The Hebrew word refers to a literal army or combat forces and may be used in a figurative sense (see Gen. 2.1; Deut. 4.19). The use of the plural form "armies" is appropriate, in that angelic forces are described as divisions of cherubs, seraphs, and angels (Is. 6.2, 3; 37.16; Rev. 5.11), and also as forming organised groups (see Matt. 26.53). The expression LORD of Hosts conveys the sense of power held at His command (Jer. 32.17, 18), from which we can take courage and hope in all our trials. We can take heart from recognising the majesty of Almighty God's position reflected in His control over mighty forces serving from His heavenly courts.

With regard to the number of angels, do we know how many there are? Daniel 7.10 records "*a thousand thousands keep ministering to Him, ten thousand times ten thousand stand right before Him*". 1,000 times 1,000 equals one million; 10,000 times 10,000 equals 100 million. Hebrews 12.22 speaks of myriads of angels, Deut. 33.2 and Jude 14 of 'holy myriads', Revelation 5.11 of 'myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands'. The number one thousand was almost incomprehensible, the Egyptian hieroglyphic for thousand being a man holding up his hands in the air, as if to say 'who can count?' These numbers would have a staggering effect at the time, an amount too wonderful to comprehend (the word *myriad* literally means 10,000). It is also fitting, given both their number and elevated station, that angels would be called "stars", as at Judges 5:20 and Job 38:7, and also likened to "*the army of the heavens*" as at 1 Kings 22.19 (see also Is. 14.13; Rev. 12.4).

This would refer to many millions, even billions upon billions of celestial beings attending the Most High, organised according to Paul (Col. 1.16; 2.15; Eph. 1.21; 3.9, 10; 1 Pet. 3.22) into thrones, angelic dominions, governments and authorities, all installed with various delegations of authority stationed alongside God's First and Only Begotten Son. Paul may here be giving a sequence of rank or descriptions of order, 'angels' being a member of the lowest order of a ninefold celestial hierarchy,

seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, virtues, archangels, angels (*Oxford Dictionary*), but without further information it is impossible to be exact. We cannot conceive the glory and majesty that is theirs serving in the very presence of God, the Almighty Originator and Fountain of life who delights in and radiates pure

love, mercy, and loving kindness to all in an inimitable way. The Father of the celestial lights (Jam. 1.17), radiates love which extends throughout the entire universe, not only toward the celestial beings up in heaven, but also toward God's creatures down here on Earth (Ps. 89.14; Job 36.26).

KW

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD

2. Jacob, father of the family

As Jacob trudged the two to three hundred miles from Bethel to Haran he must have had plenty of time to ponder what he was leaving behind in Canaan and wonder about the place to which he was going. His route would probably be through Damascus and Tadmor and he may have thought of grandfather Abraham on the road to Canaan as directed by God; and also Eliezer, the servant who had taken his mother to his father's home. He must also have met other travellers going to and fro on this ancient trade route. Beyond anything else that Jacob thought about as he travelled to Haran was the experience he had at Bethel during that last night in Canaan.

The Bible tells us nothing of the journey but only of Jacob's arrival at the well at Haran. Wells were meeting places and what stories this one could tell if it could speak. At Haran well, it was 'love at first sight' between Jacob and Rachel. Soon he was sitting in the ancestral homestead of Laban telling all the news about his mother and her family. Jacob's holiday month developed into years of work; his new home became his place of employment. Laban quickly noticed that his nephew was a skilled shepherd with a talent in breeding. Jacob was happy to work for the girl he so loved and time just fled by during what seems to us a protracted courtship. By our standards Laban was not a very ethical person but Jacob must have learned much about discipline from him. At last the cousins were able to marry but Laban played a very dirty trick on Jacob and the young man found himself wedded to the cousin he was not so fond of. Laban tried to smooth the matter over, promising that he would shortly arrange another wedding. This time Jacob did get the girl he loved but Rachel like Rebecca and Sarah before her, found producing a baby very difficult. As with the previous generations, Rachel was a very near relative of her husband and had very similar genetic make up. But Leah apparently

was not and readily produced a family. The record in Genesis bears the mark of truth according to what is now known of Hurrian culture of that time. Laban's trick once more brought bigamy into the family which broke God's Law yet it was an example of honest reporting. Breaking the rule was costly in the tranquility of home life, and battles raged as wives competed for Jacob's affection. Did he get more peace and quiet among his flock at 'lambing' time than he did among domestic conflicts. The children would soon have noticed that there was favouritism in the camp as there had been at Beer-sheba. But in spite of Jacob's attitude towards his two wives and their offspring, it was from Leah's children that the dominantly spiritual tribes sprang. Sadly, Leah's naming of her children reflected the conflicts and tension in the home says Kidner (1) and the grace of God is shown in the use of this unpromising material among Jacob's children.

The bargaining between uncle and nephew continued and Jacob grew rich and restless. God was with him still and indicated in a dream that the time had come for him to return to Canaan. Jacob, Leah and Rachel had a family conference, the vote was unanimous and they began to pack up their possession. Judging from the description of their entry into Canaan some time later, Jacob and family were very rich and owned a lot of animals. And so the long camel train set out for the Land of the Promise without taking leave of the great man of Haran, Laban, son of Nahor, son of Terah. Sometime later when sheep sheering was finished Jacob's disappearance was noticed. Its not very clear what the 'third day' of Genesis 31.15 means but Laban's travelling towards Canaan must have quicker than Jacob's journey with so much livestock. On the other hand Laban had to do the searching. In any event Laban hastened after his daughters and grandchildren but God intervened. He warned Laban to say nothing nasty to his son-in-law. After his un-

pleasant sharp practice towards Jacob he now expresses sadness that the whole family had been prevented from enjoying a big 'good-bye' party. It was natural that he wanted to say farewell in true eastern style. Laban accused Jacob of stealing his little domestic images. So Jacob gave him freedom to search the baggage and by a little of the family subterfuge the perpetrator of the crime, Rachel, got away with it and Laban did not get his property back. In spite of this poor reflection on the character of the favourite wife she did manage to rear a wonderful son in Joseph. It shows the danger of making comparisons about moral behaviour between then and now.

Laban dropped the quest for the household images and tried to patch up the broken relationship around the family. He and Jacob made a covenant, a solemn agreement, that neither would harm the other, or more positively, that each would promote the other's interests, as was common in those ancient covenants. Laban was trying to play the part of a good grandparent and ensure the safety and well being of his descendants. His remark about Jacob's behaviour when they were "*absent one from the other*" was more of a threat than a promise. However, after all Laban's aspersions and Jacob's hot-tempered defence, they parted good friends, calling upon God to see that the family honour and inheritance was upheld. With that Laban vanished from the story of the patriarchs.

As Jacob approached the rivers that he had to cross, with his vast retinue, to meet his brother, Jacob met 'an army' of angels. There is no explanation of this event but as Gibson (2) suggests, a study of such meetings with angels shows that they shed light on the way ahead and give courage for the hazards that would be encountered.

Jacob's troubles were not fully behind him. Were they ever? He seems to stumble from one tragedy to another. He appears rather pessimistic but he had much for which to thank his Maker. He would have been happier singing "Count your blessings". His next move was towards his old adversary, brother Esau. He had not yet crossed the River Jordan nor did he until after they had met. Esau lived on the east side of the river. But Jacob was now returning to Canaan, the Land of the Promise and he met an angel. This was God's land – then and now. Only those who recognize this fact can expect to prosper in the land that was to be called by the name that God gave to Jacob. First,

Jacob had business to attend to. He arranged his large family and servants, with all their animals to give his favourites the best protection from any attack by Esau. He need not have bothered. Esau was not such a bad fellow as Jacob and others would make out. But by whatever means did Esau know that Jacob was coming home? Bush telegraph must have been good.

When he realised that Esau was approaching with what appeared to be a small army, Jacob prayed to God. It is a remarkable prayer for it is apparent that Jacob was aware of what God had done for him. He knew that God was all powerful and ready to show His faithful love and so he need not fear really. He called upon God to redeem His promise of protection. Yet Jacob hedged his bets and sent a gift to his brother hoping to appease his wrath. Jacob had nursed his fear of his brother all those twenty and more years but Esau had not nursed a grudge. He was glad to see his brother again and was willing to show his goodwill. He too had prospered and didn't really need this wonderful gift. Would he know what to do with the animals if they were given to him?

But before the brothers met, Jacob was to have another encounter with God as he did when he left the land. He sent his whole company across the River Jabbok towards Esau's home in Edom. Then while alone on the northern side of the river, he came face to face with someone who wrestled with him until dawn. Taken at face value this is a strange incident. What was the reason or purpose behind such prolonged fighting? Why didn't the 'man' reveal who he was? Who was he that Jacob was able to 'hold his own' in the wrestling? Was this all a symbolical vision or was it real? The fact that Jacob refers to this person as 'God' need cause no particular problem since it was customary in Old Testament times to think of anyone who represented God to be as God to them. In all these incidents it is well to recall the categorical words of Jesus recorded in John 1.18.

W. H. Thomson (3), son of the well known author of the classic 'The Land and the Book', tells of an incident that he witnessed when a desperate childless Arab woman fell at the feet and clung to the ankles of an American physician and refused to relax her grasp until he used his expertise to enable her to bare a child. Thomson felt that Jacob clung to the angel's ankles in a similar manner of an oriental suppliant. It has been suggested that the

literal, physical combat was symbolical of the kind of spiritual battle that occurred in Jacob's life as he tried to discover what was right and wrong. He sought to inherit God's blessing through the covenant. He wanted to marry the beautiful girl he fell in love with. He hoped for peace and prosperity in the Land of the Promise. Such struggles are not unknown in a Christian's life.

Finally there was that change of name which was to have such lasting affects on the whole nation which sprang from his descendants. From Genesis 50.25 the family that descended from Abraham was known by Jacob's new name and were known as the people of Israel or Israelites. Today they are still known as Israelis. Jacob was given the name of Israel because it was said of him that he had "*striven with God and with humans and have prevailed.*" (Genesis 32.28). Jacob was no longer the cheat trying to get the best out of life the cheap and easy way. He had shown, in mortal combat with another, that he had courage and strength. These were qualities that his descendants would need through the centuries that were to follow. God was with him and kept him safe. God provided and gave him shelter. But knowing God was not just enjoying an easy life but developing the qualities of character from the various experiences that God plans and permits. In spite of the occasional moans of self-pity, Jacob's character was developing. Interestingly, Jacob was barely mentioned by Stephen (Acts 7) or among the men of faith in Hebrews 11.

The meeting with his brother, that he had evidently feared so much, proved to be a very amicable and rewarding occasion. The years had mellowed both men and they each had plenty of this world's wealth without jealousy of the other. Esau's genuine forgiveness and conciliation are quite remarkable. It was a pattern that Joseph and Moses were to follow. Jacob's statement that seeing Esau was like 'seeing the face of God' was quite extraordinary. He had seen angels and received Divine messages and assurances. So what was so special about seeing his brother that made him exclaim in this way? Perhaps we should note an Old Testament example of a New Testament rule that we must be reconciled to our brother before presenting our gift in worship (Matt. 5.23, 24).

There seems no guile in the older brother's offer of escort, but Jacob was somewhat uncertain and would not follow Esau to Mount Seir. So, with excuses, he turned westward to Succoth ready to

cross the River Jordan. They were to meet just once more, at the graveside of their old father.

Jacob had a 'tryst' to keep at Bethel but first the great entourage went across country to Shechem. As it forded the river and moved over the hills towards the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, it must have looked a wonderful sight with large herds of sheep, goats, camels and donkeys that needed plenty of grassland and fodder. And so they came to Shechem. Whether or not it was God's will to go there we are not told but they did not leave in a blaze of glory. They began to discover the ways of the pagan world and Jacob never forgot the violence of Levi and Simeon. Yet by the well in that place, centuries later, Jesus was to meet with a woman from Samaria. On that day he began to reverse the isolation and privilege of the children of Israel.

At last they turned and moved southward to Bethel. There God had revealed Himself in the wonderful dream of angels moving up and down a stairway. Once again the covenant was renewed, the name of Israel was established in the land that was to be called by that name. Before they could worship, there had to be a cleansing of the whole company. They had collected pagan objects and jewelry from sacked pagan towns. The images Rachel had stolen were now worthless. Jacob built an altar to the Lord and was assured that the promises to his fathers were renewed to him. Yet the visit was not without its sorrow for Deborah died there. One writer suggests that Rebekah's faithful old nurse had come specifically to tell Jacob that his mother had died. Now she too ends her days within sight of Bethel. A little further on Jacob suffered yet deeper grief when Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin. Her married life had been marred by the conflict with her sister and Jacob's favouritism toward her. Yet whatever her faults, she had borne and reared Joseph whose life brought salvation to so many.

Finally, Jacob arrived home in time to see his father and witness his departure. Esau shared his brother's bereavement. His genealogy possibly indicates that there will be no further record of him. From now the story is about Jacob as the patriarch of the family, ruler of a huge group of people, with peaks and troughs in his fortunes and spiritual development. He had travelled far since he said farewell to his parents. Now he truly came into his inheritance bestowed by birthright and blessing.

But the personal revelations of God were much more important and made clear that, like his fathers, he had a personal relationship with His Maker. That was worth more than anything else on

Earth, and provided the true meaning of 'a covenant'.
DN

(1) Kidner 'Genesis' p 161 TP

(2) Gibson Genesis St Andrews Daily Study Bible

(3) W H Thomson Life & Times of the Patriarchs

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A panorama of
the way of Christ*

3. 'I've Found a Friend'

"He that comes to me I will never turn away."
(John 6.37)

It is a great thing to have a friend we can be sure of at all times and in all circumstances. It is a hard thing to be turned away in a time of need from a once hospitable door. A sad thing to expect a welcome and find a frown a tragic thing to be betrayed by trusted hands, to be left neglected, forlorn and forgotten by those to whom we have looked with affection. Such is the fickleness of human nature that men and women are often let down and cast aside in the time of their greatest need by those to whom they had the most right to look for shelter and support. Surrounded by a sample of mixed humanity, Jesus gave His pledge of reliable friendship. This was He of whom it was written *"The same, yesterday, today and forever"*. His pledge is as good today as it was then. In moments of perplexity and despair, at times of great crisis, when there is nowhere to go and none to rely on, there is always that One ready to listen to the faintest call for help. Unseen but ever ready, the power of the Spirit draws, enfolds and strengthens the weary, stimulates faith and courage, planting in the mind the mystic wisdom which overcomes the world, the flesh and all its hazards and weakness.

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18.24). This is He who became man that He might experience the sorrows, the sufferings, the labours and the temptations of man. The Scriptures are full of invitation and promise. Here God is revealed as the Rock of strength, the Tower of man's defence. Jesus appears full of love and assurance, the sympathetic high priest, with all the gifts of healing love. From that day to this, grateful saints have sung their songs of praise and way worn pilgrims have given thanks for deliverance and victories, for every need abundantly supplied. If there are some who have no song to sing, no tale to tell, it is because they had doubts and not belief. It is because they have turned away offended or lacked the courage to reach out across the thin

dividing line between this world and God's world, to clasp the hand Divine. How much is missed, how much is lost in this life by the sceptic, the self-sufficient, the wavering and fluctuating. Yet a patient, unchanging love waits on, ready with the blessings that enrich life, adding no sorrow with them. *"Come unto me all you that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest"*, was not spoken to a few or for a generation but to all people for all time. God draws fainting bewildered humanity to this haven of His love. When the urge and pressure of the Spirit is not resisted Jesus receives, and the soul that finds its repose in the Everlasting Arms is never forsaken.

"He that believes on me has everlasting life" (John 6.47). It is common for the cynical to refer to everlasting life as "pie in the sky when you die". Jesus, in offering life to those around him, said nothing about heaven. He was talking of everyday living, of the quality of life in the place where they were. Their ancestors had eaten the manna provided as daily bread in their wilderness wanderings but it had not kept them alive. Jesus said that unless they shared His life they had no life in them. Life and love are synonymous terms. They are not something you get "in the sky when you die", they are something we have or have not, here and now. Looking around Him, Jesus saw a weary, overburdened, confused gathering of people whose span of years was short. He offered the weary rest and the heavy-laden a lighter yoke. He offered the bread and water of life to a dying people, knowing Himself to be the channel of that eternal energy which is the gift of God to those who believe on Him and on Jesus Christ whom He sent into the world as an exact resemblance of Himself. Life eternal is to know God and He is love. Life, light and love are so inextricably mingled together they cannot be separated. The Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Love that passes knowledge, are the very substance and essence of God and His anointed Son. It is their very nature, and those who at their

invitation believe and accept, share this nature; they become absorbed into the light, the love and the life. He that loves, dwells in God. He shares a new life. A new energy throbs through his whole being. Even when the life of the flesh ceases, the treasure of life cannot be lost but is renewed according to promise in a fairer and better form. All rests on belief, not on scientific theories, religious theologies or eastern mysticism. It is belief in Jesus Christ as the only name, the only way, the only source known in heaven or on earth or given by God, through which abundant, age-lasting life can be obtained. Apart from this the only life known to man is short, full of troubles and perplexities. The life of God has its own sustaining riches which compose those spiritual elements of wisdom, mercy, peace, purity, gentleness and all the moral virtues and principles which are diamond bright and indestructible. Without these and without faith, life lived in idle indulgence, for the pleasures of the moment, delighting in all that is avaricious and superficial can be cut shorter. It is a shallow, unsatisfactory existence that in moments of sanity fill its most ardent pursuers with discontent. To know the joys of loving and giving, to feel within the uplifting surge of energy, confidence, vision, purpose, peace and repose amid the world's noisy conflicts, is to have that life which Jesus offered freely to those who believed in His word and person.

At the conclusion of this serious discourse on belief, life and the true work of the mind as opposed to those of ritual or work, many turned away. Bound by sect and ceremony, liking only outward observances of faith and worship, it was too much to forsake these and believe in this teacher and His claims. They did not come again to hear His words of grace. They had loved their own darkness, their own confused ideas and the traditions of men rather than the light which shone on them or the life at which they had shrugged their shoulders in disdain. Despised and rejected, Jesus turned to the inner circle of His followers with the question, "*Will you also go away?*". It was not so much a test of loyalty to Himself as the provision of an opportunity for withdrawal of any of the chosen few from His company. Peter spoke up for the little band with the question "*To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*". The incident reflects the varying attitudes of men and women towards the Christian faith through twenty centuries of its history. Belief is a personal matter. Intelligent people

search for life, for enlightenment for better conditions, for solutions to all human problems, for peace of mind and social security. They conduct through reading, religion, travel and debate, what is called the search for truth but they will look anywhere but in the right direction. The philosophies of man are numerous, the formulas of faith many. The Christian churches, divided in opinion, pay homage to human leaders, use differing styles of worship, are concerned about numbers and great works. Jesus, with His gift of life and work of belief, His spirit of love and tolerance, seem strangely absent. Multitudes have listened and turned away, refusing to buy, without money and without price, the water and wine of life. These are content to live without hope, to idly speculate or to form a personal creed. There is no satisfying fountain of living water to refresh the thirsty traveller, to send him on his pilgrim way, restored and confident. As Jesus said to the seekers about him, "*You will not come to me that you might have life*". Anything, anywhere and anyone but Christ, has been the attitude of those who have loved self and this world more than God. Those who have looked upon Him with clear eyes, who have listened to His words with a true ear, have recognised in Him as Saviour, the means of reconciliation with God. Whatever of wisdom other men offered the race, no other man offered them life or claimed to be the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind. It is a claim acknowledged by heaven, by angels, by men and by the evil spirits He drove out from their secret places. They knew him as did Peter. "*You have the words of eternal life*." and "*We believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the son of the living God*." There is no other source, no other name, no other authority. Without that steadfast anchor in Him, the life-giving Son of God, life is a mere existence between the cradle and the grave. With Him it is a pilgrimage of grace to the everlasting kingdom of God.

"*My time is not yet come. Your time is always ready*" (John 7.6). The world is always ripe for mischief. There are unruly elements who only need a hint to send them off on hasty feet to stir up trouble, to commit some deed of violence or destruction. Those who refrain from saying or doing what is good because the time is not right, have mature wisdom and will power. The restraints of Jesus are often overlooked. In one to whom all power in heaven and earth had been entrusted He

showed remarkable control of its use. He might have done spectacular deeds. He could have become a crowned monarch as the rightful heir of David's throne. He could have saved himself from the final agony of trial and death. He could have answered the jeers of the malicious priests, mocking Him in their triumph. He could have called legions of angels to His aid to confound Pilate but He did none of these things. Had He been a man seeking His own glory He would have done so. He would have shown that generation something that would have shattered their pride and unbelief but His time had not yet come. The sick were healed, blind eyes were opened, deaf ears were unstopped, the dead were restored to life. Nature was stimulated or calmed at His word and the lame leaped for joy, yet these convincing evidences were not enough for hearts frigid with pride or hot with envy. Because He had set a man on his feet on the Sabbath day His enemies were ready to take His life. Day and night, at any moment evil lurks among men, ever ready to leap upon some enemy. Goodness chooses its times, waiting patiently, wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove, gentle as a lamb yet bold as a lion as it pursues its way through the mazes of this world. The times and methods of God are not according to human reasoning. There is always the element of surprise, the unexpected, as He works out His sovereign purpose. Jesus had come to further that purpose. He worked according to God's plan. He could not take His own way or follow His own ideas. A wrong word, a false move, even the right thing at the wrong time would have wrecked the work He had come to accomplish. In His entire ministry there was no rash action, no word that His foes could seize upon as false. Their efforts to trip Him up ended in their own discomfort. When they wanted to accuse Him they had to bribe false witnesses. His was a nature schooled and disciplined for the glory of God and the greatest service to humanity. In nothing did He seek His own interests. The priests in their mockery spoke truly. "He saved others, himself he cannot save". Had He come down from the cross at their behest, the race He came to save would have been doomed to extinction. His time had not yet come. They had their hour of evil victory. His hour was still to come.

Looking upon His example of meekness and strength, Christian pilgrims have secured the armour of faith more carefully about them. They have gone forth, girded in silence against the sneering

taunts of ignorance, bearing with quiet dignity the contempt of lesser minds. The time has not yet come to take the crown. The world has the advantages of pomp and vanity. When the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Christ, His time will have fully come to rebuke and judge the nations.

*"Man of sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim
Hallelujah! What a Saviour."*

Great store is set on education. The scholar has always commanded respect by the possession and use of knowledge denied to others. Like everything else in this world, education has had its counterfeit. Wisdom has been perverted. Wheat and tares have grown together. There is a genuine education not always obtainable in the great temples of learning. It does not bestow titles and letters. Shrewd observers have noted that expensive schooling does not always produce a scholar. True education is the sound use of knowledge acquired in the hard school of life. 'Experience is the best teacher', knowing how to think and to apply it to the business of living. From childhood Jesus had manifested a lively, intelligent mind, disputing in the temple with the Doctors of the Law, astonishing them by His natural aptitude for their particular sphere of learning. Little is recorded of His early years except that He grew in wisdom and in favour with God and man. These expanded a mind especially open and receptive to the powerful stimulus of the Spirit of God, and was the real education of the Man of Nazareth. By such means He became the teacher who could sit in the temple, stand on the hillside or rock gently in a boat at the water's edge, instructing His listeners as one having authority. All who heard him testified to the profound doctrine clothed in His gracious words. Long used to the vain repetitions and the dried up discourses of a priesthood that had lost all enthusiasm, the oratory of Jesus came like a fresh wind from the hills. Like rain on parched land it fell on the ears of His hearers, stirring to life the long dormant seeds of faith. The tendrils of hope and desire for life reached out towards a new beginning. "No man" they said "ever spoke like this man." He had something to say and He knew how to say it. Naturally His gifts aroused the animosity of those who taught, who had been to the schools and had the diplomas of learning; His teaching exposed their weakness and error. People began to see through the hypocrisy and shallowness

of their leaders. His influence diminished theirs and His power undermined their authority. Hence the snobbish questions. *"How does this man know anything of books having never been to the schools?"* and *"Is not this the carpenter's son?"* It was clearly then, as it has been since, a case of class distinction, for "the common people heard him gladly". The modern world would measure him by the same attitude. "Who or what does He think he is? He has never been to college. He is not a professor or a doctor. He has no letters after His name. He is a working man, fresh from a country joiner's shop."

Darkness hates the light of the humble people of God's choice, taught in the same school as Christ, by the same energies of the illuminating Spirit from on high. Their wisdom comes from the same source as their Master's. Applied to life it creates peace, justice, mercy and an atmosphere of affectionate goodwill; proof against all crooked dealing. Jesus founded a new order of scholars, men and women, chiefly from the lower walks of life, humble, unlettered, untitled but the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Without them society would be meaner than it is.

"Still to the lowly soul He does His love impart,

And for His dwelling and His Throne, chooses the pure in heart."

"Out of him shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7.38). It seems an exaggerated statement that rivers of water could flow from one believing mind. The power of the Spirit of God is an unknown quantity. Men have discovered and harnessed the forces of Nature but the power of the Spirit tends to be overlooked by the pride and assurance of man in his own bright achievements.

Christ not only offered life to *"him that believes on me"*; He offered the power of life, a force that would flow as a river, dispensing all a river's benefits to those along its banks. Water is a necessity of life. Without it all vegetation withers. The green smiling landscapes with their great food producing tracts would speedily become deserts without the sparkling liquid flowing through their streams. For this reason water becomes the simple metaphor for life-giving, life-sustaining truth. The thing that men seek afar off disappoints them. They seek for solutions to the problems of man's life on earth but they cannot find them. They believe in the variety of doctrines politic, social and philosophic, put forward by some of its best thinkers only to find their beliefs shattered. Disillusioned, they do not know

what to think or where to turn or whom to believe, stubbornly blind to those words of Jesus who held out the solutions but was rejected and is still rejected. Only the odd one here and there throughout the centuries have believed in Him with the whole heart and followed Him, faithfully to death. The few who have been counted fools for His sake have yet, during their own lifetime, exercised a stimulating influence upon some others by their words of wisdom and their actions of love. They have been like wells of water who have refreshed many other thirsty souls with their knowledge and confidence.

Without knowledge mankind cannot find the way to the peace and happiness which all nations at heart desire. But it must be true knowledge allied to wisdom flowing from God through His appointed channels. Christ, the Apostles and Prophets were the channels of living water flowing through the earth inviting men and women to drink of the waters of salvation and live. Those who had merely existed with the shadow in a thirsty and weary land became alive, full of assurance and a source of help to the needy. This full force and power of life and knowledge has not yet been released into a world too concerned with the forces of its own destruction. The forces of evil cannot exist on the same planet with the glory of God. *"As I live, says the Lord, the earth shall be filled with my glory."* *"I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh."* When that time comes the old sources and streams with their muddy waters of ignorance, superstition, fear, guesswork, intolerance and ancient traditions will have been swept out, flushed away on the full tide of new rivers. The old silted up channels will not survive to serve a new society thirsting for God's truth. The lies, the shame, the deceits of false living and reasoning will go down before the force of that clear water of life, which will flow from under the throne of the Universe to revitalize a chastened race.

"Then the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love

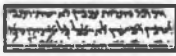
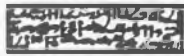
Will supply earth's sons and daughters, and all fear of want remove.

Who need faint while such a river ever flows their thirst to assuage.

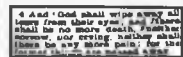
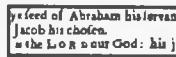
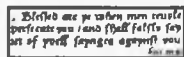
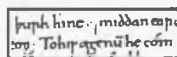
Grace which like the Lord, the Giver, ever flows from age to age."

FAS

(We apologize that the wrong initials were appended to the first two parts of this series.)



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY



Vol. 81, No.2

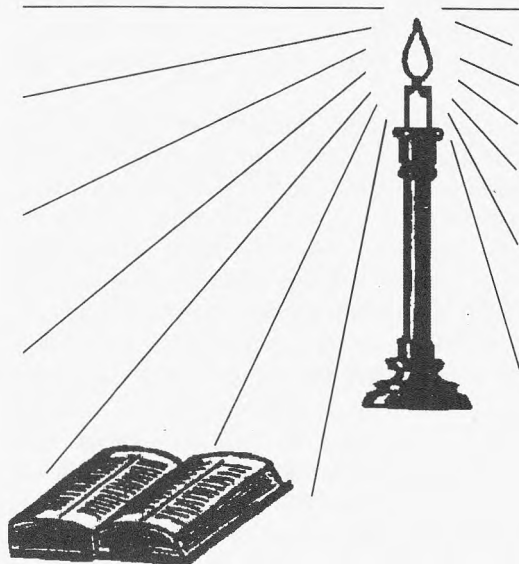
MARCH/APRIL 2004

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	26
KING DAVID OF ISRAEL	
13. Declining Days	27
UNITY	
Part 2	31
OUR HEAVENLY BROTHERS	
Part 3	35
LIGHT OF THE WORLD	
4. God resisteth the proud	38
KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD	
3. Jacob the Patriarch	42
TAMAR OF JUDAH	44
A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE	
14. Chapter 13	46



This Journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers.

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union (Registered Charity 1064607)
 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, England.

Email: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Editor & Secretary: DERRICK NADAL (*Nottingham*)

Treasurer: JOHN HAINES (*Gloucester*)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH - 'Remember Me'

This is the time of the year when most, if not all, Christians turn their thoughts toward the last weeks, days and hours of Jesus upon Earth. Is it possible to be a Christian and forget Him? Yet whenever we say something which would hurt Him to hear, or do something which would hurt Him to see, we are showing that in some way we have forgotten Him. The disciples forgot Him so many times in those last days before He went to the cross. They hindered people from reaching Him, they pretended they would never let Him down, they even argued as to who was greatest among them and at 'His table'. Of course, we would never have done anything like that would we? Sadly how often we do.

There must have been many things on His mind. He was facing the most awful rejection that any person could endure, branded a criminal, physically abused, He faced the agony of torture on a cross. From that suffering He would be able to sympathise with all who suffer. He knew what was coming and had probably observed it happen to others. Some of them seem to have deserved it. He knew too that before He could drink the wine in the Kingdom, those who claimed to be His brethren would do such things to each other. From Paul's experience on the Damascus road we know that when one of His brothers or sisters are hurt, it is the Lord who is hurt. Even our thoughts about others may hurt our Saviour because He knows what we are thinking. Have we forgotten Him then? Worst of all, we may even deny that a brother or sister is 'in Christ'.

Let us ponder afresh just what He has done for us. The cost to come to Earth was in itself a heavy one. He was in a sinless environment and everything would have been quite comfortable. He was rich beyond our wildest imagination and He left it for us – so that we might become rich and be like Him. But more, much more, He endured the contradiction of sinners, the scorn of a King, the reviling of Priests, the betrayal of friends. And He did it for

you and me. Why? It was the only way in which God's eternal purpose could be worked out. When our minds are finally totally cleared of the sinfulness of our human life, we shall begin to understand the cost to Him and to His Father who sent Him.

This is the great teaching of Scripture. This is the most wonderful story ever told. It started in a manger and ended on a cross. Yet it did not end there and we have the privilege of sharing in forwarding it, by telling others about it, not just in words but by everything we do.

It is a wonderful privilege to take the bread and wine at the Lord's supper and ponder that around the world there are many more doing the same in all sorts of conditions. Let us try to catch something of the love which motivated Jesus in what he thought and said and did. Let us rise from that table more than ever determined that we will do and say nothing that will grieve Him to see and hear. But we cannot do it alone for we are too frail in spirit. We need Him with us and we need to be conscious of that fact. No matter how good we are at writing and speaking about 'the Truth', no matter how good we are at serving His brethren, we need to know 'moment by moment' that He is with us and is only waiting to help us think, and speak and act like Him. We need to remember Him so that our service is pure and free from the hypocrisy which He so hated. We need to remember Him so that our attitudes are never aggressive or arrogant, which He so hated. We need to remember Him when others are saying and doing things that hurt us, for when He was reviled He did not retaliate. He loved the unloved; He loved the unlovely. Is there anyone that you are at the moment finding it hard to show the love of Christ. That is the very person that should be the target of your love in total submission to Christ. Let us turn our eyes upon Jesus so that in every possible situation we shall remember Him, how He responded, how He helped, how He healed broken hearts and melted hard hearts. DN

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

13. Declining Days

Joab the commander-in-chief strode out of the conference tent where his officers and the officials of David's court had been sitting in conclave. He began to make his way with purposeful steps towards the house in which David had shut himself up to bemoan the death of his favourite son, Absalom. The warriors of Judah, standing and sitting about in groups watched him go in silence. There was an air of gloom and despondency throughout the camp. Joab glanced morosely at some of them as he walked past. These men had followed David loyally into exile and had fought like tigers to defend him from his rebellious son Absalom and the hosts of Israel. They had won the day, the northern tribes' forces were defeated and dispersed, Absalom their leader was dead and the threat to David's kingship removed. The king could go back to Jerusalem and resume his reign, and everything would be as it was before. The disgrace of their ignominious flight from the capital would be wiped out by the triumph and glory of their return. They would bring back their king with rejoicing to place him once again upon the throne of the Lord. But now, most unaccountably, all this rosy anticipation had vanished. So far from setting himself at the head of his victorious warriors to lead a triumphal march to Jerusalem, he was sitting in a darkened room away from them all weeping and lamenting his lost son. They could hear his voice now, penetrating the closed door. "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son." They looked at each other as men ashamed and uncertain, and watched their leader as he strode up to the door, opened it and went in.

David looked up, cold hostility in his eyes as he recognised his visitor. He made to speak, but Joab waved him peremptorily to silence. "This day" declared the old soldier bluntly "you have put to shame all your loyal servants who have saved your life. You love your enemies and hate your friends. You have shown this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived and all we had died this day, then it had pleased you well". He looked down at the recumbent figure of the man he had served so loyally though unscrupulously, contempt showing on his face. "*Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants; for I swear by the Lord, if*

you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." (2 Samuel 19. 7 RSV).

There seems little doubt that from this time, about six years from the end of his reign, David was losing his hold over the nation. More than forty years had passed since the young women of Israel had eulogized his victorious return from battle with dances and the song "Saul has slain his thousands but David his ten thousands". The virile, handsome youth they had idolized had become a remote and somewhat embittered old man indulgent towards his close friends but distant from the mass of his people. There are indications too, that at this period of his life his physical powers were failing. In 2 Samuel 18 and 21 there are instances where the men of Israel dissuaded him from going into battle with them on this score. Chapter 21.15-17 alludes to an incident when David, in battle with the Philistines, would have been killed had not his nephew Abishai come to his aid and rescued him, after which David went out to battle no more. Joab's warning therefore was no empty threat; David must be made to realise that his hold on the throne was by no means so secure as he imagined, and the sooner he took active control of the situation the better.

So David bestirred himself and appeared once more at the head of his supporters. They were still at Mahanaim, three days' journey from Jerusalem and even although Absalom was dead anything could be happening there while the king was missing. Joab realised that even if David did not see the danger, he must get the king back to Jerusalem and firmly in control before the pro-Israel and anti-Judah influences in the nation had found another figure among David's remaining sons to set up as king. So preparations for the return went on apace.

Perhaps he need not have worried. There is some ambiguity about the precise order of events at this time as related in 2 Sam. 19 but it does seem that with the death of Absalom there was considerable uncertainty and perhaps some apprehension among the northern tribes as to the next move. They were painfully aware that they,

not Judah, had espoused the rebellion of Absalom and now he was dead and the rebellion had failed. What kind of treatment could they expect when David returned in triumph, as return he must? Perhaps the wisest course would be to take the initiative in bringing him back! "*Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle.*" they said. 'David saved us out of the hand of the Philistines in time gone by.' "*Why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?*". There must have been ambassadors sent to David at Mahanaim to sound out his attitude, for the next we hear in 2 Sam 19 is David's demand of the men of Judah back at Jerusalem for an explanation in their tardiness in welcoming him back and so giving the advantage to the northern tribes. "*Why are they last to welcome back the King?*" So the situation developed into an undignified scramble to be the first at Jordan to welcome the king back and to escort him to Jerusalem, a contest which was won by the men of Judah, who had the advantage of being nearer the scene to start with. But it was a contest that only served further to embitter relations between the Ten Tribes and the Two, leading eventually to the separation at the death of Solomon some forty five years later. A casual allusion in 2 Sam 19.13 throws a flood of light upon the political manoeuvrings of the time and not particularly to David's credit either. He sent a message to the men of Judah still at Jerusalem appointing Amasa, son of his sister Abigail and therefore cousin to Joab, to be commander in chief of the armed forces in the place of Joab. Amasa had espoused the cause of Absalom and was, therefore, one of the rebels; in thus condoning his disloyalty and appointing him to this high office, David was probably attempting to placate the pro-Absalom faction and encourage their future loyalty to him. It is also probable that he was trying by this means to get rid of Joab, whom he must have suspected, if he did not have positive knowledge, of being responsible for Absalom's death – as indeed he was, recorded in 2 Samuel 18. He speedily found out that his judgment was at fault again, Joab was not the kind of man to take such an insult lying down and the upshot in the long run was more trouble for David.

Almost immediately the trouble came. A fierce controversy arose between the "men of Israel" and "the men of Judah" – probably the leaders and notables of the various tribes – over the action of

Judah in bringing back and re-installing David as king without giving opportunity for the participation of the ten northern tribes. Here was the old rivalry springing up again in full force. According to 2 Samuel 20 the lead in this latest insurrection was taken by one Sheba, a Benjamite, a member of Saul's own tribe. He raised the standard of revolt. "*We have no part in David*" he cried "*neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel.*" And Judah remained loyal to David. Once again the kingdom was divided.

David acted. He summoned Amasa, his new commander-in-chief, and instructed him to assemble the warriors of Judah and present himself with them within three days. It looks as though he was preparing for a full-scale punitive expedition. Amasa disappeared to execute his commission and the three days passed. There was no sign of Amasa or his men. David was getting edgy. He summoned Abishai, Joab's younger brother, hitherto not in the forefront of affairs but evidently of some note in the army, instructing him to go in pursuit of Sheba before he could entrench himself in the strongholds of northern Israel. His quarrel with Joab evidently prohibited him from summoning that worthy, even although he was the most experienced tactician of them all. Somehow or other, by the time Abishai had reached Gibeon a few miles north of Jerusalem, he found himself teaming up with Amasa and his men. Amasa apparently had gone into action without the formality of reporting to David first as the latter had instructed.

Now another factor came in to complicate the situation. Joab, that hardened and utterly ruthless old campaigner, although out of office and in disgrace, turned up with his own men and attached himself to the pursuers. It is evident that each of these mutually jealous and competing army leaders held a loyalty of their own men superior even to the loyalty of those men to David. Joab's men were still following him and now in this latest tussle with the northern tribes it was Joab they looked to as their leader and he knew it. So three of David's chief men, each with his own band of adherents, joined in pursuit of the rebel Sheba.

But Joab had another score to settle first. He must have followed the whole process very closely and knew just when to introduce himself into the picture. Chapter 20 tells the story. Joab caught up

with Amasa at a point in the pursuit when it seems they were temporarily separated from the rest. He greeted his cousin in a friendly voice and with a sword in his left hand hidden behind his back. Amasa responded to the greeting: taken for a moment off his guard, he was suddenly transfixed by Joab's sword and fell to the ground a dying man. First, Abner; then, Absalom; now, Amasa. Joab allowed no man to stand in the way of his ambition, and the fact that his latest victim was his own cousin and David's nephew made no difference.

So Amasa died, but the pursuit continued, by common consent under the leadership of Joab. No better guarantee of success could be given. It was not long before Joab had got Sheba at bay in a walled town in the extreme north of the country and with his usual thoroughness he proceeded to tear down the walls in order to capture his quarry. Responding to an appeal from a "wise woman", a prophetess, he promised to spare the city if Sheba was given up, whereby the citizens promptly cut off Sheba's head and threw it to Joab over the wall. So the insurrection collapsed and Joab returned in triumph to Jerusalem and to David.

What David thought about all this is not recorded. Right at the beginning of his reign, at the time of the murder of Abner, he had complained that the sons of Zeruiah – Joab, Abishai and Asahel, sons of David's sister Zeruiah – were "too hard" for him, and he, although king, was weak in their presence. They seem to have been a turbulent family whose one redeeming feature was their utter loyalty to David himself. It looks as though at this time, following the death of Amasa, David resigned himself to the inevitable and allowed Joab to resume command of the army. There was probably no one else immediately available for the position, and with Joab's reputation, no volunteers.

Once again, with all enemies apparently defeated, David took his place on the throne of the Lord at Jerusalem. It was a rather insecure throne. He must have been conscious that he had lost the allegiance of the major part of Israel; it was probably upon the fighting men of his own clan, of Judah, that he had to rely in the main. Much of the glory and euphoria of the early part of his reign had passed away. For the first time there had emerged among the people of the Lord a division into two classes, the rich and the poor. Under Saul they had been a pastoral people where opportunities for the

accumulation of wealth did not exist. Under David, largely in consequence of his alliance with Hiram king of Tyre and his people, they had been introduced to the refinements and luxuries of what we would today call the industrialized society. Merchants and manufacturers flourished; ornate buildings were erected, then filled with luxurious embellishments. Men left, or were enticed from their farms to work for other men who employed them on these high flown schemes. A new era was opened which Solomon brought to its peak of magnificence. The words of the Lord to Samuel when Israel first asked for a king had become fearfully true. *"He will take your sons, and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands, and commanders over fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war, and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks, and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will take your menservants and your maidservants and the best of your cattle and your asses and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves ..."* (1 Sam. 8.11-13). All of this, and more, was realised by Israel under the rule of David and the kings who succeeded him, just as it has been realised by men of many nations in all the generations since. And so there was discontent throughout the land.

Then came famine. It is a little difficult to determine the precise sequence of the remaining events in David's life as narrated in 2 Sam. 21-24. It is fairly obvious that chapters 22 and 23 come from an earlier stage of his life. In any case they add nothing to the story, only repetitions of some of his Psalms and lists of the names of the mighty men of his early life in the wilderness. It does seem though that the famine came soon after the successful crushing of the rebellion of Sheba. It might well be that Nature was not altogether to blame. Since about the thirteenth year of David's reign for something like a period of twenty years the nation

had been practically continuously engaged in war and conflict, either with external foes like the Ammonites or Philistines or the internal rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. Only about seven years out of that twenty were free from war. In those circumstances it would not be surprising if the land was progressively neglected, with many of the men away fighting, so that at last it refused to yield its crops and famine resulted. Chapter 21 opens at a point where the famine had lasted three years and the people were reduced to desperate straits and David went to the Lord to find out what was wrong and what could be done about it.

The Lord's reply, according to the narrator, was short and to the point. The famine had come from his hand as reprisal for Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites half a century previously. The Gibeonites were one of the native peoples encountered by Joshua when he invaded the land. In order to avoid the fate of the other conquered tribes, they secured a treaty of toleration by Joshua by means of a trick (Joshua 9) whereby they were guaranteed safety and life; so they remained in the midst of Israel into the days of the kings. This "slaughter of the Gibeonites" is nowhere referred to in the Old Testament and nothing is known of what Saul did or his motive and it is surmised that in his early zeal for the purity of Israel he tried to exterminate the Gibeonites to cleanse the land. If so, he failed, for here in David's time there were still the descendants of the Gibeonites in Gibeon. David sent for them and asked them what he should do to pacify them and satisfy the Lord so that the famine could be lifted. Their reply was that David should hand over seven of Saul's male descendants for them to 'hang up', which meant impalement or crucifixion, "*before the Lord in Gibeah*". David selected the five sons of Merab, the eldest daughter of Saul (2 Sam. 21.8 says "Michal", the younger, one of David's wives, but this is an obvious scribal error for Merab, who was the one married to Adriel) and two sons of Saul by his concubine Rizpah. He handed them over apparently without compunction to suffer this appalling fate. "*And after that*" says the narrator in 2 Sam. 21.14 "*God heeded supplications for the land*".

To imagine that the Lord would in fact devise such fiendish treatment of inoffensive men for a crime half a century old must denote a very limited view of the Divine character. We may be sure that,

whoever originated the answer to David's question, it was not the Lord. There is more below the surface of this story than appears above.

The narrative says that David "*enquired of the Lord*" (21.1). Though king, he could not go to the Lord direct; he must enquire through the High Priest who would then ascertain the Divine reply by means of the mysterious (and still little understood) "Urim and Thummin". There were two High Priests at the time. Zadok of the line of Eleazar was at Gibeah where the Tabernacle stood with the Brazen Altar. Abiathar of the line of Ithamar was at Jerusalem ministering before the Ark of the Covenant in the "tent" which David had erected for it. David would obviously go to Abiathar whose office it was to enquire before the Ark. And Abiathar himself had a grudge against Saul who had sent warriors to slay his father Ahimelech, the serving High Priest, his sons and the entire priesthood, Abiathar alone escaping. Is it possible that Abiathar seized this opportunity to have his revenge on the house of the man who had all but extirpated his own father's house? It would seem a lot more feasible to pin the responsibility for this savage deed on the creature rather than the Creator.

So the condemned men went to their fate and hung on stakes "*before the Lord*", that is in honour of the Lord, probably in front of the Tabernacle that was at Gibeah. It is not likely that the Lord felt honoured. More likely He pitied His people for their hardness of heart and failure to understand His ways. He must have looked with greater tenderness upon the unhappy Rizpah, who sat by those stakes day and night for six months, from the beginning of harvest to the time of the winter rains, keeping the vultures and carrion beasts away from the bodies. When David heard about that he did at least have the decency to have the remains taken away and given decent burial. Only after that was done is it said that God "*heeded supplication for the land*". The famine continued throughout that six months, which looks as though God did not acknowledge or accept the sacrifice after all. It may be then that it was the woman Rizpah, and not David, who ended the famine. Perhaps He did for her what He would not do for the man of blood.

(To be continued)

AOH

UNITY

Part 2

*A discourse on our
oneness in Christ*

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God,. this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good; pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12.1- 2).

We are continually told that we can not live a true Christian life unless we are in unity with our fellows, but as matters are at the moment the world is completely disunited. There are disputes, wars and the threat of war between nations. There is disunity between the various religions of the world, and mankind is separated from God. Even within ourselves there is a continual battle going on between good and evil, but Jesus died so that all the discord and separation in the world could be ended and man be reconciled to God. Now obviously that unity doesn't exist yet, although it should already be there within the family of God. But when the day comes that everyone loves his neighbour in the way that he himself would like to be loved, we will all be truly one in Christ Jesus. So with this thought in mind we should perhaps consider the warning given by our Lord (Matthew 5.23) about the dangers of offering gifts to God when we're not in unity with our brothers. You may recall that we are told that if one of our brethren has any dispute with us we should leave the offering at the altar and go and settle the problem first; **then** we can come and make the offering. This offering can take many forms, besides money or animal sacrifices. Think of the parable of the sheep and goats and what they did or didn't do for the Lord's brethren. Jesus said that what had been done for His brethren was also done for Him. Since God and Jesus are completely united, in word, thought and deed, all these things, in being done, (or not done) to Jesus were also done to God and therefore were offerings to the Lord. So if Jesus says we must make peace before making our offering, then He is also telling us that if we don't do so, our offering won't be acceptable to our Heavenly Father because we are at odds with one or more of our brethren. Which in turn says that as long as the disagreement continues, we cannot be in harmony with God. Therefore, since the Son and

the Father are like-minded, one in thought, aim and purpose, then we can't be united with Christ either.

This is a thought that is perhaps overlooked by those who, through a lack of a unity of Spirit, refuse to associate with others of a similar belief. This is so because they disagree on the interpretation of certain points of doctrine rather than agreeing to disagree on that point and continuing in fellowship together. Would it not be good if we all always remembered the words of Psalm 133 *"How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live together in harmony! For harmony is as precious as the fragrant anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard, and onto the border of his robe. Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Herman that falls on the mountains of Zion. And the Lord has pronounced his blessing, even life forevermore."*

The statement that we're all *"one in Christ"*, all of equal standing in His eyes, must have seemed a very revolutionary announcement for Paul to make at a time when slavery was common, and the social differences of wealth, rank, nationality and even gender were much more active than they are today. Now we like to think that in our own enlightened and advanced Western society we've done away with many of these divisions and in worldly affairs this is fairly true. However, in spiritual matters, these divisions are still rife. The curse of sectarianism has been the problem of the Churches down through the ages. Men disagree on gospel teaching and instead of settling their differences, as our Master taught, neither will give way, so one of them goes away from his class or even his church and starts another one based on his interpretation of the scriptures. Paul had occasion to lecture the Corinthian church about this very problem. Some were saying I follow the teaching of Paul, some that of Apollos, others the teaching of Peter, and some, presumably on the argument of going back to first principles, saying I follow Christ, but we should ask the same question that Paul did; *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Cor. 1.13)

The apostle, in his reprimand, is quite plainly saying, No, this isn't the way that **God** sees **His** Church; this is not the harmony that Jesus wants. That's not to say, of course, that we shouldn't

respect those who have been specially blessed with gifts or talents for the Lord's service. But it is to say that we should remember the teaching of the Apostle John. *"Do not trust any and every spirit, my friends; test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for among those who have gone out into the world there are many prophets falsely inspired."* (1 John 4.1)

Going on then from the reality of the oneness of the Body of Christ, made up of all of His faithful followers, and the worth of each member of that body, let us read again the words of our Master shortly before the end of His ministry. John tells us that after Jesus had shared the last supper with the apostles, and had comforted them about His imminent death, He looked up to heaven and prayed to the Father. In part of that petition He said of His followers; *"I have delivered thy word to them, and the world hates them because they are strangers in the world, as I am. I pray thee, not to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are strangers in the world as I am. Consecrate them by the truth; thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I now consecrate myself, that they too may be consecrated by the truth. But it is not for these alone that I pray, but for those also who through their words put their faith in me; may they all be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me. The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly one. Then the world will learn that thou didst send me, that thou didst love them as thou didst me."* (John 17.14-23)

Here we have the same point again that was raised earlier. We are strangers in the world, but we aren't to be taken out of it, only protected from the evil one while we are here. Why? Because God loves us, and so that the world may know, by the lives we lead, that we represent our Lord, because, while we're in this alien land we are ambassadors of Heaven. And what a marvellous standard of unity the Lord was praying for in those words. One, even as the Father and the Son are one (one in aim, purpose and love) and this harmony was also to be a oneness in us. This is a unity in the Father and the Son and if this oneness has been granted by our Heavenly Father, then we should surely expect to

see some character development. Also there should be evidence of some family likeness not only to one another, but also, and more importantly, first to our Lord, and also to our Father in Heaven, if the likeness is to become real.

This raises a number of questions. How much of Jesus do others see in us? Can a family likeness be seen in us or is one developing? Do others listen to us and *"take notice of us that we have been with Jesus"*, in the same way that they did of Peter and John? These are really self-examination questions. But they are questions we should regularly ask ourselves as we endeavour to progress along the way. Of course in all these things we need reverence and we need respect for one another. But these things are not in themselves the criteria for oneness in Christ and perhaps Paul in his letter to the Ephesians gives us the best guide to how we should behave if we are to obtain this unity. He says; *"I entreat you, then – I, a prisoner for the Lord's sake: as God has called you, live up to your calling. Be humble always and gentle, and patient too. Be forbearing with one another and charitable. Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity that the Spirit gives. There is one body and one Spirit, as there is also one hope held out to you in God's call to you; one Lord; one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* (Ephesians 4.1-6)

Paul's earnest plea for the maintenance of Christian unity emphasizes the essentials for this oneness, and we can perhaps sum them up as the common consideration of one for another, and love for one another.

The first essential is humility. Christian humility needs to be cultivated because it's so easy to think only of oneself, or at least to put oneself first. It's the virtue by which we become aware of our own unworthiness. It comes from comparing our own lives, not with the life of some worldly acquaintance where, hopefully, we'll come out looking quite good, but with the life of our Lord and then looking at the answer in the light of the perfection which God asks of us. God is perfect and for us as human beings to be perfect in this life is impossible. Therefore in humbleness we must do our very best to throw ourselves on His mercy and ask His help.

The second is gentleness; the King James version calls it meekness. To be gentle is to be

moderate in our behaviour; neither excessively angry or overly mild but having every passion, every attitude of mind, under control. That's not to say that a gentle person is completely self-controlled because we all "blow our top" at some time, even our Lord did. Just think of how He dealt with the money-changers and sellers of doves, in the Temple – but a gentle person is one who allows God to control them so that if they **are** angry it's at the right time and for the right reason.

The third great quality is patience; what the King James Version calls long suffering. It is translated from the Greek word *makrothumia* which has two main meanings. First, it has the thought of the mind which will never give in, and which, because it endures to the end, will reap the promised reward. The second thought is of the person who bears insult and injury without bitterness or complaint, which should immediately bring to mind the words of Peter about our Lord: *"Christ suffered on your behalf, and thereby left you an example; it is for you to follow in His steps. He committed no sin, He was convicted of no falsehood; when He was abused He did not retort with abuse, when He suffered He uttered no threats, but committed His cause to the One who judges justly"* (1 Peter 2.21-23). These three virtues need to be constantly brought to mind because failure to give proper attention to any of these instructions has perhaps been one of the greatest reasons for the condemnation by the world, of those who name the Name of Jesus. I don't suppose that anyone will doubt that the adversary is still active in the area of personal relationships, especially in relationships between the Lord's people, and we need to be constantly vigilant, always on our guard with *"humility, gentleness and patience, in the bond of peace"* because these qualities can assure us of oneness and unity of the spirit. So wherever people gather together, we are only going to get unity, only going to get harmony and united effort, where these qualities of consideration for others are practised and not only practised but seen to be practised. Our Lord said that; *"A house that is divided against itself will fall"* (Matthew 12.25). Throughout history, and even more so today, personal ambition, personal ideas and self-interest have led to disintegration, even though those who have been guilty of these faults, have professed to have the same ideas and the same objectives as the rest of humanity. The spirit of forbearance, and

consideration or concern for others has only been notable by its absence, so that we get, not harmony, not unity but discord. Having the same objectives and ideas are obviously not enough, there must be mutual respect of, and concern for, others. That's why the apostle puts this aspect of concern for – and of love for – one another first, before going on to describe our common ideals and objectives. Writing to the Church at Philippi about this Paul urged them to; *"Fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another, the same turn of mind, and a common care for unity. There must be no room for rivalry and personal vanity among you, but you must humbly reckon others better than yourselves, Look to each other's interest and not merely to your own."* (Philippians 2.2-4)

We're to be like minded. This doesn't mean, of course, that we should all have exactly the same view on every aspect of Christian knowledge: if we were to be like that we would be nothing more than robots. Then as we read on we find the like mindedness, at which we're to aim, described by the apostle in the next verse where he says; *"Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus. For the divine nature was His from the first; yet He did not think to snatch equality with God but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death – death on a cross."* (Philippians 2.5-8)

This lovely lesson in humility, obedience and self-sacrifice takes our thoughts back again to the oneness of the Father and the Son. The full extent of this harmony between them seems to be well beyond our simple human understanding. However, we can see it expressed by the love and perfect obedience of Jesus in doing His Father's will in order to further the divine purposes, even at the cost of His own life. So if we, as new creatures, want to share the divine nature with Him we must also be prepared to share the trials and tribulations and prove faithful unto death.

When we understand the perfect love and devotion of our Lord then all those who have the eyes to see – to all who have the hearts and minds to understand just what our Lord did for us – can appreciate something of the characteristics of God, the God who is the one Lord and Father of all those who come to Him by faith. These need to be

characteristics of every child of God as we try to; *"Proclaim the triumphs of Him who has brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (1 Peter 2.9).

By concentrating all our efforts along these lines we will build a greater unity of the Spirit among all the Lord's people. Of course there will be differences – differences of background, differences of understanding of the details of our Father's plans and purposes, differences in our interpretation of the scriptures and differences of personal ways of expression. But we can safely leave all these in our loving Fathers hands, because, as Paul says; *"Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. Our knowledge is now partial; then it will be whole. like God's knowledge of me."* (1 Corinthians 13.12). These precious truths which are shared by all of us who really love God, all who trust in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, are, in reality, so much greater than those things which are sometimes allowed to divide His people and to sever fellowships. It seems that Paul didn't think that the Church was completely united because in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians he repeats his teaching of the oneness of the Church as one body of many members under one head, our Lord Jesus, and united by one Spirit, the spirit of love. He

encourages all those members to walk worthy of their calling, in lowliness, meekness and long suffering, forbearing one another in love: endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Speaking of this unity of the Church one writer said; *"We shall never be of one mind in the sense of all holding the same opinions. But we may all be of one mind when, beneath the divisions of opinion, of expression and of view, we are united by a common devotion to Christ, a common loyalty to the great underlying facts of redemption and a common love to all who hold Him the Head."*

So! *"Let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God; for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." ... "Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other. God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us."* (1 John 4.7-12)

RJH

Autobiography of the Bible

"I am the oldest book in existence having out-lived the storms of thirty centuries. Men have endeavoured to banish me from the face of the earth; they have hidden, torn and burnt me, and have done to death tens of thousands of my faithful witnesses. No other book has been more bitterly hated; no other book has been more dearly cherished; no other book has been so misrepresented and misunderstood; but today, while so many of my foes slumber in death, I still live on.

It is not for me to speak of the conflicting creeds laid to my charge, but on behalf of the one true purpose of my Author I appeal to reason. Look at the stately trees of the forest, the living green of the meadows be-spangled by a thousand lovely flowers. Hear the singing birds that delight themselves amid the beauties of nature. Observe the blue dome of heaven, illumined by the sun, moon and stars that space out a universe too immense for man to fathom and know that the Creator of these things has a wise and loving purpose equally great and

beautiful for mankind.

There is revealed within my covers a plan so broad and a design so deep as to be beyond the power of human origin. My story centres around the Redeemer, who by the grace of God tasted death for every man. Based upon His atoning sacrifice, all the dead will be raised, and the whole earth made glorious with life and happiness everywhere, without a trace of sorrow, pain or death.

"My message has blessed every follower of Jesus. It has inspired them with hope, encouraged them to zeal, comforted them in sorrow, strengthened them in faith till they have laid down their all in death, awaiting their reward. Like the crystal springs from the mountain side which flow on and on to refresh the luxuriant verdure on the plain below, in that glad day the waters of truth will impart life-giving blessings to the willing and obedient of mankind, who will forever with one accord, praise, love and adore my Author."

OUR HEAVENLY BROTHERS

Part 3

We know for sure that angels uphold and administer God's government of the Universe. He is Ruler of all, controls and directs all things for the good of His subjects (Is. 46.8-11; Ps. 103.17-20).

It is in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (3.9, 10, 15) that another staggering matter is revealed to us regarding the angels' deep interest in the progress of the church. We are told that the great purpose of God in the salvation of man was that *"through the church His manifold wisdom would be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places"*. Earth is where the attributes of God are displayed for the teaching and adoration of the family in heaven.

The order and organisation of the heavenly world, and its obedience to the Son of God is brought forcibly to our attention when we recall what Jesus stated when Peter attempted to prevent His arrest: *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matt. 26.53 NASB; see Lk. 2.13). One legion amounts to 6,000 foot soldiers, often with additional cavalry and auxiliary troops that could number 144,000 altogether. Twelve legions taken literally amounts to 72,000 angels, possibly 144,000, a frightening power that would readily have intervened to deliver Him from Gethsemane. And note he spoke of "more than twelve legions". In fact he could have called upon them all. What a wonderful privilege for the unnamed angel that was sent to Gethsemane to help and strengthen Jesus in his final agony and struggle (Lk. 22.43). It would be a real comfort to Him that angels were at His control if He needed them. What an indescribable privilege was also theirs serving food to Him who had given life to all (Matt. 4.11).

From the beginning to the end, the holy angels of God followed the earthly life and ministry of our Lord with extreme interest, care and support. He referred to angels many times, including in His parables and in their fulfilment. Gabriel who was used to give Daniel the prophecy of the Messiah's appearance, was also used to announce His birth. We do not have the time to examine how angels supported Jesus throughout His time on Earth, from before His birth until and including His death, resurrection, ascension, and His coming again.

The duties and service of God's heavenly sons toward humans is far more fully described than their places in the heavenly realms. Often we are told what they do with regard to man, at other times their heavenly duties. We get a glimpse into a mighty spirit organisation when the scriptures unfold the presence of archangels, seraphs, cherubs, and messenger angels communicating between God and man. There seems to emerge an order that includes rank or responsibility. That angels command other angels is seen at Revelation 7.1-3 and 14.15, 16, 18. Evident throughout the book of Revelation, that speaks of angels more than any other book, is the fact that they are under the control of Christ.

ARCHANGELS are spoken of twice; (1 Thess. 4.16; Jude 9; 2 Pet. 2.11). Dan. 10.13 (12.1) describes Michael as one of the "chief princes" and is called an archangel in Jude 9, therefore there could well be more than one archangel. Michael 'like God' or 'who is like God' ranks very high possible being a seraph. He also leads angelic armies against Satan and his angels in Rev. 12.7-9, and is possibly the one who led God's people through the wilderness, as he also disputed with the Devil with regard to the body of Moses (Jude 9; Ex. 23.20-23; 32.34; 33.2). Gabriel may also be an archangel, his name signifies 'strong one of God.'

SERAPHS, SERAPHIM (Spoken of twice in Isaiah chap. 6 - Heb/Arabic 'sar, sarim'), means prince, noble, chief, in the sense of having royal rank, position in the royal court. Seraphs are high-ranking noble ones in the heavenly family. Also 'fiery one', lightning; Egyptian 'seref', griffin. In Isaiah 6 they are seen in attendance at God's throne having three pairs of wings, one pair covers their face in modesty and humility; one pair covers their feet in due respect and reverence for God and His holy place, and the other pair for flight. They are seen in the vision praising God's holiness and power like an antiphonal choir "one cried unto the other" as though ranged in opposite choirs each side of the throne, the strength of their voices shaking the supports of the throne room (Is. 6.4).

The cry of the seraphs concerning God's holiness perhaps indicates that they have to do with seeing that God's holiness is declared and His glory acknowledged in all parts of the universe. It was a

seraph that sent Isaiah out on his duties as a prophet to declare God's holiness and uphold His holy standards. They aid in cleansing others for holy devoted service in a priestly manner (Is. 6.6, 7), possibly in answer to prayer. T. K. Cheyne (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1889) writes of seraphs keeping, "everything that is profane or unclean at a distance."

CHERUBS, CHERUBIM (Spoken of 93 times in Scripture Heb. 'to cover, guard'; Syriac *cerib* 'great, strong'; *cerib* 'to plough', to cut into like an ox pulling a plough. Cherubs are usually seen and depicted on Earth guarding and upholding holy things; the tree of life (Gen. 3.24), in Exodus guarding and upholding the mercy seat (25.20, 28). In heaven they are seen under and yet upholding the throne, perhaps of the next order down from seraphs, seraphs who are seen attending at the throne.

In Ezekiel chapter one (vs. 5-14, 24) the "four living creatures" are called cherubs in chapter 9.3, chapter 10 and 11.22. They possess extraordinary powers and beauty. Cherubs correspond in Ezekiel's vision with runners that accompanied kings alongside their royal chariots and pictures the speed with which they respond to the king's instructions. Instead of six wings they have two pairs, one pair guarding and protecting, a second pair for swift flight.

In a song of praise King David speaks of God's 'riding upon a cherub ... the wings of a spirit' (2 Sam. 22.11; Ps. 18.10. See 2 Kings 6.17; 19.15). The Psalms also speak of 'the war chariots of God' (Ps. 68.17), and of God stationed above the cherubs (Ps. 80.1; 99.1. See Is. 37.16; Zechariah 6). 1 Chronicles 28.18 calls the mercy seat with cherubs the representation of the chariot.

They are depicted in Ezekiel's vision with attributes of God's essence, the four cardinal attributes perfectly balanced like the four sides of a cube, having powers over matter, and surpassing the limits of the physical world. In the book of Revelation (4.6,7) they are also called living creatures, not carvings or images or a half beast half human fusion, but intelligent living beings arrayed with powers befitting the presence and dwelling of majesty. Their visionary form and various features depict qualities, abilities and functions or responsibilities. The four living creatures in Ezekiel and the living creatures of Revelation 4 and 5 have some similarities and some differences; they are

probably all cherubs. The living creatures of Revelation may also be seen as a combination of the cherubim in Ezekiel and the seraphim in Isaiah. It is interesting to note the praise they give in the visions of Revelation alongside the 24 older persons, of Jesus Christ (Rev. 5.9; 14.3; 15.3).

Of course cherubs and seraphs do not literally possess wings. This feature represents their fearsome ability and power of motion. It causes noise like many waters, like an army moving, and like the sound of God when He speaks it is so mighty (Ez. 1.24; 3.13; 10.5; Rev. 19.6). Coming to a standstill they let down their wings (Ez. 1.25). Other angels, other than seraphs and cherubs, obviously have the ability of movement, such as the 'angel flying in mid-heaven' (Rev. 14.6; also Gabriel at Dan. 9.21).

Representative figures of cherubs were included in the furnishings of the tabernacle (Ex. 25.10-21; 26.1, 31; 36.8, 35; 37.7-9), and would serve to remind the serving priests that it was a holy place and representative of heaven itself. Hebrews 9.5 speaks of "*glorious cherubs overshadowing the propitiatory cover*", 'the cherubim of glory', representing the presence of God (Ex. 25.22; Num. 7.89. See also Eccl. 5.6).

Figures of cherubs were also included within the Temple (1 Kings chapter 6; 8.6, 7 and 2 Chronicles chapter 3). Its dimensions help us to visualise what only the High Priest would see within the Most Holy. The Holy of Holies was a cube of 20 cubits, a 30 foot cube double the size of the Tabernacle. Each cherub stood 15 feet high with a wingspan of 30 feet (1 cubit = 17.5 inches).

Psalm 91 is a magnificent and expressive hymn of trust. Its theme: ultimate security under the Almighty's sheltering wings. Possibly the psalmist had in mind living in the shadow of the great sanctuary or Temple, where one could find asylum and refuge, under the wings of the cherubim stationed above the Ark of the Covenant, and above what was called the 'mercy seat.' (see verses 11,12; Ps. 61.4; 27.5). Who are the twenty-four older persons of Revelation? A number of commentators interpret the elders as symbolising the church, and the living-beings creation, both united in their worship of God. Other speculations often seem to go beyond the book's own terms of reference. On reflection a close examination of the text reveals celestial beings are in view. N.B. Stonehouse writes, "late expositors do not appear to do justice

to the implications of the current critical text which records a song celebrating the redemption of a diverse multitude but which evidently ascribes the song to beings who are distinguished from the redeemed (p.92. the author's italics, in *The Elders and the Living-Beings in the Apocalypse*, chapter 4 of *Paul Before the Areopagus and Other New Testament Studies* 1957).

The passages in Revelation that refer to the twenty four elders are 4.8-11, 5.8-14, 11.16, and 19.4. The vision in chapters 4 and 5 is that of God's throne and those attendants upon Him, a heavenly Court in terms of a King surrounded by His elders. Isaiah has a similar vision at 24.23 (see also Ps. 69.28; Esther 6.1; Phil. 4.3; Heb. 12.23; Lk. 10.20; 12.8, 9).

The manner of the worship of both the living creatures and the twenty four elders are in the same terms and standing in the same basic relationship to God. The redeemed, the church, are named "saints", as in the rest of the New Testament, and do not appear in Revelation until chapter 7. At Rev. 5.8-10 where redemption is celebrated, the twenty four elders *and* the living creatures sing the song ascribing salvation to God and to the Lamb. In all their acts of worship there is no suggestion they are numbered among the redeemed. At Rev. 5.8 they act in conjunction with the "saints", in regard to their prayers as at Rev. 8.3.

The twenty four older persons extol the Lamb because of His redemption of a great company from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, but they do not identify themselves with the redeemed. At Rev. 7.9, 10 for the first time the saints themselves credit *their* salvation to God and to the Lamb. At Revelation chapter 14 the saints *sing* before the throne, the four living creatures, and the older persons (verse 3). There is then, a distinction between the redeemed, the church, who receive redemption, and those depicted in vision celebrating the accomplishment of redemption. These are depicted as in a grand court or throne room like counsellors, elders, attendant upon and praising both the Lamb and the One seated upon the throne. The significance of the number 24 is beyond the present brief study.

Angels have always been an important part of God's arrangements though we often do not give them any consideration (1 Tim. 5.21). Yet in the Scriptures they are frequently referred to, often with a familiarity, as though they were common

knowledge (Gal. 4.14). Just read the book of Acts and there are just as many acts of angels as there are acts of apostles or missionaries referred to (Acts 5.19; 6.15; 7.30, 35, 38, 53; 8.26; 10.3, 7, 22; 11.13; 12.7, 12, 23; 23.8, 9; 27.23).

They are often, but by no means always unseen actors on the world's stage. Sometimes human eyes have had to be opened to see the angels present (Balaam at Num. 22.22, 23, 31; Elisha's attendant at 2 Kings 6.15-17; companions of Daniel at Dan. 10.7; when Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus those with him 'saw no man', Acts 9.7).

They can move so swiftly that the response to prayer is often instantaneous. When Daniel (9.20-23) was praying Gabriel was despatched to answer his prayer, and arrived even before the prayer was concluded. It is comforting to know that response to prayer, especially when in danger can be instant. We may pray for angels to intervene (1 Tim. 2.1-6), angels are agents involved in answers to prayer (Rev. 8.2-4; Ex. 30.1-10).

Paul informs us that angels are present at the worship of Christians and in their gatherings (1 Cor. 11.10). And in Hebrews 12.22, 23 (NASV), Paul, contrasting the giving of the law at Sinai (Gal. 3.19) with the reality, writes "*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God; the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and the church of the first born are enrolled in heaven and to God the Judge of all ... and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.*"

We need no man like Moses, or superhuman beings to bring us into the presence of God who is no longer unapproachable as at Mt. Sinai. Jesus Christ is our Mediator who opened direct and personal access into the Most Holy, the residence of God's family, and where angels await us in joyful, festal assembly. In fact archangels are somehow involved in the resurrection of Christians (1 Thess. 4.16). Michael is connected with resurrection at Daniel 12.1-3.

You have approached, Paul writes, not just a stone mountain with those angels who transmitted the Law, but you have approached, you are before all of them, a "mass assembly", a "gathering of all", for Paul uses the Greek word panegyric (Gr. *panegyris*, *pan*, 'all', *agora*, 'assembly') meaning an assembly of all, the same expression used by Jesus when he spoke of the Son of man coming with "all the angels with Him" (Matt. 25.31).

KW

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

4. God resisteth the proud

*A panorama of
the way of Christ*

"Every man went to his own house" (John 7.53). The rulers of Israel had been in furtive conclave, plotting together how they might get rid of Jesus. His teaching and His influence among the people were so effective they would have taken Him for their leader and made Him their king. This was too much for that select minority who saw a threat to their own power and personal prestige.

Among that gathering were men of many temperaments. Not all of them held the same views or showed the same spirit. Nicodemus, who had gone secretly by night to learn more of the doctrine of Christ, pleaded for a fair deal or trial for the teacher his fellow leaders hated and feared. His plea was looked upon with suspicion. The scholars among them had already been searching the sacred writings, looking for the forecast of a prophet from Galilee. They could find none, for Jesus was much more than a prophet. The chief priests at the time of His birth had searched the Scriptures at Herod's command, giving Bethlehem as the place from which should come not a prophet but a ruler who should rule Israel. As Herod feared for his throne and was prepared to keep it at the cost of the lives of many innocent children, so were the priests ready to sacrifice an innocent man to retain their own personal authority. The voice of one timid man asking for a just trial by which he must have been acquitted, was easily silenced. Their own officers had refused to arrest the teacher whose words of life had stirred them into admiration, stating that "Never man spoke like this man". They, too, fell under suspicion. No agreement was reached. Frustrated, afraid, admiring, half convinced, the meeting broke up and every man went his way to his own house, taking their mixed attitudes with them. No wonder Simeon, the aged servant of God, had said to Mary while he held the infant Jesus in his arms, *"This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel"*.

Jesus forces people to think, to come to certain conclusions, to make certain decisions for good or ill. It is either yea or nay. Either He is accepted or rejected, loved and followed or hated and despised. The indifferent do not count and the timid are usually too late to do much more than send a wreath, to speak fine words when death has closed the ears which might have been cheered in life and gladdened by them. Foreknowing the wavering

minds of men and the proud hearts who love the best seats, God had sent His kingly Son in lowly garb, to be a stumbling stone to those who could not or would not believe on Him. As forecast, they either bruised themselves upon that stone or were crushed by it, while those who believed were exalted in heart and mind. To them He was precious. History and human nature do not change. Neither does God. The call to accept the rule of the Prince of Peace has been answered by blood and violence. The few who have followed are a little flock who have found a Shepherd. Each one has gone to his own house.

*Each heart will seek and love its own
My goal is Christ, and Christ alone.*

Jesus, during His lifetime on earth, never regarded this world as His world. When questioned by Pilate as to His kingship, he replied, *"My kingdom is not of this world"*. The opening words of His ministry were, *"The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel"*. From many references of this sort to another world, the inference has been drawn that believers of the gospel would at death be mysteriously transferred from an earthly to a heavenly dwelling place. Yet the earth was made for man and man for the earth. What Jesus offered men was life, under the varying metaphors easily understood as synonyms for life. The Biblical aspect of the world is that of society, of various systems existing on the earth among mankind in general. It informs us that the first world, whatever its size, perished at the great deluge of Noah, a disaster which imprinted itself indelibly upon the minds of all succeeding generations. The world system or order of society they produced, which has continued on through the terrible twentieth century, has contained all the faults of the old world. It is variously described as evil, dark, crooked and astray in the judgment of Him who created the earth to last forever. Looking upon that world with all the evidences of men's hate and sin and bitter envying about Him, He disassociated Himself with its system and spirit. Justice, mercy, peace, truth and all the beauty and tenderness of God-like love were the elements of His world. He lived in an atmosphere of sanity and life, far removed from the world of the poor lunatic among the tombs. A way also from the vast charnel house, hungry for its daily tally of the dead, from which He rescued a few youthful vic-

tims to assuage for awhile the grief of their distracted families.

He travelled and preached and taught among these sick and dying crowds, pouring out His energies and power in works of healing, conscious of the doubts of His own race, of the hatred of His enemies, of the determined plotting of the priests. So the spotless Lamb of God could say with deep feeling *"I am not of this world"*. His ways, His teaching, His whole life was as distinctly different as that of a visitor from another world. What had He, the Lord of Life, in common with this lost and dying race of men, whose words were abusive, whose spirit was so alien to the spirit of God? Jesus quenched their boasting by identifying their true sire as that father of lies who in the beginning had deceived and murdered the glory of Eden.

He wore the flesh of natural man. He walked and spoke and ate and drank as other men, was tempted and tried as other men through every avenue of His natural senses, but there the resemblance ended. Rebuking the fiery ardour of His disciples He declared the difference. *"I am not come to destroy. I am come that they might have life; that they might have it more abundantly."* The great of this world were waited upon, served by scores of bondservants, but the life-giving Lord proved that He came not to be served but to serve others. Knowing who and what He was and whither He went, He performed the task of a slave for His disciples. The world of which He was not, which knew Him not, but which God loved, was saved from annihilation by that mighty giving heart which broke in sorrow on the cross. His world was God's world, the kingdom of God, yet to come on the earth when the proud systems of this world have bitten the dust. Their lease is running out, and soon,

*"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."*

"The Truth shall make you free" (John. 8:32). Perhaps none appreciate or understand freedom so much as those who have not got it. To be restricted and denied all the natural rights of individual liberty is to an intelligent mind, the bitterest and most galling bondage. The birds of the air, the beasts of the woods and the cattle of the fields rejoice in their freedom to roam, to fend for themselves and to live their own lives. Behind bars or cooped within a cage, the spirit may submit but the eye dims and the

joy of life fades into listless indifference. Martyrs, offered the choice of stake or life-imprisonment by their tormenters, have chosen the stake rather than the terrible, long drawn out anguish of restraint, of loss of freedom to live and move and have their being beneath the changing skies and among the living, breathing things of God's creation. For freedom men have willingly given their lives, fighting for the fundamental right of the liberty of individuals and of nations. Today the mixed peoples of the earth clamour for freedom. It is the universal cry of man everywhere. Every sort of bondage once accepted is now felt and resented. The shackles of mankind are being shaken in every city. Forged long ago by hard circumstances, riveted by time and custom, an enlightened people now struggles to be free.

In the days of Jesus the Jewish race was in bonds to Rome. It chafed their proud spirit and roused their animosity when the arrogant conquerors interfered with their internal affairs or slew their rebellious without pity. Freedom to them meant freedom from Rome. Any man who could deliver them from that hated subjection they would have looked on immediately as a Saviour, a Deliverer, a Liberator. Hopefully, they had looked to Jesus, the worker of miracles, whom His forerunner had proclaimed as He of whom all the prophets had spoken. But Jesus spoke to them of a freedom spiritually discerned. It is a freedom of little interest to the natural fighting man. It was a freedom not of this world, a state of liberty for the sons of peace who would become the children of God. Freedom from sin and death, freedom from ignorance, superstition and fear, freedom from the bondage of sect and creed, from self and selfish aims, was a fine philosophy but it had little appeal for a people ready to take up arms against an aggressive conqueror. They rejected His teaching, and Christ, foreknowing its fate, wept over their holy city of Jerusalem. They took up arms against the iron might of Rome, were defeated and scattered to the four winds, their city a ruin, their temple reduced to smoking rubble.

For twenty centuries the civilized nations have pursued the same path. Suspicious, intolerant, grasping, ambitious, they have marched upon each other, destroying and being destroyed. Freedom is the offspring of truth, not of violence, yet the poets have described truth as *"forever on the scaffold, error on the throne"*. Truth is not popular, neither was Jesus who claimed to be the Truth. *"And now*

you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth." Had Israel, had the leaders and peoples of mankind, been set free from the greater bondage of their own weak nature and all the attendant vices of evil, the tragedies which have overtaken them could not have occurred. The universal practice of the golden rule would have trodden out the baleful fires of pride and fear. Where God is loved with knowledge and sincerity, where neighbours are cherished and respected, no man's hand would be against his brother. Love is truth and truth is love the only power to set men free from all their strife.

"He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free

To take away transgression; to rule in equity."

"The night comes when no man can work" (John. 9.4). Jesus expressed His love for men by His works. In a practical manner He gave sight to a man blind from his birth, while His disciples stood around speculating on the cause of the disease. He was less concerned with how or why than that His God-given power should be used in healing. It was a visible demonstration of the compassion of God on the sufferings of mankind. His was the will and the power to send relief to encourage men to turn from self and the evil ways of the world, to look unto Him and be reconciled and live. Knowing His time was short, the Lord of Life would not allow Himself to be hindered in His work by intricate discussion. It has been a common fault with scholars and students to cavil and argue, to discuss and debate and dissect a subject, even the very Word itself, until they have talked themselves out of face.

Trained as He had been by the wisdom of God and His work at the carpenter's bench, Jesus turned His knowledge and power to good account. He had the physician's sure touch and thoughtful care for His patient. This work He had done also on the Sabbath day, an act which created a division of opinion among upholders of the law. While the blind received his sight, and the disciples speculated, and the lawyers, having eyes, saw not, and blindly argued, Jesus went on with the work He had to do, healing, teaching and preaching, until cruel hearts nailed His healing hands to a cross. When the sun veiled its glory and darkness lay over the land, His work was finished.

There has come for all God's workers a night when toil is over and the busy hands are folded in rest. One short life-time is little enough in which to follow the Master's example, "to work the works of God", not always the great works of a full preaching career. Missionary zeal without love is but

sounding brass. The works of God are mercy, justice, self-denial, belief, faith, the good fight, the warfare of the pilgrim soul passing through this worldly vale on the narrow road to the eternal bourne in His very presence.

For the religious world also there comes the night when all work in the earth is finished. The voice of the prophet is stilled and the ears of the world become deaf to all but worldly attractions. The end of its systems cannot come without that great falling away from the faith to formalism, from belief to unbelief in the records of God's Book and in the plain claims of Christianity's founder, Jesus said to the blind Pharisees, *"for judgment am I come into this world, that they which see might not see"*. His words tested them. They stumbled and fell over their own cold formality. Their sectarianism blinded and bound them fast. The light of the world departed and the dark night of their dispersion closed down a great age of history.

Dark nights close all ages before a new day dawns with hopes of better things. As the lights go out and the daylight fades which once illuminated the high ideals of men and made bright their faith, there is no further scope for work. All the calls have been made, the invitations given, the deeds done, the lives dedicated and yielded, the Gospel preached in all the world for a witness. If there are works yet to be done let them be done quickly, carefully, with speed and dispatch, without the time-wasting trifling with words, for *"the night comes when no man can work"*.

Work till the last beam fadeth

Fadeth to shine no more

Work while the night is darkening

When man's work, is o'er.

"If this man were not of God he could do nothing" (John 9.33). The logic of this statement lies in its simple brevity. There was no record in history of any man born blind receiving his sight by any means known to man. The simple operation and instructions of Jesus had performed the miracle, a demonstration of knowledge and power over the accident of birth which had kept a man shut up in darkness. He came seeing, to the astonishment of his neighbours and the annoyance of the strict observers of the law. Jesus' work of healing on the Sabbath day created the usual division of opinion. The mercy, the compassion, the God-given power was lost on the law-worshipping sect whose time observance of the letter was fast strangling their faith and freezing to death the warmth of their humanity. It was the man who had been blind who

saw more than just the blessed daylight. His words were barbed and they found their mark in the cold characters of those proud disciples of Moses, who grudged him the gift of his sight on the Sabbath day. Taunting them for having so much anxious curiosity about the methods of the man who had healed him, he proceeded to mock their own blindness in that they could not recognize such a man by this one credential of doing what no man had ever done before. Then he flung at them the final proof which they of all men should not have needed; they, the teachers, were being taught, not by a greater than themselves, but by one who had recently been a blind beggar.

Stung by the truth of his common sense and all the discomfiture of having the tables turned on them, they cast him out of the synagogue. When Jesus heard that he had been expelled He went to look for him. On finding him He asked, "Do you believe in the Son of God"? The spirited defence of the man before his superiors had revealed his true metal. The seeing eyes of the man looked into the face of the Lord and worshipped Him. They were both outside the camp, the Lord and His new follower. Both had been labelled sinners by the self-righteous men inside. Jesus drew a sharp distinction between the physically blind who see with the penetrating eye of faith and the spiritually blind who have their natural sight but cannot discern the things of God. To make right appear wrong and wrong appear right is one of the worst of sins. It is

a deliberate denial of reason, truth and justice, a folly the cautious have been wary of committing lest they be found fighting against God.

What is not of God sooner or later comes to an inglorious end. No human power can successfully contest the power and will of God. Pharaoh's magicians withstood Moses and the plagues increased in intensity. Then they admitted themselves beaten with the words, "*This is the finger of God*". Hardness of heart is the common ailment not of the ignorant but of the lettered. Jesus thanked God that the great truths had been hidden from the scholars but revealed to the childlike in heart, because it seemed good in the sight of God. He did not go into the high places of the earth to seek sons among the noble and the illustrious, the lettered and the proud. The artificial atmosphere of wealth and learning was not His training ground for saints. In the by-ways He found the humble, rich in faith and to them He gave sight, wisdom, healing and the promise of life, the power to become children of the Most High.

Man achieves what is possible. God does the impossible. Jesus demonstrated this truth. The blind man understood, looked on his healer and believed, while the seeing scribes were blinded by their own prejudices.

*"Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind
Sight, riches, healing of the mind
Yea all I need in Thee to find
O Lamb of God, I come."*

(To be continued) FAS

"Put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, ... and put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator." (Col. 3.8-10). 'Wasps have been an absolute pest this year,' said a hardworking housewife as she finished her autumn jam making. Insects do seem to have enjoyed the long hot summer and autumn, especially butterflies on the buddleia. 'But what good are wasps?' pursued the frustrated housewife as the little beast buzzed around her head.

Like all God's creatures wasps fit into a wonderfully balanced system but human behaviour spoils that balance making us feel that certain organisms are a nuisance. But a Christian brother who is an expert on mini-beasts (an entomologist) says that they should be treated gently and it works. Anger and animosity have probably been the biggest single factor in man's failure to be friends with many in the animal world. They create fear, distrust and conflict.

Is that not so in human relationships also? In home and school, factory and office, on roads and in sporting events people get angry with each other and friendships are tarnished. It happens in churches and Christian communities. We allow the old human nature to spoil the "image of the Creator".

Paul says that we must take off the old nature and put on the new, as with a coat. It is a radical removal of that which we have inherited from Adam. We can't just cover over the old nature we need a fresh start. The Christian faith alone is able to do that. If we feel angry with someone, a boss, a teacher, a neighbour, the most effective way to change attitudes is to pray for the one we feel angry about and for ourselves that God will give us a warm heart of gentle patience and we shall find our anger evaporates.

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD

3. Jacob, The Patriarch

At various times in his life, Jacob, like other members of his family, appears to have created situations that resulted in trouble. It's easy to criticise after the event and perhaps many of us are just as short sighted. One of Jacob's saddest mistakes was his favouritism to Rachel's children while he was rather harsh with Leah's. They didn't choose to be the sons, of Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. Jacob's own young life had been twisted by the favouritism of his mother while his father favoured Esau. Why hadn't Jacob learned the lesson? Thus, Joseph received a coat suited to the son and heir who was not expected to take a share of the hard work handling the stock. But didn't God favour Joseph too? He was the one who had dreams of becoming lord over the rest of the family. While Jacob manipulated family favouritism he was not prepared that he and Leah should do obeisance to Joseph.

God spoke to Joseph in dreams and thereby showed the 17 year old youth to be the one God had selected for His purpose in the same way that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were part of the 'election of God'. This is a display of God's love for carefully selected people who are to carry out His sovereign will. That love, which in the New Testament is represented in '*agape*' is a seeking love that ultimately must result in the blessing of all mankind. Neither the failure of His servants nor the hatred of His enemies can thwart God's sovereign purpose that is totally motivated by love.

However much Jacob thought he loved Joseph, he failed to foresee the hazard of sending him to his brothers in the northern part of the country. He was learning, as generations before and since have learned 'to dote' is not the same as 'to love'. As Joseph, secured to another slave or to an animal, trudged the weary miles to Egypt, Jacob wept for his beloved son but was it more in self pity than disinterested unconditional love? He had lost Rachel and now he had lost her son. It is probable that his thoughts at that moment were far from the promise made to Abraham recorded in Genesis 15.13, 14 that his descendants would live in an alien land and be delivered from the people there; but then it is also probable that he didn't know that the land would be Egypt. Derek Kidner (1) observes that events that led Israel into Egypt were "set in

motion through the rivalries and predicaments of Joseph's brothers" under God's hand. Stephen showed that this pattern of human behaviour runs through the Old Testament, culminating at Calvary. Israel, in envy and unbelief rejected God's servants but that rejection plays its part in bringing about their deliverance. While nine cruel brothers bartered for their brother's life, as Judas would later to do with Jesus' life, God was with the victim and nothing could be done outside His purpose. So it was with Christian martyrs on the rack and at the stake in the persecution which led up to the reformation. *"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."* (Isaiah 43.1-2 RSV)

While Jacob mourned the loss of a dearly loved son the power of God was as able to keep Joseph on the journey to Egypt and in that pagan country just as He had 'kept' his father in Haran. Divine providence was exercised at every stage of the drama that raised the Hebrew boy to the highest place in the land. He could have had few better places to receive an initial education for later court life than the home of Potiphar.

The mean temptation of an immoral woman only served to contrast the integrity of the young man. Prison was a further stage of that education to mellow his character and make him a sympathetic as well as a disciplined ruler of the future. In some circumstances the incident in Potiphar's household might have cost him his life. The royal butler's memory might have left Joseph languishing in the Egyptian jail forever. But the God of Israel had the young life under control and the dreams of his youth came true. Joseph had been placed in that position to save Israel's family and the whole of that part of the world from famine. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm." It isn't the immensity of the miracle or the piety of the one receiving it that really counts, important though these may be. We need to discern, as Joseph did, the wonder of the Divine hand that is able to

move the pieces across the world's chess board yet give freedom of decision and action to those whose lives are so touched. How little we really know about God's providential care. Perhaps we should look more closely at His loving plan and purpose in our own lives, as Joseph did. Its so easy to get wrapped up in studies which hardly affect our lives yet fail to see how the Scriptures are concerned with the intimate details of our lives. The moment of greatest distress is the moment of God's victory in us. In his darkest moments Joseph related his loyalty and long suffering to God; as also he did in the moment of deliverance and victory (Genesis 39.9; 40.8; 41.16, 25)

The story of Joseph's reunion and reconciliation with his brothers is a very moving one. His manner of teaching them concern for every member of the family, the fear which gripped their hard hearts, the changes that eventually came upon everyone of the characters involved in the drama, all make a fascinating study. Yet from it the most important lesson is the power of God which weaves the pattern of our lives, transforming and renewing, until that wonderful image given to man at the beginning is restored, for that is the purpose of God's wondrous care. Behind the apparent harsh display of Joseph there is warm affection in his character as he thoughtfully invites and receives the whole family into Egypt. Wagons are sent so that his father and the grandchildren are able to travel. Brothers are reminded of the foolishness of quarrelling. They are settled in the finest, most productive area in Egypt at the Nile delta. Then at last Joseph introduces father and selected brothers to Pharaoh.

There are some interesting details mentioned in this story. Joseph's divination in his cup is very strange in view of the practice being strictly forbidden to Israel. But then his accusations of his brothers being spies was just a pose. The way in which Joseph directs them not to speak of themselves as shepherds but as stockmen after which they say exactly what they were told not to say, leaves something of an enigma. The Hyksos shepherd kings were still the ruling class of the land. Egyptians scorned the poor Canaanite shepherds in contrast with their own wealthy sophisticated city life. There is the anomaly of Egyptian farmers growing a surplus corn that is stored on a national basis and then they buy it back

until at last they 'sold themselves' to Pharaoh and put themselves into a position of everlasting debt to their monarch. These and other details are a testimony to scholars and scribes who later did not remove records that did not match their own ethical standards. It may seem strange to us that a nomadic sheikh should give his blessing to the head of the greatest empire of that time. Jacob's words are measured as he speaks of his 'pilgrimage' the days of which have been 'few and hard'. This is the first time that life is described in the Bible as a pilgrimage and as W. H. Thomson (2) writes "A pilgrimage has no abiding place by the way. That comes only at its end".

As Jacob makes his final farewell and blesses sons and grandsons, there is revealed something of what he has learned during the long and eventful years of his life. First he speaks to Joseph of Rachel his mother. Then poetically, He likens God to a shepherd reminding those present what he had done in his younger days. His special blessing is for the younger of Joseph's sons and favour rests upon Joseph in that his two sons each made up a tribe. He never seems to have forgiven Reuben for his indiscretion about Bilhah nor Simeon and Levi for their violence at Shechem. Did he ever discover that Reuben had planned to save Joseph from slavery? Was he to know that Levi was to be the patriarch of the family of priests from whom also Moses would come? Certainly there is the special command that his remains should go back to Canaan to be buried alongside Leah with his parents and grandparents. What was it that was so important about where they were buried? How much did they know about life after death, and the promise of the resurrection? This old patriarch, having seen the hand of God in his son and through angels that had visited him, played the part of a prophet. All that he has to say recorded in Genesis 48 and 49 is a remarkable act of faith that things will not always be as they are. (Hebrews 11.21)

(1) Kidner pl79 Genesis (Tyndale 1968) (2) Thomson The Patriarchs (1912)

DN

Gone from us

Brother John Brockis (Sible Headingham)

Sister Sadie Wakefield (Milborne Port)

Sister Dolina Smethers (Whetstone)

Sister Nancy Grice (Ruddington, Nottingham)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away.

TAMAR OF JUDAH

The story recorded in Gen. 38, relating an apparently unsavoury incident in the life of Judah, son of Jacob, is usually glossed over or passed over and tacitly ignored. Past ages viewed it with horror and it is probably regarded today by many readers with distaste. Rarely is it asked why the narrative appears at all in the Bible and probably few stop to reflect that since the overruling control of the Holy Spirit has seen fit to provide for its inclusion, there must be a justifiable reason. The chapter has nothing to do with what goes before in Genesis; it has no connection with what comes after. It stands entirely by itself, but the fact that it is there must denote a purpose. And a closer look at what is written reveals that it has a definite bearing upon the lineage and fleshly ancestry of Christ.

The account revolves around Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar. The latter is usually considered to be guilty of discreditable conduct but a clear knowledge of what might be called the background, shows that Judah was the one to blame and that, despite appearance, Tamar acted with perfect propriety and as a true daughter of Israel. This is not the only instance in Biblical history where a cursory reading without taking into consideration the underlying motives and actions of the characters can lead to false impressions.

Jacob had returned to his native Canaan from Padan-Aram, the home of his father-in-law Laban, with his family. They had not been there many years, before Judah, his fourth son of Leah, now in his thirties, separated himself from the family business and started up his own establishment thirty miles away among the Canaanites. Not surprisingly, he married a Canaanite woman by whom he had three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah. At what must have been a very early age he married off Er to a local woman named Tamar. The marriage did not last long. In a manner not detailed in the narrative and not relevant to the story, Er "*was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord slew him*". This can mean that Er, half-Canaanite in parentage, was guilty of some gross unrighteousness or led a grossly dissolute life, and in consequence, or in connection therewith, met his death. That was enough for the chronicler to say that the Lord slew him. The death of Judah's eldest son, through whom the family line would normally

be carried on, involved the question of succession to his property and his rights as Judah's heir. At this point the question of the Levirate law came to the front.

The Levirate law is from the Latin *levir*, meaning brother-in-law. It was the arrangement embodied in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 25.5-10) going back to remote antiquity before Moses, which was intended to perpetuate the family name and preserve family rights of inheritance in the case of a man who died without male issue. The solution was simple. The dead man's brother, or failing him, the nearest male relative must take the widow in marriage and the first son born to that marriage would take the dead man's name and be accounted his legal son and heir, inheriting the dead man's estate and carrying on the family line. The foremost example of the operation of this law in Israel is recorded in the Book of Ruth. There the widowed and childless Ruth is taken by her dead husband's kinsman Boaz, after a nearer kinsman had refused to do his duty, thus making her an ancestress of Jesus of Nazareth. In this case, Judah, faced with the same position, married Tamar to his second son Onan. It seems that Onan resented the obligation thrust upon him, and determined that, marriage or no marriage, he would not become the father of a son who then would not be counted as his. Perhaps he had designs himself on the possessions of his deceased brother and did not relish the possible appearance of a legal heir. At any rate he took steps to ensure that there would be no son while Tamar remained his wife. "*And the thing which he did displeased the Lord; wherefore the Lord slew him also*". Here again, in some way or other Onan also met an untimely death and the chronicler again associated the two events and saw in this the hand of the Lord. The fact that almost certainly the two deaths were due to what we would call natural causes does not forbid the feeling that the guiding hand of God was preparing the way for the execution of a purpose which the unbelief or sin of man was for the moment obstructing.

Judah was now faced with a dilemma. According to the Levirate law his youngest and only surviving son, Shelah, should now marry Tamar in the hope that thus heirs to both Er and Onan might be born. But Judah was apprehensive

that Shelah might then share the fate of his brothers. He was perhaps superstitious; was there some kind of curse on this woman that spelt death to any man who married her? At any rate he made an excuse. He told Tamar to return to her father's house for the present until Shelah was old enough to be married. There was probably justification for the excuse: in order to fit all these incidents in the thirty-three years between Jacob's return from Padan-Aram and the whole family's descent into Egypt it is not possible that Shelah could have been more than sixteen at this time. Tamar assented to the request and went back to her father.

Several years passed and Shelah attained marriageable age – about eighteen or nineteen in that day and society. Judah made no move to fulfil the obligation. Tamar realised that he had no intention of making a move. It was obvious that he intended her to stay out of the family circle. In due time he would find a wife for Shelah who, to his way of thinking, might produce the grandson he needed to carry on the family line without the risk of another and final tragedy if Tamar was again involved. Tamar's widowhood could not have lasted for more than five or six years. One might have thought that Tamar, who must still have been a young woman, would have accepted the situation and found herself another husband. But no; her subsequent action shows that she was determined to bear a child who would be the legitimate heir to carry on the line of Judah. In less than twenty years later Jacob, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold that the promised Messiah would one day come of the line of Judah. So there begins to emerge the outline of a Divine purpose working in this rather involved family tangle which would ensure the clearing of the way for the fulfilment of that promise.

How much of all this was already known to either Judah or Tamar is not apparent. The words of Jacob on his deathbed (Gen. 49) constitute the first recorded intimation that the Messiah was to come through Judah. It is tolerably certain that this was in Jacob's mind long before his death for he is not likely to have deferred making up his mind on so important a matter until the last minute. In this he must have had the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Reuben was his eldest son but he forfeited the birthright by the grievous wrong he committed against his father as narrated in Gen. 35.22. The

next two, Simeon and Levi, were rejected on account of their violent and fierce nature and the wrong they did their father in the matter of their sister Dinah (Gen. 34). Judah was the fourth and of him Jacob spoke approvingly. It might well be therefore that Judah was already aware of the fact that his was the chosen line and this might account for his anxiety throughout this series of episodes to be sure of acquiring an heir to continue the line.

However, he had made one grievous mistake. The chosen line was to be pure Hebrew without admixture of other races. Abraham, the first source, had insisted that Isaac marry a Hebrew woman, in his case from the family of Nahor, Abraham's brother. Jacob in his turn also married into the same family. Judah therefore was pure Hebrew, but he married a Canaanite and his three sons therefore were of mixed race, Hebrew and Canaanite. In the providence of God the line was not continued through them. Perhaps Tamar also knew something of this, which accounts for her subsequent action. Tamar is a Hebrew and not a Canaanite name and it is tolerably certain that Tamar was a Hebrew, a descendant of one of Abraham's numerous sons by Keturah or his concubines, or of the parallel family of Nahor. It might well be that Tamar perceived what Judah had not realised, that the only way in which the line of Judah could be continued into succeeding generations in a manner pleasing to the Lord was through Judah himself. His Canaanite wife had now died and there would be no more mixed race sons from that quarter.

Seen in this light, Tamar acted in a perfectly proper manner. Under the Levirate law, if Shelah was not to play the husband's part towards her, then it was the duty of the next relative to do so. That next relative was Judah himself. Tamar therefore was perfectly entitled to require that he assumed the obligation, just as Ruth did to Boaz after the unnamed "nearer kinsman" had declined to do so. She must have realised, however, that Judah, although now a widower had no more intention of marrying her than he had of allowing his son to do so. What had to be done therefore had to be done by subterfuge.

Judah was due to visit one of his outlying farms to superintend the annual sheep shearing, which was usually made an occasion for feasting and revelry. Tamar attired and disguised herself as a prostitute and waited, veiled, by the wayside for

him to pass. Judah, not recognizing her, turned aside and kept company with her, leaving as pledge of payment his personal seal, the cord by which it was suspended, and his staff ("signet, bracelets and staff" in the A.V.). The seal, of course, was an absolute proof of identity; it was used to mark objects as the personal property of the owner. Arriving home after the feast, Judah sent his friend Hiram to redeem his pledges, but by then Tamar had gone back to her own home and resumed her normal attire and no one could give any information about the woman he sought. Judah let the matter go by default and probably very speedily forgot all about it.

Three months later news came that Tamar was with child and Judah immediately hailed this as a heaven sent opportunity to rid himself of her altogether. He demanded that she be brought to the place of judgment and condemned. As the widow of his sons she was still legally a member of his household and he still had certain spheres of authority over her. Brought before her judges, Tamar produced the missing pledges. *"By the man, whose these are, am I with child"*. Judah, conscience stricken declared *"She hath been more righteous than I, because I gave her not to Shelah my son"*. Belatedly, but honestly, he admitted that she had done the right thing, both by the law and custom of the time, and in recognition of the declared purpose of God.

In giving herself willingly to a man old enough

to be her father Tamar must have been animated by some high purpose. Had she not done what she did, the line of Judah might there and then have become extinct. Then the high hopes of Jacob, that the tribe of Judah should be the royal tribe, giving kings to Israel and eventually leading to Israel's Messiah, would have been frustrated.

There is no indication that Shelah was any better morally than his brothers. The fear of Judah that if he married Tamar he might well share their fate would seem to point the same way. Tamar's sole place in the Scriptures seems at first sight to be a rather reprehensible role. It might well be, in fact that as a woman of faith she became the means of preserving the racial purity of the Messianic line at a time when it was being jeopardized by the heedless self-indulgence of one man.

The sons of Tamar were Pharez and Zarah. Pharez is named in all the Biblical genealogies as the son of Judah. The intervening generation of Er, Onan and Shelah, is omitted so far as the line of descent to Christ is concerned and they are noted only as being other sons of Judah. It is evident from the narrative that Judah took Tamar back into his house, although not as his wife. There she probably spent the rest of her life bringing up the son Judah needed to fulfil his position as progenitor of the famous tribe in which later days became the royal tribe of Israel.

AOH

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

16. Chapter 13

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

Jesus and His disciples were moving towards Jerusalem for His last visit.

vv 1-5 Cause of Disasters. Some people came to Jesus and asked about the Galileans who had been offering sacrifices when Pilate's soldiers killed them. It was a common belief from ancient times that disasters were punishment for sin. Eliphaz insisted that this was so when talking with Job (4.7). Pilate, procurator of Judea, had been ruthlessly cruel. There had been many massacres during the time of his administration. Galileans were notoriously turbulent and may even have provoked this problem by holding a demonstration against Rome. His cruelty may even have been the cause of enmity between himself and Herod (Luke 23.12). Jesus, however, made it very clear that such

disasters were not retribution. He emphasised His point by reference to eighteen people who died when the tower by the Pool of Siloam toppled over. Siloam was close to the wall of the city at the angle where the south and eastern wall joined. There are no historical records of these events not even by Josephus (1). Historians tend to ignore accidents of this sort. It is known that there were demonstrations against Pilate's use of Temple money to augment the Jerusalem water supply. Jesus had made it clear that the man born blind (John 9.7) was not to blame, nor were his parents. He also told those before Him that they were just as much sinners as those who had died. He directly challenged that first century generation to repent of their evil ways or they too would be destroyed. A nation that rebels

against God is on the way to disaster.

vv 6-9 The Parable of the Fruitless Fig Tree follows logically with the previous exhortation to repentance. This tree was probably six years old. Fig trees take three years to reach a fruiting stage, and appears to have borne nothing for three more years when it might have been expected to have fruit on it. This tree was more than just useless, it was taking up space where fruitful trees or plants could have been for so is the meaning of the Greek word which in the A.V. is translated by the quaint expression "cumbereth the ground" (2). The vinedresser pleads with the owner to be given another opportunity to produce fruit from the tree. Some commentators have seen in it the parabolic idea of the Saviour interceding with the Father, for sinners. The fig tree, like the vine, is used as a symbol of Israel (Hos. 9.10; Joel 1.7). John the Baptist had warned "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." The story speaks of God's patience with unbelief and wrongdoing. Like Israel in the first century, it could be said today, never had a generation been entrusted with so much and was so answerable to God for uselessness that invites disaster (3). Jesus in speaking of the ending age referred to the fig tree and all the trees putting forth foliage (21.29). Whatever the national and prophetic symbolism of this parable it must stand together with the earlier verses as a warning to every generation, and that is to us, that God cannot tolerate fruitlessness for ever. Are we repentant and fruitful?

vv 10-17 The woman with the bowed back. This is the last occasion recorded of Jesus entering a synagogue. Some commentators assume that this healing is connected with an evil spirit and quote Rendle Short (4) for explanation yet that physician wrote "Jesus once healed a woman who was suffering from spondylitis deformans; the bones of her spine were fused into rigid mass. There is no hint that the Jews or the disciples looked on this as a case of demon possession". He goes on to discuss these points and recognises the root cause as the principle of evil, against which in every case Jesus claimed victory. "*The woman had been bound by Satan*" to use Jesus' own words and He alone had the power to release her and would not wait till the next day to do so. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, which he described as a 'messenger of Satan' and although he was not healed, he was able to bear it

by the grace of God (2 Cor. 12.7). Luke again shows his sympathy with women and his special interest in medicine. The 'ruler' of the synagogue held a similar position to Jarius and he did not address Jesus personally but rather spoke to the people about coming to synagogue on Sabbath and postponing work like healing till next day. The woman had not specifically expressed faith to be healed but she had come to worship and she later 'praised God'. The Jewish leaders worshipped systems more than they loved God or people.

vv 18-21 Parables of Mustard Seed and Leaven. Mustard is a herb as Dr. Thomson (4) rightly points out but he also goes on to say that it may have been perennial and there are traditions which suggest that it was large enough for birds to perch in it. He had seen tall shrubs like the red pepper that grew on year after year and made it possible to believe that mustard could grow tall. In rabbinical and apocalyptic literature birds of the air stand for Gentile nations (5). Generally commentators think of this parable depicting the Kingdom of Heaven, growing from a tiny beginning into the triumphant Church at the end of the age. In this it is usually accepted that the Kingdom receives all peoples whoever they are. As one writer puts it, God's work grows to fulfilment no matter how small the beginnings. But Campbell Morgan (6) takes a different view of these parables. "The idea that the Gospel is to be preached until all the world is converted, is a mistaken one, if we believe Jesus and in what He said." He was writing in the 1940s and denied that Christian nations understood what vital Christianity is. He showed too that the darkest day in the history of the Church was when Constantine annexed it and grafted paganism into it. Thus the Church has become a great spreading tree into which the nations of the world find roost. Kings of Egypt and Babylon were likened to trees. The Lord was not dealing with the true nature of the ultimate Kingdom but said the "*Kingdom of heaven is like ...*". Similar parables should be examined to see that the 'Kingdom' is more than converted believers. The land that was sown had 25% success and in another parable 50% of the field was tares.

Similar differences of interpretation occur in the story of the woman's cooking. This was no small baking and half hundredweight of flour or in modern language about 50 kilos was used. She did not use yeast from little packets as we know it

today but used a piece of soured dough from the last baking. Geldenhuys sees as the final fulfilment at the Second Advent when the Kingdom will be revealed in its perfection. Barclay interestingly recognises that leaven is about fermentation and putrefaction and the whole as a seething mass of bubbles. The general interpretation is in the contrast between small beginnings and large results. But Campbell Morgan (7) questions whether leaven can be used as something 'good'. It is worth looking closely at the way 'leaven' is used in Old and New Testaments. Jesus warned the disciples of the Pharisees' hypocrisy pictured as leaven (Mark 8.15, Luke 12.1). Paul strongly urges the Corinthians and the Galatians to cleanse out the leaven that was like the hypocrisy of immorality and formalism (1 Cor. 5.6 and Gal. 5.9).

vv 22-30 The Strait Gate. It is thought that by this time Jesus was in Perea on the east bank of the River Jordan. The questioner remains unknown and his question was speculative. Jesus turns the question around and thereby gives the person who asks, an instruction – a direction about living. Why were those who wanted to enter not able? The Greek word that in the A V is translated '*strive*' is a technical term for those competing in the 'games' and from which we derive our word 'agonize'. Paul used it in 1 Cor 9.25 and 1 Tim. 6.12.

Jesus shows why some do not make the grade. He had never known them and they find that hard to understand. After all, they have been acquainted with Him and they knew all about Him and His teaching. But they failed to know Him personally; to walk and talk with Him and establish a personal friendship. When it comes to the point, they don't really know Him. Further more, not only the patriarchs and great men of Israel will be at His table but people from far and wide across the world. Jesus is already indicating that some people of Jewish descent will not be in the Kingdom while some Gentiles will be. Disciples should have been ready for the great move forward when Cornelius became a Christian. Genetic connections, being a member of the favoured race, did not give right of entry into the Kingdom but the hated, despised, unwanted Gentile sinners would go in before them. This was the great reversal, Israel had always been first, now they were last.

This passage also shows clearly that there is more to Christianity than just belief and sitting back resting on the knowledge of being saved. Jesus here

shows that to enter the Kingdom and to discover eternal life the believer has an intense struggle like climbing a mountain or wrestling with a situation; and the Christian life is really very exciting. Its also exacting but with Jesus always on hand, no one need fear to take the plunge, to go for it, for to become a Christian, to enter that strait gate, is within the possibility of every person. It is a change from being a slave to sin to becoming a slave of a Master who cared so much that He died for everyone of us.

vv 31-35 Warning against Herod. Was this a sincere effort to help Jesus avoid the man who had killed John the Baptist? Or was it an attempt to get Him out of Galilee into Judea where he was more vulnerable to the Sanhedrin. Jesus epithet 'fox' is rather unusual for Him. Geldenhuys says it describes Herod as neither 'straight nor great' while Morris says its about an 'insignificant or worthless person'. Barclay says 'a fox' symbolises what is sly and destructive. Herod wanted to see Jesus perform miracles but at His trial Jesus would not speak to the man. What does the 'third day' represent? Some have thought it was a short period of time while others pinpoint it to the years of Jesus' ministry. A further thought suggests that its about the completion of His mission and He is saying 'I am perfected, I am reaching my goal (Heb 2.10). He uses the Greek word '*teleioumai*' – 'I am finished'. Then comes that heart breaking lament over Jerusalem (in a different setting from Matthew or Mark). Jerusalem had a monopoly for killing prophets, it habitually rejected God's messengers. This is the lament of one who deeply loved the city of God's choice and knew that it hated Him. This is no warning of wrath to come but a gentle reminder of that which each prophet ended his message. There would come a time when the Olive would be re-grafted into the stock, a time when God's love for His people would at last be appreciated, a time when those who now wanted to destroy the Messiah would welcome Him in their midst as the 'Blessed One from God'. We may pray with Jesus "May your kingdom come" ... soon.

(1) (5) N. Geldenhuys : Commentary: The Gospel of Luke. (M. M. & S 1950)

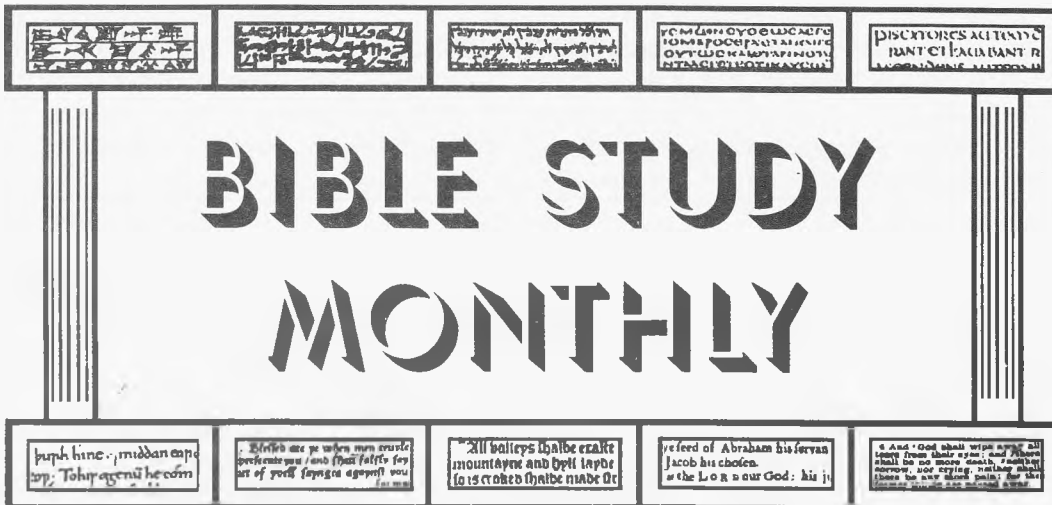
(2) E. H. Plumptre The Gospel of Luke (Marshall)

(3) W Barclay The Gospel of Luke (Daily Bible Study, St Andrews 1967)

(4) Rendle Short. Modern Discovery and the Bible IVF (1949)

(5) Thomson 'The Land and the Book' (Nelson 1882)

(6) (7) G Campbell Morgan 'Parables and Metaphors of our Lord' (Marshall Morgan & Scott 1956) pp 46-56.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 81, No.3

MAY/JUNE 2004

Published May 1st

Next issue July 1st

CONTENTS

THE VISION OF JOEL

1. The Coming of the Locusts . . . 51

THE HEAVENLY SOURCE OF EVERLASTING

- WATERS . . . 54

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

14. Reconciliation . . . 57

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD

4. Moses, the Man who Changed the
Ancient World . . . 61

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

5. Shepherd of the Sheep . . . 63

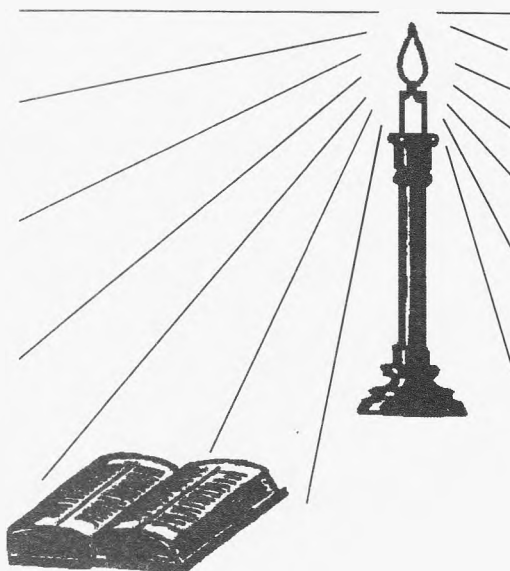
MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM . . . 67

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

17. Chapter 14 . . . 70

IN THE LAND OF BEGINNING AGAIN . . . 71

A HYMN – LORD OF THE UNIVERSE . . . 72



This Journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers.

Published by

Bible Fellowship Union (Registered Charity 1064607)

4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, England.

Email: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Editor & Secretary: DERRICK NADAL (*Nottingham*)

Treasurer: JOHN HAINES (*Gloucester*)

NOTICES

INTERNET: We invite you to visit the Bible Fellowship Union's web site at www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk – the site continually grows and each issue of the Bible Study Monthly appears on it. Tell your friends about it. We are very grateful to our 'technician' who gives long hours to do this work.

GIFT AID: If you send a gift and are a UK tax payer, the Inland Revenue will refund your tax to BFU. If you have already sent the appropriate form then you need do no more. If you have not sent a form or letter previously, please write a brief note, signed and dated, saying that you want all monies sent to Bible Fellowship Union to be regarded as a gift with tax refundable.

INTRODUCE A FRIEND: Your interest and support are much appreciated. 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 helpful as possible to all readers. They live in many lands with different Christian and cultural backgrounds. We are pleased to receive observations about BFU literature. Such comments may not make us change anything immediately but we will listen attentively. With the Lord's help and guidance we will try to maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication. In order to reach all ages, modern translations are often used. Articles are kept to moderate length with varied presentation. When reprinted material is updated we try to retain original viewpoints. What is published is believed to have a wide interest but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinion of the editor and his colleagues.

BFU PUBLICATIONS: were not listed on the back page of the March issue as heretofore and instead there should have been inserted a publications list. This can be used as an order form. It would greatly assist us and be much easier for you if readers' requests for booklets etc. were marked on this form and sent to us instead of putting them in the middle of a letter in personal handwriting which is sometimes difficult to decipher. Although we are not always successful, we try to be accurate in our address labels. The British Postal Service makes it clear that commas etc are no longer needed in a postal address, nor are UK counties. Please keep us supplied with your up-to-date address and let us know if any correction is needed. **Post codes (zip) are essential.**

AFRICA AND INDIA: We continue to send a considerable amount of literature to our Brethren overseas. They have a great need for Bibles and Bible study books. If you or your family or your friends have books of this nature that are no longer needed we will be glad to receive them to pass on.

Notes about **GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE** and **CART** are elsewhere in this issue.

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

'SWORD AGAINST ALL NATIONS' described as an apocalyptic novel based on 'Jacob's Trouble' is working towards production. The manuscript is now with the printer which will be followed by some hard proof reading. Volumes may be ready for dispatch in the Summer (in time for holiday reading) and an order form will be sent

in the July/August issue. We are already compiling a list of readers who require copies.

It is appropriate to say 'thank you' on behalf of

readers to those who work so hard in looking after BFU finances, those who do the proof reading and who despatch the magazines.

THE VISION OF JOEL

*An exposition of
the Book of Joel*

1. The Coming of the Locusts

Joel lived about eight hundred years before Christ, probably in the early part of the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah. He was a southerner, a Judean, and all his prophecy is cast against the background of Judea. He was a countryman too, not a city-dweller, as is evidenced by the wealth of allusions to country life in the three chapters of his short prophecy. Vine-dressers and husbandmen pass across the stage; vines and fig trees, pomegranates, palms and orange trees stand erect in the background against a landscape of cornfields and pasture lands. This was the world that Joel knew, in this framework he set his prophecy and from it he took his allusions and symbols.

Joel was very nearly the first of the prophets. Amos and Jonah lived just a little later and Hosea perhaps, twenty years earlier. But Hosea was not one of the men who saw in vision the glory of the coming Kingdom; he was more concerned with the sins of Israel of his own day. So Joel was the first of that long line of seers, ending with Malachi, who saw in vision something of the glories to come and recorded what they saw in never-to-be-forgotten words. Malachi lived five hundred years later than Joel. During all that time the voice of prophecy was hardly ever silent. When at last, with the death of Malachi, the Holy Spirit ceased to speak with the authority that was the peculiar characteristic of these Hebrew prophets the foundation had been well and truly laid. All men in after times were to learn about God's good plans for the last conflict with evil and the setting up of His Kingdom on Earth.

Isaiah, who began his lifetime of prophecy and statesmanship something like sixty years after Joel, must have owed much to the earlier prophet. Isaiah's prophecy contains much that is found in embryo form in Joel. Isaiah's doctrine of the "remnant" that was carried forward into the New Testament and furnished the Apostle Paul with one of his greatest themes, has its origin in Joel. The restoration of the Earth in the "times of restitution of all things" so wonderfully described by Isaiah, is

first hinted at in Joel. There are eloquent descriptions of Armageddon, the day of God's rising up to judge the evil things of the earth, and His establishment of a Kingdom of everlasting righteousness. The constant themes of prophetic Scripture from Isaiah to Revelation, have their commencement too in Joel. This obscure countryman, notable neither for wealth or rank or talent, unused to city ways and the society of the learned and cultured, a man of the people and a man of the soil, was the first to be blessed by the Most High with visions of the Last Days. And because this short prophecy is thus the fountain-head of all subsequent revelation concerning the Time of the End it is of surpassing interest to all who would discern the "shape of things to come".

Characteristically, we know nothing of Joel's antecedents, only that he was the son of Pethuel, and no one knows of whom came Pethuel, of what tribe he was, or where he lived. The message was all-important, and Joel's own identity of no importance. He just announces, briefly, "*The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel*" and then plunges into his message. None can doubt that it was a message from the heart; the words are burning, white-hot, given forth with urgency and fire. One has the impression of a youthful zealot like John the Baptist, crying his message with such intensity that the people were compelled in spite of themselves to stop and listen. "*Hear this, you aged men*" he cries "*and give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers?*" An arresting opening to the message, that he had something to tell them that had not been known in past generations; a new thing in the land to which they must give earnest heed, a thing unheard of by the wise men of times gone past.

"*Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.*" Joel was a master of psychology. He has not yet broached the subject of his message, nor even given any hint as to its nature. Many of the

prophets announced their God-given authority in their opening breath and plunged into their message with the next. Not so Joel; he means to get the interest of his hearers first. And how subtle the appeal to their knowledge of the Mosaic Law! It was an obligation in Israel that Divine Truth be passed on from generation to generation by the teaching of the young. Had not Moses commanded them, saying *"Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, ... make them known to your children and your children's children."* (Deut. 4.9) In much later times the people were taught to sing the noble strains of the 78th Psalm *"he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God; and not forget the works of God; but keep his commandments"*. What a wonderful conception of the eternal truth of God, handed down from generation to generation, preserving alive the healthful influence of a strong religious faith within the nation. What a condemnation upon our own times when this Divine injunction has been all but universally ignored, with the dire results manifest today on every hand among the young!

But now the listeners are waiting to hear what the prophet has to tell them. Is it a message only for them, or does its scope take in sweeps of time and space outside the limits of their own lives and homes, extending into all the Earth and even to the end of the world? From the first few words, tremendous though they may be, it would seem not, for they appear to relate to nothing more world-shaking than the imminence of a great plague of locusts in Judea, and that, although always a grievous calamity hardly needed the intervention of a prophet of God. *"That which the palmerworm has left, the locusts have eaten; and those which the locusts have left have the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm has left has the caterpillar eaten."* The Hebrew words refer to four varieties of the many different species of locust, the *gazam*, the *arbeth*, the *yelek* and the *chasil*. The first is distinguished for its voracity, whence it was called the "biter", the second for its swarming

multitudes, the third for its propensity for licking up and consuming all in its path, so it was called the "licker", and the fourth for plain unadulterated destructiveness. One might almost think that here is a covert reference to God's "four sore judgments". It is, surprising how often the number four is associated with Divine judgment in the Scriptures. Not only are there the well known four horsemen of Revelation, and the four winds of Revelation 7, but there are also the four horns of Zechariah 1.18 and the four beasts of Daniel 7. In these latter two instances, at least, the symbols describe agencies that are like Joel's locusts in that their mission is to execute judgment upon Israel. Yet like that dread visitation that appeared before Joel's eyes, it will one day be turned back and permit the favour of God to come upon a chastened people. That truth is brought forth very plainly in Ezekiel 14. 21-22. *"Thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four sore acts of judgments, sword, famine, evil beast, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! (RSV) Yet therein shall be left a remnant" (AV).*

The opening verse of the prophecy, therefore, gives a picture of the utter desolation of the land by a great plague of locusts. It was a vivid picture and a very familiar one to the people of Joel's day. Many travellers in Eastern lands have written descriptions of the terrible havoc caused by the millions of flying insects; no better symbol of devastation and ruin could be selected. Chapter 1 verse 4 implies that the plague has come and gone and now the land is utterly ruined. The following verses describe the lament that goes up from all quarters, from the people and the priests, the merry-makers and the workers merging into a national cry of distress rising up to God; but there is as yet no evidence of repentance. Chapter 1 closes with a people bowed down in trouble but not as yet prepared to come to God in repentance that He might heal them.

It is difficult to decide whether in this first chapter, Joel is referring to a literal plague of locusts or to a great calamity that is about to fall upon his nation and of which the locusts are but a symbol. Probably the latter is the right interpretation. There would hardly seem to be necessity for employing a prophet of God to foretell a visitation which was a fairly common sight and occurred every few years anyway. It is

more likely that this is the beginning of Joel's developing prophetic sense, that sense which by the time he reached his third chapter had stretched out into the far distant future and shown him Armageddon itself ---"multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision". But there is no hint in this first chapter of his seeing so far; the visitation to which he refers here must be one that was already very near, to be fulfilled on his own people in consequence of their apostasy. It is a reasonable conclusion that under the figure of the locusts, Joel was seeing the series of invasions under Shalmaneser and Sennacherib. These resulted in the carrying away captive of the "Ten Tribes" and a goodly number also of the people of Judah. Later, under Nebuchadnezzar the devastation of the land was completed. It is significant that just as Joel saw four species of locusts, each eating up what its predecessors had left (v 4) until nothing remained; so the Scriptures speak of four great military conquerors who came, one after the other, into the land of Israel and Judah, and left nothing. Shalmaneser V of Assyria (2 Kings 18.9) came first, about sixty years after Joel prophesied. He was followed by Sargon II (Isa. 20.1) who actually captured Samaria. Next came the famous Sennacherib whose host was destroyed outside Jerusalem (Isa. 36 and 37) but who nevertheless did subdue the ten-tribe kingdom and take many captives. Finally, a century later, came Nebuchadnezzar, who took the remaining people of Judah away to Babylon. The four waves of locusts had done their work and this part of Joel's prophecy was thus fulfilled.

It is the consciousness, of this imminent catastrophe that gives the prophet's message its initial urgency. "*Awake, you drunkards, and weep*" he cries (vs. 5) "*and wail all you drinkers of wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation is come up against my land; powerful and without number. Its teeth are lion's teeth ... It has laid waste my vines and splintered my fig tree...*" His first call is to the pleasure-seeking multitude, the heedless ones that had forsaken their covenant with God and turned to the interests and distractions of the moment. In the midst of their revelry destruction had come. The ruthless Assyrian soldiers would break into their houses and bring to an end their pleasant feasts. Isaiah saw something of a very similar nature when he proclaimed "*Woe ... to the*

drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of its glorious beauty ... Behold the Lord has one who is a mighty and strong one (the Assyrians) like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, he will cast down the earth with violence." (Isa. 28.1-2 RSV). There is an analogy with conditions in the world in our own day when men are "*lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*" (2 Tim. 3.4). Judgment inevitably must come, just as it did a century or so after the days of Joel. Is there not in our own times a repetition of the days immediately before Israel's final disaster? "*The Lord God of their fathers sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place; but they kept mocking the messengers, despising his words, scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy.*" (2 Chron. 36.15-16).

The completeness of the catastrophe is shown by the reference to vine and fig tree. The vine was a symbol of the people of Israel "*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel*" (Isa. 5.7); "*Yet I had planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed*" (Jer. 2.21). The fig tree too is a symbol of the same (Jer. 24); and they both alike are wasted. Small wonder that the prophet calls for a lament; the voice of the bridegroom and the bride has been stilled, the holy and glorious nation has been humbled to the dust, and even Joel has not as yet seen what is to be the outcome. He can do nought else but call to sorrow and mourning and to wait upon God to know what He will do. The Lamentations of Jeremiah, written to express the grief of the nation at the same calamity had its seed also in this prophecy of Joel, calling to mourning and lamentation nearly two hundred years before the event.

(To be continued) AOH

Next month's instalment treats the remainder of chapter 1. Joel still sees no further into the future, but he is led to take one great step forward. He raises the lamentation from a cry of hopeless self-pity to a cry to God. There is still no hint of repentance -- that comes in chapter 2 -- but his call to the nation to bring their troubles to God was itself a stage in the developing understanding of the Divine Plans which led him at last to see, and describe, the last great day when God will deliver all men from their thralldom to sin and death.

THE HEAVENLY SOURCE OF EVERLASTING WATERS

Part 1 of a Conference Discourse

"There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her." (Ps. 46.4, 5 ASV; 48.1)

The word rendered river in the AV is generally explained as referring to the brook Kidron, which flows down the valley of that name on the East side of Jerusalem. *"The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High"* has, however, direct reference to the Temple on Mt. Moriah. The word rendered river in this psalm is the Hebrew word *Nahar*, which denotes a perennial spring, a constantly flowing source of water, clear, fresh, running water that the Hebrews called 'living waters' in contrast to the waters of a stagnant pool. It is therefore not applicable to the brook Kidron that contains a little water only after rainfall, but otherwise is a dry watercourse during the whole year ("the streams are of short duration", p.8, *Notes on the Water Supply of Jerusalem*, J. MacNeill, Capt. Wilson, 1866).

Is there a perennial, a constantly flowing spring of water connected with the 'city of the great King' (Ps. 48.2) and with the Temple on Mt. Moriah, and which made the city of Jerusalem rejoice? And how is it that a Roman historian could describe Jerusalem, situated on an elevation, on mountains, as "Within, truly well watered; but without, altogether dry?" (Tacitus, Hist. v.12).

In spite of its closeness to the arid Judean wilderness, on the East side of Jerusalem there is a single source of living water called the Gihon Spring or the Gihon Fountain. It was "vital to the existence of Jerusalem" (*Digging Up Jerusalem*, K. M. Kenyon, 1975, p.76). An archaeological and geological survey between 1909-11 concluded, "The prominent point established by the recent excavations is the extreme importance of the fountain" and also wrote of "the very remote geological period when it first issued." (p.31, *Underground Jerusalem - Discoveries on the Hill of Ophel*, H. V. 1911)

Rainfall in Israel was completely seasonal, from April to November, for seven months there is virtually none. Any permanent settlement had to be within reach of a perennial water supply. Only one such spring exists in Jerusalem, the Gihon spring,

it is truly water in a thirsty land. Access to this spring was the reason for the first Jerusalem and appears in the pages of history for the first time when Abraham meets up with Priest and King of the Most High, Melchizedek, under the name Salem (Gen. 14.18).

A military as well as a town-planning problem lay in how to protect this single vital water source. The spring lies in the valley, any fortification here would easily be overcome from higher grounds. It was solved by closing the entrance to the spring and cutting a vertical shaft to access the water, executed either by Melchizedek, or the Jebusites who eventually moved into the settlement. A team of archaeologists and geologists reported the shaft is a "scientifically constructed wonderful path so perfectly hidden in the rocks" (*Underground Jerusalem*, p.34, termed 'Warren's Shaft'.)

A wall, the Eastern city wall, well down the slope of Mt. Zion/Ophel protected this new opening. If it were too low it would be vulnerable; control of the spring conditioned the position of this east wall. Jerusalem itself occupied a lofty position, built as it was on the elevated summit of a ridge of limestone rock. It was a mountain fortress and could not be taken by any invader at the time. So impregnable was its approach that the Jebusites boasted that a lame or a blind man could guard the city (2 Sam. 5.6-10).

However, David either knew or discovered not only access to the Gihon Spring, but also the "water tunnel" (2 Sam. 5.8) that led from the Spring into the city. He offered a reward of first in command to any of his men who would be first to scale the shaft and enter the city (1 Ch. 11.4-9). Joab succeeded taking the Jebusites completely by surprise, possibly at night, opening the city gates, and the city fell.

Joab's feat in climbing the 50-foot shaft must have been considerable. An expedition in 1867 by Warren could not climb it without wooden scaffolding. In 1909-11 the Parker expedition also failed. Kenyon's excavators failed in the 1961-7 excavations, 100 years after the first attempt!

Another team in 1978 attempted repeatedly but were unable to scale it, and had to enlist the help of skilled climbers; in 1979 it took three alpine

climbers two hours using specialist equipment. (See "The Rediscovery of the Ancient Water System Known as "Warren's Shaft" by Yigal Shiloh, in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, Ed. H. Geva, p.49)

It has an oval shape, like a chimney in the rock and designed to draw the water. A geological survey came to the conclusion that the vertical shaft, and the cavernous lateral tunnel that accesses the shaft, were engineered by integrating natural and man-made features. This was in itself an accomplishment. They went to extraordinary lengths to tap this single source of water.

Jerusalem was to be not only the capital, the city of the great King, but also the place where the Temple was to stand, so David, after taking the city, first secured the Gihon Spring, which lay outside the city itself and walls protecting access to it. A key problem for Solomon in the planning of Jerusalem and the Temple was how to ensure a regular supply of water.

What of all the water for ritual washings and purifications, called ablutions, required under the old Law and which were numerous? (Mk. 7.3, 4) Where did the water for all this come from? All the priests and Levites had frequently to wash. The three main festivals often had as many as a thousand priests and Levites officiating. The sacrifices for burnt offerings had to be washed and cleaned; all the vessels of the Temple had to be washed. Whole sheep and lambs also were washed, and during one Passover over 200,000 lambs had to be washed and sacrificed (Josephus VI.ix.3).

To the north of the Temple there were three rock-hewn cisterns or open pools. One is a sheep pool where lambs and rams were taken, through the city Sheep Gate to be washed before sacrificed in the Temple (Neh. 3.1). The other two cisterns together formed the Pool of Bethesda (John 5.2, House of Mercy or Bethzatha, House of Olives) over which there are five marble colonnades. These cisterns were cut in the rock with a rock partition about 20 feet thick. Each is 130 feet square, 30 feet deep. Where did all this water come from? Not from rain, for this could be contaminated and was forbidden in connection with the Temple. It would not account for the quantities used anyway. They were all fed by water engineered from the Gihon Spring by a series of hydraulic installations.

The Hebrew word *gihon* means 'gushes forth' and takes us to something Jesus Christ said (John 7.38) "*out from his inner parts streams of living water will gush forth*", and to a Samaritan woman at the well he stated that "*whoever drinks from the water that I will give will become in him a fountain of water bubbling up to impart everlasting life*" (John 4.14). It was King Solomon who extended water channels from Gihon to supply every part of Jerusalem with fresh running water. One system was for the city, the other for the Temple, two water systems that fulfilled different functions and operated in different ways. Interestingly Solomon was anointed King at the Gihon Spring (1 Kings 1.32-45), Josephus writes that the inauguration occurred at a fountain (Ant. vii.xiv:5), and the Mishna states that this led to the demand that all later kings of Judah be crowned at a spring, "Our Rabbis taught, Kings are anointed only by the site of a spring" (Kerithoth 5b). Kingship, Priesthood, and the Temple, were placed next to and dependent upon this Spring for their existence.

It was also at this Spring that David housed the Ark of the Covenant in a special tent until the Temple was built. It was specially housed for 38 years (the last 27 years of David, and the first 11 of Solomon; 2 Sam. 6.16-20; 1 Kings 3.15; 8.1; 1 Ch. 15.1; 16.1). In David's reign this spring became the appointed place for all ceremonial washings before any great act of worship or religious service. The Tabernacle itself, constructed in Moses' day, was at Gibeon (1 Kings 3.4; 1 Ch. 16.39).

How then can a spring in a valley supply water to the top of a mountain? There were water channels, ducts and hydraulic tunnels connected to the Spring, and clearly indicates an advanced knowledge of the science of hydrology and hydrostatics, a branch of mechanics dealing with the characteristics of fluids, especially pressure, unknown to the Romans. The Romans used immense arched structures for conducting water across valleys and depressions. Solomon's engineers knew that water flowing through a siphon or a tube can be made to rise under pressure and exploited this when moving water from one position to another underground. They also had considerable skill in masonry. Where did these water channels run to?

There are vast cisterns beneath the Temple, great rock-cut reservoirs that were connected by

elaborate hydraulic masonry to the Gihon Fountain. Thirty seven have been explored and excavated in detail (there are others that have not), they are called the "Royal Cisterns", mostly cut out of the soft chalk rock (maliki), but the roof of the cisterns is composed of harder overlaying rock (missae). They are all connected by passages, tunnels and innumerable ducts, so that beneath the Temple there is a honeycombed network of vaults and cisterns, all supplied by this single immense Spring. Many are of considerable depth (the latest survey of the Temple cisterns was carried out in 1996, *Below the Temple Mount in Jerusalem: A Sourcebook on the cisterns, subterranean chambers and conduits of the Haram al-Sharif*, S. Gibson, D. M. Jacobson, 1996).

One cistern is so gigantic it is known as the Great Sea (not the Molten Sea) and covers an area of 11,000 square feet, is 42 feet deep on average, and holds 3 million gallons (Ecclesiasticus 1.3). Those that have been excavated amount to an area of seven acres and hold, in total, 10 million gallons, a quantity sufficient to supply Jerusalem for more than one year (Notes on the Water Supply of Jerusalem, p.68)! Yet this water was not for the general populace, but for the Temple and its worship services. Truly there was a subterranean sea under the Temple.

The Pools of Jerusalem were also supplied by the Spring, all of which were reputed to have healing properties. All of Jerusalem's waters had healing powers. The ten Pools of Jerusalem had a combined capacity of over 44 million gallons (Notes p.21). Also next to the Altar in the inner courtyard there was a huge copper basin (Ex. 38.8) resting on 12 bull-calves arranged in groups of three facing a point of the compass, called the Molten Sea and held 10,000 gallons of water, seven feet high, three inches thick. A large and magnificent basin, grand enough to symbolise the Great Deep.

In 300 BC an Egyptian official, Aristeas, was sent to the High Priest at Jerusalem to procure a copy of the Law for the Great Library of Alexandria. In a letter to his brother he gives an account of his visit to Jerusalem (Ant. xii. ii. 1, 15; see also Eusebius). He writes, "a powerful natural spring is received into subterranean reservoirs, the extent of which is surprising and beyond description ... each of them has countless pipes so that the different streams converge together ... all

these were fastened with copper at the bottom and at the sidewalls, and over them a great quantity of plaster had been spread [cisterns were lined with waterproof lime plaster. Limestone rock in its natural state is porous, and water would seep through the sides of these cisterns], and every part of the work had been carefully carried out" (*Epistle of Aristeas*, 89-90; tr. R. H. Charles, 1913, II, 103). He goes on, saying that 'subterranean reservoirs extend to a distance of 5 stadia round the Temple (over 3,000 feet: actually more, they did not, wisely, show him everything!), that they have innumerable ducts and pipes for the regulation and distribution of waters, with many secret openings known only to the servants of the holy house, through which the abundant waters wash away the blood of the sacrifices.'

Tacitus (Hist.v.12) also writes, giving further secular confirmation, that beneath the Temple area exists "A perennial fountain of water, mountains excavated underneath; likewise fish ponds and cisterns."

So we can truly say there were vast quantities of water before the Most Holy, the Mercy seat, the throne of God, "like the sea in abundance" (Ecclesiasticus 50.3). This fact was used in visions recorded in Revelation, the use of imagery drawn from the earthly Jerusalem in order to describe the heavenly, and also reproduces some of the features of Ezekiel's vision of the holy waters (see Rev. 22.1, 2, 14; 4.6; NIV).

One cistern occupies part of the SE corner below the Temple itself and lines up with the Foundation Cornerstone at the SE corner of the Temple platform. This cistern is of importance and is of a curious cruciform shape, it has the shape of a cross, and is called the Cross Cavern. It contains a long passage running in the direction of the Most Holy, under which there is a natural cavern. Over the Cross Cavern stood the Altar of Burnt Offering, connected by what was called the Blood Passage to the cavern under the Most Holy. In other words sacrificial blood coursed its way underground from the Altar, passed the Most Holy, and then on out of sight. It is Jesus laying down His life, entering the Heavenly and presenting His sacrifice to His Father (Heb. 9.12-24).

According to the account given in the Talmud there was another channel for the offal of the sacrifices, so that by means of sluices of water, all the unwanted parts of offerings were carried off

through subterranean passages, to be completely hidden from sight. It has also been discovered that water still flows under the site of the Most Holy with water from the Gihon Spring, a stream of clear water is still issuing under the Temple Hill. The Spring is also not dependent on rain, or drought, it never, ever dries up. It is perennial, ever flowing. In fact it has been witnessed to rise in level during drought. Twenty-five feet below the valley surface it is still flowing, a fitting symbol of Him who

imparts everlasting, never-ending waters of life. It is also interesting to note that one of the Rivers that issued from the Garden of Eden which faced East, was also called the River Gihon (Gen. 2.10,13). The Temple itself was positioned facing East, like the Garden of Eden, East from where the Spring issued, and facing the rising of the sun, for God and Christ are the Light and the Life of the world.

KW

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

14. Reconciliation

The sands were running out fast. Only about three years remained for Israel's most famous king. He had achieved tolerable security from external enemies for his people and could bequeath a safe and reasonably prosperous kingdom to his successor. But there were enemies within the nation and he knew that after his death the destined ruler, his young son, Solomon, still less than twenty years of age, would need all his wisdom and sagacity to maintain his kingship. All that came out in his final charge to Solomon when he felt the shades of death closing round him.

In the meantime the old flair for organizing the affairs of the nation asserted itself. His military prowess was spent; no longer did he possess the physical strength to go out at the head of his armies to battle; in any case there were no longer any enemies, to fight. Israel had earned from the surrounding nations that healthy respect for her fighting qualities that never left her afterwards – and remains to this day in this modern world. David had time to think of other matters and other ambitions having to do with the internal affairs of Israel, and more importantly, its religious condition before God.

Perhaps this is why he determined to take a census of the nation. 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21 both tell how he ordered Joab to institute and conduct a comprehensive numbering of the people. He wanted to know just how many subjects he had and Joab was to investigate and report. Joab was appalled. *"May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"* (1 Chron. 21.3)

There was always a prejudice in ancient times

against the counting of peoples. It was partially based upon the superstitious idea that if the powers of darkness knew just how many people were involved in men's opposition to them their strategy could be better directed to obtaining the victory. There was also the feeling that if the Lord was fighting for them their number was of no consequence, and therefore to take a census of this nature implied a lack of faith and would bring Divine censure upon them. So Joab made his protest.

David took no notice. Joab was told to obey and summarily dismissed from the king's presence to commence the discharge of his commission. 1 Chronicles says that it was Satan who moved David to undertake this census whereas 2 Samuel declares that *"the anger of the Lord was burned against Israel and he incited David against them saying. Go and take a census of Israel and Judah"*. The probable explanation of this apparent contradiction is that the word rendered "Satan" in 1 Chron. 21.1 means "an adversary" (the Hebrew word for "adversary" is "*Satan*"). Unless the context specifically demands the application of the term to the malevolent evil spirit popularly known as Satan, the term adversary should be used. 1 Chron. 21.1 should read *"An adversary stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel"*. The combined import of the two passages then would be that some person unknown instigated the thought in David's mind to do this thing.

It certainly was not the Lord. It is quite illogical to think that if this action was displeasing to the Lord, and merited and received Divine retribution in consequence, it would have been suggested and inspired by the Lord in the first place. The action was inspired by man. The next question is, what was its purpose? Whatever the purpose? it was

something which elicited Divine disapproval.

"The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (2 Sam. 24.1) Note, not against David at this juncture, but against the nation generally. This can mean only one thing, that the nation was passing through one of its periodic times of apostasy, and consequently under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant was due for chastisement. If the occasion of the census became the means of chastisement, so be it. The Lord uses all kinds of agents to execute His purpose.

But why should the Lord be displeased at David's action in this matter. Says 1 Chron. 21.7. *"God was displeased with this thing"*. There is nothing immoral in counting heads, no prohibition in the Mosaic Law; in fact God commanded both Moses and Joshua on two notable occasions to do this very thing. The element of evil must, therefore, have been not in the action itself but in the motive which inspired the action. Why did David, after nearly forty years of kingship, suddenly develop or had instilled into him this sudden passion for ascertaining the number of his people. He had never indicated any such desire before. What element was present in his reign at this time which was not there before?

One activity, and that a most noteworthy activity, did come to its culminating point at this period of David's reign. That activity was the collecting together of the materials and the preparation for the erection of the magnificent Temple that he had planned. But the Lord told him it would be built, not by him, but by his son Solomon, for he had been a man of blood, and that great Temple was to be a house of peace. The rather confused and disjointed narrative in 1 Chron. 22 to 28 gives an account of David's actions at this time. It would almost seem as if he sensed his approaching demise and was anxious to leave everything in order and readiness before his decease. There was a great coming and going between the land of Israel and that of Tyre, from which had to be obtained many cedars of Lebanon, floated down the coast from Tyre to Joppa and then hauled forty miles up the mountains, to Jerusalem. There was a great deal of quarrying of limestone from the Judean hills and its shaping by masons into large stone blocks; the casting and fabrication of gold and silver and copper into the ornamentation and furnishing of the building, and a great deal besides. All this required men, teams of labourers and foresters and hauliers

and craftsmen toiling in the forests, quarries and factories, to give substance to this creation of David's ambition, to be the crowning glory of his reign. Those chapters in Chronicles, written long after the events they record, tell of the gathering of thousands of workers together to perform all kinds of tasks and the appointment over them of controllers, supervisors, taskmasters, to see that the work ordained was duly and expeditiously executed. When one thinks of the glory of David and Solomon's achievement in that magnificent Temple, rated by the ancients as one of the seven wonders of the world, one is apt not to realise the cost of it all in terms of toil and sweat and human suffering and death. *"There are workmen with you in abundance"* said David to his son. The various categories of workers is catalogued in a meticulous manner, down to those who were allocated to *"do the work of the ground for tillage"*. These were the growers of crops and fruits and keepers of herds and beasts of burden, apparently to feed and serve the hosts of manual workers engaged in this great project. All seem to indicate that David conceived and put into execution a comprehensive project for the regimentation and virtual harnessing of the entire nation for the completion of his great project.

Was it for that purpose he ordered the census, that he might ascertain the extent of his manpower resources, that the work might be planned accordingly, that every man in Israel might be assigned his place and directed to work therein? That at least could suggest a logical reason for David's otherwise rather incomprehensible action in sending Joab and his men to number all Israel and bring the results back to him. Suppose then that this was the reason; why should the Lord be "displeased with this thing" to the extent that He sent a pestilence upon Israel? Was not the Temple to be for His honour and was not the purpose that He might be magnified among all nations. Surely all this lavish display of earthly wealth and untiring human effort to His honour could be nothing but pleasing to him?

Perhaps not; perhaps the Lord looked beyond and underneath all this frenzied and much-proclaimed activity, and saw that all was not right, either with David or with his people. *"The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool"* He said much later on to Isaiah, *"Where is the house that you build me, and where is the place of my rest?"* All these things His own hand had made at the beginning, and He derived no particular joy from

this great edifice, however magnificent, unless it was a spontaneous expression of the love and devotion and loyalty of His chosen people, and that, the narrative clearly implies, it was not. A lot is said in Chronicles about the willingness of the leaders of the nation giving of their wealth to assist in the compilation of the treasure of which the Temple was built; nothing about the lower orders who had to undertake the hard work. The implication is that they were just drafted into the service at the king's behest and that was that. When Moses built the Tabernacle in the wilderness the Lord's instruction was that each man and woman of Israel was to bring "of his own voluntary will" that which he or she could contribute to the achievement of that work. The people then were fired with an enthusiasm for, and a loyalty to, God and it was that spirit which the Lord honoured and accepted. Things were not the same in the days of David. The king was intent upon a lasting monument to the glory of his reign; that to him was synonymous with the glory of God, but there is no guarantee that the Lord also saw it that way. The notables and politicians and leaders of the nation comprised a rabble of plotters and counter-plotters each ever on the alert to advance his personal interests and ambitions at whatever cost in injustice and suffering to others, even to the extent of murder. The people in general, despite David's own unflinching loyalty to his God and his example, were themselves, retrogressing back into the idolatry from which Samuel had rescued them a century before. We know that, from the statement in 2 Sam 24.11 "*And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.*" These words always mean the same thing. The people had apostatized from the Lord, repudiated the Covenant and turned again to idols. So the penalty of the broken Covenant had to come upon them as it had done so many times before. How could the Lord God of Israel receive and bless the offering of such a Temple to His glory at a time when the hearts of His people were so far from Him?

Twenty five years earlier David had conceived this scheme of a magnificent Temple to the Lord to supersede the existing Tabernacle constructed by Moses (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17). On that occasion God had sent the prophet Nathan to tell him, in short, that He did not want such a house and that He was quite content to dwell with His people within the curtains of the Tabernacle. What was more important, Nathan went on to tell David, was that

the Lord Himself would build David a house, a royal dynasty, that would culminate in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. He would be the King of all the earth, in the Millennial Day of man's redemption, ruling as a greater David to all eternity. That, to the Lord, was a much more important thing than the erection of a literal building upon earth which must inevitably, with the passage of time, wax old and vanish away, as in fact it did at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers less than four centuries later. Now, at the end of his reign, David had revived the idea, doubtless believing that the Lord's promises regarding the glory of his successor Solomon whilst he maintained Israel's loyalty to God would incline him this time to accept the proposition and the offering.

So the pestilence which the Lord allowed to come upon Israel might well be regarded as a joint judgment upon David for his ambition and upon the people for their idolatry. It did at least have the effect of causing David to do what he ought to have done at the first, come before the Lord in humility and with sacrificial offering to ask the Lord's blessing and guidance on his project.

David, busy with his planning, the result of Joab's census before him, received a visitor, the prophet Gad. Gad was an old man by now; he had adventured with David since the early days when Saul was king and been with him in the dark days of David's exile in the wilderness. He was probably one of the very few men privileged to "speak his mind" to the king. (It is thought that Gad was the author of the narrative appearing as 1 Sam. 25 to 2 Sam. 9). Now he appeared in the royal presence with a message from the Lord.

The message, as usual, was uncompromising. David had sinned; he must accept the consequences. He had the choice of three options. Three years, famine, three months' invasion of the land by hostile enemies, or three days' pestilence decimating the people. Gad faced his sovereign, "*Choose one of them*". "*I have sinned*" said David dejectedly, "*I have done very foolishly. Let me now fall into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man*" (RSV). The country had just survived three years of famine; he did not want any more of that. He was in no mood, even had he been physically capable, to lead his armies out against an invading host. Three days' pestilence would soon be over and the loss of life probably least of the three alternatives. "*So the*

Lord sent pestilence upon Israel ... and there died of the people about seventy thousand men" (2 Sam. 24.15).

One might query the justice of the Lord inflicting death by pestilence upon seventy thousand Israelites as retribution for David's fault. It might not have been that way at all. It might well be that what the Lord did do was to restrain famine and invasion which was already poised to strike and allowed the onset of a pestilence which was on the way anyway. If all related factors are taken into account the position was that because Israel generally was in a state of apostasy (2 Sam. 24.1) all these things were due to come, irrespective of David's particular fault at this moment. Was the moral behind this happening the fact that had Israel been righteous and David without fault, none of these things would have smitten Israel? What the Lord did was to accept David's plea and allow only the lightest of the three natural disasters to fall upon the people as a kind of combined retribution for their own apostasy and the lack of real piety in David and to restrain the other two.

David's repentance was sincere, and his repentance was accepted. The prophet Gad came again to him and told him to erect an altar at the spot where the pestilence was stayed, on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. There he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made his peace with God. There, perhaps, at last, his life was cleansed from all arrogance and pride, ruthlessness and blood-guiltiness, leaving only the man of God who fifty years earlier had been described as a "man after God's own heart". Here the sterling faith and tenacious loyalty of the shepherd lad who faced the unbelieving Philistine with one small stone taken

from the brook came to the top. He was once again God's man, a fitting type of the One who is to take His place on the throne of David, ruling for ever and ever.

It must have been so, for that piece of land on the top of Mount Moriah where David built his altar and made his reverent offerings to the Lord became hallowed for all time when Solomon not many years later built there the great Temple. That had been David's own ambition to build but which he had been forbidden so to do. That spot was to be famed ever after as the meeting place between God and Israel throughout the period of the Kings, a symbol of the Divine presence with His people, thus revered through the centuries to our own time. It is entered also in the annals of Heaven as the place where at last the often wayward and errant man whom God, who never makes a mistake, had chosen at the first, became fully and finally reconciled to the One who had never really let him go. So for the few remaining years of his life, David entered into an "afterward of peace".

In that, David is a true symbol of the course of mankind. He was chosen and decreed by God to be capable of great things, finding his destiny through dark and devious ways of stumbling and error, of selfishness and heedlessness, of outright violation of the laws of God. Yet he emerged at the end into the sunlight of the "*glorious liberty of the children of God*". David was shown then, as men will be shown at the end of God's dealing with them, when stripped of all the pollution and defilement of encircling sin, to be pure gold, resplendent in the Divine likeness.

So, at last, David found peace.

To be concluded AOH

"GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE is a Christian Retirement Centre. It was established in 1978 by the Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust, a non-profit making charity. It provides a family atmosphere and Christian Fellowship. Residents share with brethren." This is the opening paragraph of the 'The Book of Gainsborough House' a copy of which is given to each resident. The centre is run by a resident Housekeeper who does a wonderful job in caring for the current six residents. There are vacancies for a further 4 permanent residents as well as accommodation for occasional guests and those wishing for a 'short break'. It can provide bed and breakfast and full board. There is a chapel, a

library and extensive gardens. Gainsborough is in a lovely rural setting near Sherborne and within easy access of many interesting places and the coast.

Milborne Port is referred to locally as 'the village' but this is a pleasant Somerset town with adequate medical facilities, food shops all of which are about half a mile from Gainsborough. For those with greater needs Yeovil and Wincanton are not far away. In its 22 years, Gainsborough has enjoyed the patronage of more than 20 residents and many visitors from UK and overseas.

Bookings are normally made through the Housekeeper but Bible Fellowship Union will be glad to pass enquiries on to her.

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD

4. Moses – the man who changed the ancient world

The life of Moses was one of ups and downs, peaks and troughs, mountain-tops and valleys. His life began among slaves in Egypt with the threat of being drowned in the River Nile yet within a few months he was living under the protection of the royal court. Eventually he enjoyed one of the highest places in the ancient kingdom of Egypt. At forty he cut his ties with the Egyptian court to become a nomadic exile. Forty years further on he became the leader of Israel and acted as their mediator before God and Pharaoh. As he led them through the desert there was constant discontent that sometimes erupted into rebellion when they wanted to kill him. The Israelites treated Moses as many of their descendants were to treat other great men who had been sent by God. That is how they treated their ultimate Deliverer. Moses was a very great man but at times he was openly disobedient to God. He seemed to have little confidence or courage when God spoke to him at the 'burning bush' yet this man more than anyone else among the heroes of the Old Testament enjoyed the very presence of God more than they all. Moses conferred upon Aaron his brother, by God's grace, the great honour of the High Priestly office, yet it was Aaron and their sister Miriam who grossly insulted Moses and his wife and were jealous of his position. As a result Miriam suffered the terrible indignity of leprosy but Moses interceded for the restoration of her health in a most forgiving way. It was this man's meekness and compassion that contributed to him being the greatest man on Earth in Old Testament times.

The keeping power of God is best seen in the 'troughs' of Moses' life but it was just as important through the heady days of high rank and honour in Israel and mystic glory on the mountain.

Moses was a survivor. At the time of his birth, Pharaoh, ruler of all Egypt had decreed that Israeli baby boys should be drowned in the River Nile. He was afraid that the massive increase of the Hebrew population might put his own people at risk should there be war. From the days of the Patriarchs, Israel had been a peaceful, rural community. They had hardly known war and possibly had no weapons. Now they were faced with a desperate situation whereby the Egyptians were making slaves of them.

Moses' mother, Jochebed, was a resourceful woman. Somehow she kept that baby quiet through his first three months. Then she made a little boat in which he safely floated until he was 'found' by Pharaoh's daughter. This lady is known to archaeologists as Hatshepsut. She was wise enough to know that a Hebrew wet nurse would give him his best chance of survival. Jochebed became the first mother to be paid by royalty for nursing her own offspring; so David Kosssoff describes the event. Eventually Moses was transferred to the royal palace but who would have planned such an escape from the King's edict to destroy Hebrew boys. So it was overruled by God that Moses should spend those first formative years with his Hebrew parents learning basic skills and attitudes. Then he was trained in the wisdom of Egypt, educated to take a place of highest rank. God saved Moses from what might have seemed certain death and provided him with training and development that would fit him to become the leader of His people. The way in which God plans and overrules the details of the lives of His people is quite wonderful and every child of God in Christ has that same planning and providential care directing their lives.

Moses spent his life in the Royal Palace or on missions for the royal family. He did not share the harsh existence of his relatives as a slave. Yet he voluntarily gave up the life of luxury and safety and returned to his own oppressed people. But if that was not enough he was soon in the desert running away to escape an angry Pharaoh. For him it was a hazardous journey. There is no mention that he knew where he was going. Maybe in former times royal duties had led him out into the Sinai desert – perhaps to the Egyptian copper mines and other industrial pursuits. But Scripture records none of this nor that he knew his destination. But God did, for he was to spend the next forty years with a man who had some knowledge of the one true God. He may have been responsible for coaching Moses in the ethics and rationale of leading God's people. And it all happened through a 'chance' meeting at a well. Wells are interesting meeting places and those familiar with Scripture will know the value of those wells.

He lived with Jethro and his family and there he learned the joyful simplicity of rural home life, of becoming a father, of discovering relationships that might have passed him by in a royal palace. The Midianites were "related to the Israelites (Gen.25.2) and were well disposed to them until a later date" (1 Payne). Some scholars have suggested that the Israelite religion was taken from the Midianites but as Cole (2) points out "it is most unlikely that Moses would have learnt from them anything that he did not know already of the 'common law' of the western Semites". Moses had a job of work to do with the animals where he learned resourcefulness in every day experiences. There too, he must have spent time with God, discovering the great truths of Creation that he would need in the days of leadership and organising two million Israelites.

It is fascinating to think that God met with Moses twice in this area, which is geographically outside the Promised Land that was to become Israel. It was not made a point of special pilgrimage by the Israelites nor was its location exactly known. An older theory of Sinai being in Arabia has been resuscitated more recently but there is little proof about any of the possible sites. Whatever is eventually discovered about the location of Sinai, its geographical exactness is not to be compared with what actually happened.

On the first occasion of their meeting, forever linked with the 'burning bush', Moses received from God his first commission to take God's people out of Egypt. Moses must have looked back at that event in his life and realised that it was here that he came of age spiritually, where God prepared his faith and courage by a revelation of just who He was. The sacred name of Yahweh was revealed here and helped Moses to understand that this was the only true God and there was none like Him. 'He was, and is and is to come' the only one in the Universe for whom there was no beginning and no end. This was a mountain top experience that would help Moses to realise that the Eternal God was by his side through every day of his life. It is clear from Exodus 2.25 that God cares about Israel too and by imparting this information Moses at once became their great teacher.

Many a child of God wonders why He plans for them to have years in the 'wilderness'. They might wonder why He doesn't give some cherished work

for Him much earlier in life in the flood of energy and enthusiasm. A glance at the life of Moses might answer those questionings. Moses years of exile were not wasted but a time of preparation for one of the greatest tasks ever given to a man. Lessons learned in the years in the royal palace were also of value when he had to confront Egypt's rulers with the demand to release Israel from bondage. He had to stand in the royal palace amid the wealthy courtiers and learned advisers to tell the king of Egypt what the God of Heaven had to say. By the wisdom and power of the Creator of the Universe, Moses declared what was about to happen. Soon the ancient magic of Egypt could not withstand the power of God. Little by little the Egyptians saw the erosion of their might and majesty, the destruction of their wonderful land and the complete failure of the Egyptians to withstand the word conveyed through Moses. Of all the tests of faith that this son of Levi endured, the period through the great disasters that befell Egypt must have been one of the most difficult. Yet there is no record that his faith faltered or his courage failed. In fact it was this experience before leaving Egypt, that brought commendation from the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament. Yet to a man who had lived half a lifetime in the Palace and who demonstrated enormous compassion, this time when Egypt became so devastated could not have been pleasant for Moses. Good men don't enjoy their fellow men and women suffering even if it is for their own folly. But Moses never failed. His God was with him and his trust remained firm and strong.

Moses learned his skills well as a shepherd among the Midianites and so was capable to lead the people of Israel from Goshen to the edge of the Land of the Promise. Lesser men would have given up in despair. Their nagging for better conditions and their refusal to give up their stupid idolatry of pagan gods must have been hard to wear. Organising two million people who had been deprived of their social rights for several generations was a mammoth task. However, he faced each problem and difficulty and set back with renewed courage; not in his own strength or wisdom but because God had set His seal upon this man. God was literally with him all the way until he reached his resting place in Moab. There he would await the prophet whom the Lord would send and who in so many ways was mirrored by his

own life. God was with him in the ups and downs of life and each step of the way, upward or downward was made by the Lord to be one of safe keeping.

Few men and women have crossed the human stage who could even begin to match the qualities of Moses. Looking through history till this present day, he stands head and shoulders above leaders of intellect and politics. Above all, his integrity of character and the growth of his spiritual life are unknown to this world's 'great' men and women. But God does sometimes use those who are 'giants' among us for he did not give them mental and

ethical qualities for nothing. But Moses achieved his greatness because he was willing to submit to the will and purpose of God. Moses enjoyed his outstanding success because he was a willing tool in the hand of God. It was because of that, nothing could stand in the way of this son of Levi and so He was kept till the journey's end. We cannot all have Moses' qualities, few have, nor can we achieve what he did in those far off days, but we can, if we will, enjoy the wonder of God's keeping power.

DN

- (1) D F Payne 'Understanding the Old Testament' (SU 1978)
(2) Alan Cole Exodus Commentary (IVP 1977)

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A panorama of the
Way of Christ*

5. Shepherd of the Sheep

"He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." (John 10.1).

The lawful entry into any building is by the door. Anyone seen climbing in some other way is immediately suspected as an intruder; up to no good. Jesus portrayed Himself as the Good Shepherd caring for His sheep. From the pastoral life around Him He could draw abundant illustrations by which to teach natural men heavenly faith and truth.

Those who heard and followed Him were His sheep with all the sheep's need of care and protection. Only at night were they folded to protect them from thieves and wild beasts which prowl under cover of darkness for purposes of destruction. Such marauders would not be likely to come boldly up to the front door and seek admittance. If a large sheepfold had a porter he would answer to none but the shepherd. The sheep themselves only knew and responded to the man who led them by day, finding pasturage and running water for them and shade from the heat. They relied upon him to protect them from perils known and unknown. In him they found peace and safety. A good shepherd never betrayed his trust or forsook his flock.

Jesus went one further. He said with emphasis *"I am the door of the sheep"*. It was the custom where sheep were valuable for the shepherd to rest with his flock. Lying down in the doorway he became the door, guarding its entrance with his life. None could get in or out without his knowledge. This picture presents two aspects important to the Christian faith, the keeping power of the shepherd

with His readiness to lay down His life for those in His care, and the cunning necessary for any intruder to get into the fold any other way.

Of the believers who heard the voice of Jesus and followed Him, recognizing the tones of love and authority, He said, *"They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them to me is greater than all; no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."* The true and only door into the love of God is Jesus Christ. Peace with Him and eternal life is the Divine sheepfold where "Stands God within the shadow, keeping watch upon His own". The safety of such folded sheep, contentedly hidden with God in Christ, is expressed repeatedly throughout the Word of God as 'great peace' the 'peace of God', the peace Christ left to all His sheep.

Whatever is valuable in this world or closely guarded, presents a challenge to certain perverted natures. To get in, to gain possession or even to destroy, becomes a fixed idea. During the Christian era men have tried unlawful entry into the fold of God. By some other means than salvation through Jesus Christ they have tried to steal away men's hearts or lead Christ's sheep away from safety into false places where there is neither sustaining food, water nor shelter. The true sheep who know His voice have resisted both tyranny and seduction.

It is not in the power of legislation, of science, of great religious systems, of political doctrines or learned philosophers, or eastern mystics, to grant life to any human being. God alone is the giver of life and He gives it through Christ and no other. Jesus claimed repeatedly and under many

metaphors to give men life. Of His believing sheep He said "*I give unto them eternal life*".

There is no love like the love of Jesus
Never to fade or fall
Till into the fold of the peace of God
He has gathered us all.

"*The Master is come and calls for you*" (John 11.28). There is a poetic beauty about these words. The relation of this whole incident is like the painting of a masterpiece. Nothing is lacking of human emotion. Drama and pathos play their part on the domestic stage of a country home. Every character is drawn with an observant and unbiased pen. The friend of Jesus is sick. His devoted sisters, believing in the love and power of Jesus to heal, send Him the news, never doubting that He will come. But Jesus did not come. He stayed where he was, purposely delaying His visit until Lazarus was beyond human aid. Four days after the burial he arrived, to be met outside the village by the practical and reproachful Martha, who softened her words with the sincerity of her belief in Him. "I know that even now whatever you will ask of God, God will give you." Jesus warmed to the tenacity of this member of a much loved family, speaking to her the words which have thrilled, comforted and inspired with hope and courage thousands of bereaved hearts. "*I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*" Never before had such words been spoken in the ears of the living. Scarcely comprehending His meaning Martha turned away and went home where she had left Mary sitting still in the house. She was brooding over the sorrow and the pain of death, meditating sadly over the inscrutable ways of the Son of God, whose power had opened the eyes of the blind and healed so many sick, yet had allowed her brother, whom He loved, to die. A few words whispered privately by Martha energized the drooping, gentle Mary into immediate action. She arose at once, going with all speed to Him who had requested her presence. So well is the picture drawn, it is possible to overhear the low, beautiful words which brought joy and relief to the grieving heart. He had not neglected or forgotten them. He was there the kingly teacher at whose feet she had sat drinking in the wonderful words of life spoken to none other, unrecorded words, yet so convincing that they sent her to His feet with the heart-broken cry, "*Lord, if you had*

been here my brother had not died." The same words from Martha had moved Him to declare His power over life and death. Mary's anguished cry and the tears of those who had followed her, moved Him to tears. Knowing what He was about to do, the sorrows of mankind touched the heart of Christ with overwhelming compassion. Revealing the power and the ultimate purpose of God, He showed also the pity of God for human sorrow and helplessness.

Alone and silent in some desolating experience, schooling the spirit to submission, baffled by the unfathomable ways of a Divine love which appears neglectful and aloof, how intensely joyous it would be to hear the same poetically, lovely words whispered in a despondent ear. "*The Master is come and calls for you.*" How swiftly the feet would take their flight to His all-powerful loving presence. "Be swift my soul to answer him, be jubilant my feet." Although the thin veil of the flesh divides time from eternity, by the word of His promise, "Lo I am with you always", He still calls the sorrowing to His side. He still stimulates the flagging spirit by the miracle of His grace, to rise and pursue the onward path with renewed vigour. Life, the very life of God in Christ, is still infused into the beating heart of the faithful. The day will dawn which crowns all other days, when the call of the Master sounds clear, strong and imperative. As steel rushes to the magnet so will His saints be gathered, drawn, brought together from the four corners of earth and time, to be forever with Him. In a moment of time, in the twinkling of an eye, they shall see Him as He is and be like Him.

What rejoicing in His presence,
When are banished grief and pain;
When the crooked ways are straightened,
And the dark things shall be plain.
Face to face, O blissful moment!
Face to face to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer,
Jesus Christ who loves me so.

"*If we let him alone, all men will believe on him*" (John 18.48). Here we stumble upon a little-acknowledged human longing for life, love and true leadership, and the base means employed to deprive the race of these benefits. Whatever the reasons given by the council for their determination to put Jesus to death after His greatest display of invested power, self-preservation was their prime

motive. Fear for the loss of their own top positions of wealth, prestige and authority, drove them to eliminate the one man who could have liberated their race and freed the world from the foot of tyrants. As He rode into Jerusalem triumphantly a week later to the glad Hosannas of the crowds who hailed Him 'King of Israel, coming in the name the Lord.' The Pharisees expressed their fear and dismay. "*Perceive how you prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him.*" Any student of history cannot fail to note the methods by which the bulk of the human race have been kept in servitude and ignorance by a privileged minority or to observe how every step forward towards decency and dignity has been fought for inch by inch against ruthless aggression and crafty deception. The thoughtful cannot fail to be moved by the sight and sound of restless multitudes, either past or present. They have cried out for security, for sufficient food and suitable homes, for the rights of human creatures to enjoy their fair share of the good earth and its products in peace. Jesus had expounded His formula for all these things, to which the people had eagerly listened. Moreover He had plainly shown His power over Nature, over life and death. He had stilled the storm and fed the hungry, healed the sick and raised the dead. Of no other man could it be said, as He had said to the messengers of John the Baptist, who had asked from his dungeon "*Are you he that should come or do we look for another?*", "*Go your way and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised; to the poor the gospel is preached*".

He was the great emancipator of the people, setting free whoever would believe on Him. All forms of servitude of the mind and flesh were broken. He ruled, not by tyranny but by justice, gentleness and love. The people who cried 'Hosannas' on the road to Jerusalem recognised in Him a wise and benevolent king, a leader to be trusted. Through the centuries the restless, confused masses of the peoples have looked to human leaders to improve their lot, often to meet with disappointment. Even the son of the glorious Solomon had threatened to beat the burdened people of his day when they complained of the heavy yoke put upon them "*I will add to your yoke. I will chastise you with scorpions instead of whips.*"

Pharaoh of Egypt had likewise increased both labour and chastisement to every appeal of Moses to set the people free. When in the end he was driven to letting them go, he and his rulers soon regretted it and pursued after them that they might drag them back to the old drudgery. It is a conspiracy as old as the race to bind men, body and soul, to keep in subjection by ignorance, superstition, fear, sorrow, labour, sickness and death, the race of man. The forces of evil have constantly opposed the forces of good. Agencies have always been at work to block the path, to blind the eyes of those who long for life. Darkness has hated the light, finding ready tools and willing minds among the warped, the selfish and the ignorant, to thwart by any means the universal happiness of mankind, to throw any obstacle in the way of their knowledge and worship of the living God. Like many before and since, the men who plotted the death of Jesus were ready to stamp out life and light to maintain their own place in society. That the blind should see, or the sick be healed, or the dead raised, or the poor receive good news of the kingdom of God, was of no account. They cared for none of these things. Yet the days will come when this same Jesus will take up His great power and reign over the earth. The desire of all nations shall come because "He comes to break oppression, to set the captives free, to take away transgression and rule in equity".

"*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" (John 12.32). Jesus knew He would be crucified. He knew the priests would demand His death. They had no legal power to carry out the sentence, and the Roman form of execution was the cross. The shadow of the cross has lain across the world ever since; the symbol of human cruelty, of martyrdom, of suffering and self-sacrifice. It has become the pinnacle of the world, glittering from its tallest spires, or standing ruggedly in mountain snows. The faultless Son of God who poured out His life without stint in a healing, teaching ministry, was nailed to the wooden beams of the cross by the sin of man. Willingly or unwillingly a good cross-section of mankind were participants in that evil deed. Jesus could have saved Himself but He went willingly to a foreknown end. God could have saved Him but for three dark hours He forsook him. "*He made him to be sin who knew no sin.*"

God's purpose was to redeem Israel and save the world. The way He chose and the submission of Jesus to its shame and pain are a mysterious dispensation of a far-sighted wisdom and astounding love which leaves the beholder dumb with silence. Before that cross it is presumption either to question the ways of God or doubt the cross is a stake, fixed into the centre of history, driven into the heart of mankind, until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess the exalted name of their Saviour and their King. The lifting up of the cross on Calvary's hill has forced large sections of mankind to look up to that guiltless sufferer, recognizing dimly that in some way His life and death are strangely bound up with theirs. If this turning point in history is only vaguely comprehended, "seen through a glass darkly", it is always there with its mystic attraction, its drawing power, putting question and answer into the minds of the unresisting. When Israel rebelled in their wilderness wanderings they were bitten by snakes. For their cure Moses lifted up a shining serpent of brass upon a pole. When they looked at this fiery symbol they were healed. The incident was prophetic, a living picture illustrating greater events. The sins and revolts of man against God are many. It pleases the conceit of modern society to call these offences by some other name, but it does not make their bite any the less deadly. The sick and the plagued may look in a thousand directions finding palliatives but no cure. *"All we like sheep have gone astray. We have erred every one from his ways and there is no health in us"* is not an idle chant. It is an easily recognizable fact.

The old evangelists who wrote "There is life in a look at the Crucified One, O yes, there is life there for thee, Simply look unto Christ and by faith be thou saved – Unto Him who was nailed to the tree – Look! Look! look and live!" were not fanatical enthusiasts for a new religious sect. They spoke the language of the Scriptures, a language unknown to many, forgotten by some and needing restatement to all. It is the gospel, the good news, that by the cross of Christ man may become reconciled to God, so gaining peace and hope of everlasting life. There is neither merit nor charm in the wood of the cross, even if it were obtainable. It is the love and self-sacrifice of the living load it bore unto His death, that bought the peace and life of man, *"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have*

everlasting life".

"In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time,

All the light of sacred story, Gathers round its head sublime."

"While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light" (John 12.36). Light is the life-blood of Nature. It is that indefinable element which gives energy and colour to every living thing. Deprived of light the growths of a perpetual dungeon become diseased and deformed. There is little use for the eye in the dark. Those who walk in the dark without a light, walk in danger. They do not know where they are going or what perils await their unwary feet. It is in the dark hours of night that most troubles strike. It is when weary and off guard that disaster finds its easiest victims. The works and the faces which cannot bear the light of day set out on their rounds under cover of darkness.

To any visitor coming from a world of wholesome peace, sanity, soundness and beauty, this planet must seem like a whirling mad-house. Its teeming cities full of raucous sounds, of squalid slums and hideous crimes. Its highways and byways are an endless rush of wheels, killing and maiming the inhabitants by the thousand. Its green countryside slowly despoiled by forests of steel and concrete, by towers and chimneys belching smoke and flame, by the tiers of boxes reared for human habitation, the whole plentifully dotted with the ever present provision for the sick and the dead. However well lighted the modern world may be, or however blue it may look to man on the moon, its aspect in the eyes of its Creator is dark. It was dark when He sent His son into the world to be its light. Because men's deeds were evil they preferred the darkness and hated the light. Light silently rebukes darkness. It shows up a multitude of deficiencies for which the dark provides an ample cloak. The greater fear of faulty natures is not of doing wrong but of being found out, of being shown up or seen through. As Shakespeare shrewdly observed, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all".

The nature of God is light. It is not only an incandescent glory of Being, but a radiant glowing energy of pure beauty, named Holiness, a state which is wholly opposed to evil and to darkness. The Ruler of the Universe dwells in a light which cannot be approached by mortal man. Jesus

brought some of this eternal light to earth, its radiant purity suitably clothed in the flesh of man, its energy given off in waves of healing power. Some believed and worshipped; others believed and trembled. Doubt was that rare phenomenon that disturbed those who had been given the greatest cause for trust.

That light and love and life are a triple alliance, the three strands of one powerful cord that none who read the Bible intelligently can fail to overlook. To have one is to have the other. To have the other is to have all and this is to walk through a dark world with the light of the glory of God before and behind, on the right hand and on the left. Israel in the wilderness had as guardian the pillar of fire. They had the shining face of Moses, veiled after his forty days in the mountain with the Giver of the Law. They had the radiant glory of the Shekinah between the cherubim, the glory that filled the temple and the lambent tongues of Pentecostal fire, all the outward evidences of the invisible Supreme Being. They all walked by sight, living and vivid testimonies to those who walk by faith. By many means and through many men God had spoken to

the world, more especially to the nation of Israel, made and separated to prove to other peoples the power of a living God. They were in contrast to the worshippers of gods of wood and brass and clay who were all wind and confusion. In the days, when Jesus walked among them, the light to Jew and Gentile alike, opening the eyes of the blind to new ways and larger avenues of life, his power and preaching and personality only half discerned, He yet shone as the light of God among men. None of the noxious vapours of darkness have ever been able to extinguish it. Those who have believed and followed the Light of the life of Christ have themselves become lights in the world's darkness. They are the exponents of an indestructible ideal which will in due time conquer all darkness, filling the earth with the glory of the light of God as the waters cover the sea.

"Walk in the light! and thou shalt own Thy darkness passed away,

Because that Light hath on thee shone In which is perfect day."

(To be concluded)

FAS

THE MESSAGE OF THE KINGDOM

"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." (Acts 1.21, 22 RSV) These were the words of Peter just prior to Pentecost as he addressed what was becoming the nucleus of the early Church in Jerusalem. Many have discounted what happened at that meeting in choosing a disciple to fill the place left by Judas' defection but at least they set us an example by praying that the choice should be the Lord's choice. The important point from Peter's oration is his statement of the task before them as 'witnesses of the resurrection'. John the Baptist had been a herald of the Kingdom of Heaven and he said that it was at hand. It is not easy to explain exactly what he meant. Was this the Kingdom which the prophets had expected and predicted would come? What kind of Kingdom was this to be and was it all to come at once? Without looking too far ahead in history, how did John's words work out in practice during the lives of the apostles?

There must be a sense in which the Kingdom came at the time of Jesus. He likened the seed of the sower to the word of the Kingdom and then compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a field of grain (Matt. 13.18, 24). Does this not make the Kingdom the work of Jesus and the Church now. Yet there was a sense in which Israel had been the kingdom or possessed the Kingdom and it was to be taken away from them (Matt. 21.43). Yet since John had preached about the Kingdom everyone had entered it violently (Luke 16.16). Contrast this with the promise that those who are obedient to Christ will inherit the Kingdom. (Matt. 25.34). The early Church did not sit down and make a meticulous study of the Kingdom so that they knew what to preach to the unconverted. They had one objective and that was to preach that their Lord had been resurrected. Some time later we have a record of the Greeks' response to Paul's preaching Athens; *"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead; some mocked, and others said 'We will hear you again of this matter'."* (Acts 17.32).

Two thousand years ago Paul, stood on Mars Hill and preached Jesus Christ to an audience of the

world's great philosophers and learned men. The resurrection and the Kingdom were key points of his message and so he exhorted them to repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ. *"God ... now commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on the which he will judge the world in righteousness"* (vv 30, 31). Christ is not only the solution to the troubles and woes of this life, He is also the hope and certainty of the life to come. Paul never forsook that faith or lost that enthusiasm. To the very end of a busy, arduous and oft-times intensely disappointed life, he kept his vision of the coming Kingdom clear and undimmed. One of his last utterances ended with the hope of the Kingdom upon his lips – *"which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but also to all them that love his appearing"*. (2 Tim. 4.8).

Paul was not the first to speak of the need for repentance to enter the Kingdom, for in the early days of the Church, Peter, speaking to the people of Jerusalem, had brought together these twin themes in the words *"you ... killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead ... Repent therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."*

Maybe the seeds of these ideas were sown in the apostles' minds as they listened to Jesus when He spoke to the people of Jerusalem recorded in John 5.25-29 *"I say to you the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live ... Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs, will hear his voice and come forth"*. Later when He raised Lazarus from the dead, in conversation with Martha who had said *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* Jesus had replied *"I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he die yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."* (John 11.21-27)

In His words in John 5 Jesus encapsulates in one breath the work of the Kingdom in this life and in the age to come. Those who have heard the voice of the Son of God have been raised to newness of life and now experience the quality of life of the Kingdom. These are those who have really followed Jesus since Pentecost till this day and now live in the Kingdom and have eternal life. They

experience now the judgment of the Kingdom (1 Peter 4.17). All others of whom Jesus spoke have yet to be raised from the tomb and enter into judgment.

Those who have eternal life are those who know God (John 17.3) such give adequate time to the devotional life which is so important to grow in the fruit of the spirit. Nevertheless, those who so live will have the burning desire of the Lord to let the light of the Gospel shine from their words and actions. Such will want to tell others of the wonder of God's love and assure unbelievers that our God has not forgotten the world and will not allow for ever destruction of human life on the Earth that was given to humanity as a home to enjoy. There can be no better way of giving that assurance than by a life lived out in real concern for the deprived and destitute of this world. No amount of preaching and prediction of future events will substitute for living the kind of life that Jesus actually lived while here on Earth. Can we forever ignore the fact that Jesus lived out His life in genuine concern for all who He met? He made it clear, and the Apostles followed after some hesitancy, that His love for people, shown in action as much as in word, must cross all man-made barriers of race and nationality, of gender and age, of rich and poor. Knowing God, said Jeremiah, was concern for the poor and needy (Jer. 22.16). It is worth noticing that in the Gospels Jesus spoke to such tenderly, gently and in a way that they knew their sins were forgiven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not static; it doesn't rest on yesterday's glories or problems but is forever looking forward to new opportunities of service, new visions of what God is doing in the world now and be ready for what He will do tomorrow. This may not be quite what we expected nor what He will be doing in a week, a month or a year's time. We cannot go forward in our own strength or wisdom but those who have lived out today well, and used their talents and opportunities as He directs, will be alert and ready for the days to come. Such will be assured that come what may in the world or among God's people, they will be ready to move forward with Him. In the natural world all living things must move and progress and it's no different in the spiritual realm. We may not need signs and wonders, dreams and visions, although we would be foolish to believe these can never happen. But God takes us a step at a time and

gives us a message in word or action that we are personally able to pass on. We need not fear, He will never press us to do something for which we are not properly prepared. But we must be alert and ready for His calling and His directive. It may not be the way our brother or sister is bidden to go nor the task or word they have been given. We may not, if we have Christ's love in our heart, criticize what they are doing for we are not the judge of another man's slave (Rom. 14.4) and there is only one Head of Christ's Church. We may bear another's burden but we may not make that burden heavier by adverse comment.

So let us go forward in the strength and love and wisdom of the Lord, bearing our message bravely. It may meet with the kind of response that Peter had

in Jerusalem on that first day of Pentecost. It may be similar to the reaction of the clever Athenians to Paul's great speech. But let us hail each opportunity of serving the Master with the joy that abounded among the early disciples. Let us tell others what He has said and done for us. "*Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?*" "*Lord; here am I; send me.*" If the live coal has touched our lips we can go to "this people" in confidence; but we must go armed with knowledge of the message for the day, and that message is "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!*"

(Seed thoughts and quotations from an article by AOH)
DN

CART

The Christian African Relief Trust (CART) continues its great work of sending supplies of food, clothing, medicines and many other items to Africa. We give here part of a recent report of the Charity's work showing countries to which containers of goods were sent. ... "... it's really worth getting out a map of Africa, to see where all these countries are!"

Cameroon

Somaliland

Ghana (4 containers)

The Gambia (2 containers)

Eritrea (2 containers)

Togo

India

Uganda (3 containers)

Malawi (3 containers)

Zambia (2 containers)

Senegal

Zimbabwe
Sierra Leone

In addition to this record total of 23 containers filled and sent off during 2003, CART also contributed a large amount of goods to two further shipments for Uganda, funded by World Emergency Relief on behalf of Medical Aid Uganda / All Nations Christian Care. Collaborative ventures of this kind are becoming an increasingly important part of CART's activities: sometimes a charitable organization can provide the funding – in some cases the relief goods too – in order to send a shipment to a particular country, but it needs CART's expertise to get the containers packed and exported. For further details write to Mr Guildford Tompkins, 'Whitegates', Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorks HD8 OLR. Thank you for all your help in the past.

B & K K-S

"Temptations never give us notice. Can we expect them to do so? The sailor does not expect to have notice of every gale of wind that blows upon him. The soldier in battle does not reckon to have notice of every bullet that is coming his way. By what apparatus could we be kept aware of every advance of the evil one? The very essence of temptation often lies in the suddenness of it. We are carried off our feet before we are aware. Yet we must not say, because of this 'I cannot help it,' for we ought to be all the more watchful, and live all

the nearer to God in prayer. We are bound to stand against a sudden temptation, as much as against a slower mode of attack. We must look to the Lord to be kept from the arrow which flieth by day and the pestilence which walketh in darkness. We are to cry to God for grace, that, let the gusts of temptation come how and when they may, we may always be found in Christ, resting in HIM, covered with His Divine power."

C H Spurgeon

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

17. Chapter 14

vv 1-14 Jesus went to the home of a Pharisee to have what was probably one of three meals on the Sabbath (they had only two on other days). These were sometimes taken in the courtyard where relative strangers could 'drop in'. Commentators suggest that the Pharisees arranged for the man with dropsy to be present so that they could "set Jesus up". No one said anything about healing the sick man but Jesus read the thoughts of some present and disarmed them by challenging them about the legality of healing on the Sabbath. Jesus healed the man and then questioned them about rescuing their own child or animal that had fallen into a well on the Sabbath and whether they would get it out (Ex. 21.33). But should they only act when the need is for someone or something they value. Are our efforts to help selfishly directed? Jesus exposed their hypocrisy which he hated. Barclay lists the occasions when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, recorded in the various Gospels. He then remarked, "Anyone would think that a record like that would have made a man beloved by all; but it is the tragic fact that every miracle of healing that Jesus wrought on the Sabbath day only made the Scribes and Pharisees more certain that He was a dangerous and irreligious law-breaker who must at all costs be stopped." Barclay then discusses the way in which Jews cooked food on the sixth day and would only keep it warm by a method that would not continue the cooking process on the Sabbath. "No wonder they could not understand Jesus."

Evidently the Lord noticed that as the guests had taken their seats at table they had jockeyed for the best position. The low tables with couches were arranged in a U-form and the most important guests sat at the base angle. Jesus warned them that it was better to recline at a place of less importance rather than claim a position of honour and then be required to move down the order. The really important person is ready to take the insignificant place and only the little man is self-important. If we see ourselves in light of Jesus' radiance then our pride will vanish and self-satisfaction will 'shrink up'. How sad that the 'twelve' did not recall that lesson when later they argued as to which of them was the greatest?

The Master then turned to the host for a lesson

about inviting guests who could return the compliment and invite him back. Jesus 'Kingdom' teaching that day was about meekness and concern for those in need. There were no debates about the meanings of words or finer points of the law. The Kingdom of Heaven is about our motives and behaviour towards others. (James 4.6; 1 Pet. 5.5, 6; Prov. 25.6, 7)

vv15-24 The table talk was not over yet thanks to a comment by one of the guests. The Jews were not unfamiliar with the picture of the Messianic Banquet and the man's comment may have been about this. Jesus went on to tell a parable about a banquet and the guests were again the problem. Those who had accepted invitations didn't turn up and when questioned about their absence they made all kinds of excuses. So invitations went out to ordinary folk on the streets. God is arranging a dinner party in heaven, so what keeps people away from it? Excuses for not doing God's will or just lack of spiritual awareness? The phrase "compel them to come in" has been used by Augustine and others to justify religious persecution and even torture. But Barclay reminds us of Paul's words "*the love of Christ constrains us*" – the only compulsion in the Kingdom of Heaven is love. Geldenhuys make clear that this teaching is not mechanical predestination that determines from all eternity who will or will not be in the kingdom. Neither is a person's entry into the kingdom purely their own choice. No one can enter the kingdom without God's invitation and no one remains outside except by their own deliberate choice. Once again Jesus is part of a social event and agrees that the Kingdom of Heaven includes a happy event of a banquet.

vv25-35 These verses record that what Jesus taught is superficially quite astonishing. But in v26 Jesus is not teaching us that we are to have the hatred for our nearest and dearest that elsewhere He condemns (Matt. 5.21-26). The point He is making with something of the hyperbole is that if we are to become real disciples we must put Him always first in our affections and activities. His interests are of prime importance but He doesn't mean the abandonment of our responsibilities towards our family, friends and neighbours. Jesus is now on His way to Jerusalem and the cross and He didn't want

any of His followers to be unaware of the consequences of associating with Him. Nevertheless says Barclay. He who calls us to climb the steep road, will walk with us every step of the way.

Jesus then reinforced the lesson by referring to two stories that He did not fully narrate. He offered discipleship but said that to follow Him we must first count the cost and think about what we are doing because to be His disciple is costly. Jesus didn't comment on what will happen to us if we don't become His disciples. Surely, He would have warned His hearers of the consequences of taking the alternative option by not becoming a follower if such a course resulted in eternal punishment.

Goldenhuyts warns against using these stories as

allegories and finding symbolical meaning in every detail. The main points are making sure that when we undertake anything important that we must be able to finish the task and pay the full price. Leon Morris sums up the whole of these teachings when he writes that Jesus did not "want followers who rush into discipleship without thinking what is involved"

The final metaphorical saying of the chapter is about salt as used in Jesus' day. It was not pure and if incorrectly stored it was possible for the sodium chloride to be leached out of the impure 'salt' leaving behind the impurities that lacked flavour, preservative qualities or nutritional value on the land.

DN

IN THE LAND OF BEGINNING AGAIN

3. Resurrection by Judgment (John 5.20)

*A Parable
of the Kingdom*

He came striding along the road, a fine figure of a man, vigorous and healthy, but with eyes betraying a haunting sadness. The other, seated by a wayside pool embowered in brilliant flowers, held up his hand in that gesture of greeting and invitation so familiar in this strange new world. The newcomer hesitated and came across voicing an easy greeting as he sat down on the grassy bank.

For a moment neither spoke. A lark soared up into the azure sky, the throbbing sweetness of its song holding the two listeners enthralled. The fields and trees shimmered in the heat of an afternoon sun, and all creation seemed at peace.

"You are on a mission?" queried the one by the pool.

"A mission which spurs me ever onward without rest" returned the other, "and until it is accomplished I may not know happiness."

"It needs the help of a friend, perhaps?" ventured his questioner, but the traveller shook his head.

"My sorrow is of my own making. I once defied the powers of Heaven and thought to outwit God. Now the hand of God is outstretched to me in blessing but I cannot enjoy His munificence until I have made amends for the evil which I have done."

"I have read in the sayings of Jesus that there are those who in this day come forth to a resurrection by judgment" observed Gerhard, his eyes on two goldfish disporting themselves in the pool.

The newcomer nodded. 'Those words are true.

There was a time when a man of God, crying his message to a heedless people declared, 'Every man that eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.' 'What a man sows' said Paul, 'that shall he also reap' I knew of those Divine laws but in my folly believed that I a king could flout them with impunity.'

"You were a king then?" returned the other with interest. His companion did not answer at once. A party of children racing along the road in joyous abandon, perceived him as he sat and in a minute had surrounded him with every evidence of recognition and affection. "Elder brother, elder brother" they cried. "Here is Michael. Tell him the story of Jesus." Michael came forward shyly – a chubby golden curled toddler of three. He looked up into the friendly face above him and climbed confidently upon his knee. A strong arm held him safely but the man's eyes were misty with tears.

"Yes, I was a king, he said at last, almost reluctantly. His eyes looked away across the quiet countryside as though they saw other and far distant scenes. His thoughts came back to the present and he turned to Gerhard. "You are a resident here? You have offered the help of a friend. Perhaps you can indeed assist me."

"That I will gladly do" came the ready answer.

"I seek a woman named Miriam, who in the Days that Were lived in the land of Judea. Her home was in the village of El-Ramallah near the royal city of Bethlehem. I am told she lives in this

district and I must have converse with her."

"Then I can help you; for Miriam of El-Ramallah lives yonder on the slopes of the hill." Gerhard pointed, and following his outstretched arm, the other perceived a cluster of red-roofed cottages surrounded by trees. "You see the house beside the rhododendrons? Miriam lives there, praying daily for the raising to life of her first born child, slain by Herod, the King of Judea, in the days when Jesus was born."

"Then I must haste there today" said the stranger, rising to his feet and gently putting Michael upon the ground. "for my prayers must be joined with hers for the restoration of that life which was so ruthlessly cut off by my fear and cruelty."

"Then," said Gerhard quickly, "You are ..."

"My name is Herod. I was King of Judea in the Days that Were. Today I serve the Lord Christ whom I sought so blindly to destroy. But I have learned that 'by mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.' There are words that ring in my ears day and night

written in letters of fire before my eyes, *"In Rama was there a voice heard, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."* Until I have sought out every mother whom I made desolate – until I have prayed with her and witnessed her joy as her loved one is restored to her arms, I may not rest. Then, and then only, shall I be free from that age-lasting reproach spoken of by the prophet Daniel when he told of this blessed day."

With the shouting children running at his side and baby Michael nestled comfortably in the crook of his arm, Herod, slayer of the Innocents, strode up the hill to the place where a woman of faith waited for her heart's petition to be fulfilled in glorious reality.

AOH

* * * * *

Time has yet to prove whether King Herod will repent in the manner imagined in this story but the Scriptures are definite that he, with all men, no matter how depraved, are to have the opportunity in the day of the resurrection.

LORD OF THE UNIVERSE

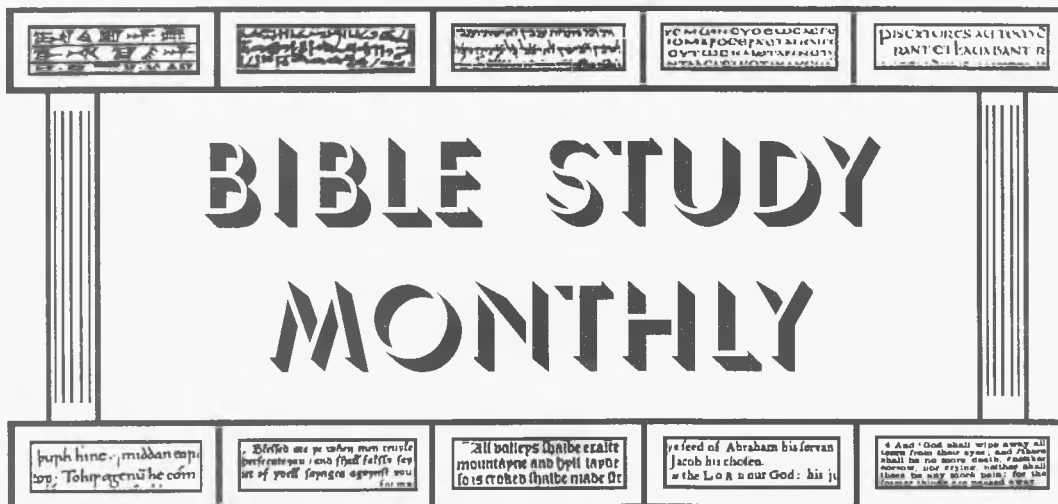
Lord of the Universe, God of the future,
Humbly before your throne we stand,
Asking forgiveness for our fallen nature,
Seeking your blessing on our land.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer!
God of the past and God of the present,
Bless all your people gathered here.

Lord for our children we seek your protection,
Innocence always under threat –
Sidelined, exploited and starved of affection –
Never allow us to forget.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer!
God of the past and God of the present,
We pray for children everywhere.

For those who live on the streets of our nation,
Eking life out with crusts of bread,
Lord, for the homeless we pray in compassion -
You had no place to lay your head.
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer!
God of the past and God of the present
Oh, give us all a heart to share.

For refugees who arrive in our cities,
Looking for somewhere safe to stay,
Lord give us hearts overflowing with pity,
Ready to help and keen to pray.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer!
God of the past and God of the present,
Father, O teach us how to care!

Metre: 11.8.11.8.8.10.8 to a German melody
Beresford King-Smith @ 2003
We are grateful for permission to print this
lovely hymn.



Vol. 81, No.4

JULY/AUGUST 2004

Published July 1st

Next issue September 1st

CONTENTS

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

15. Sunset 75

HEAVENLY SOURCE OF EVERLASTING WATER

Part 2 79

THE VISION OF JOEL

Part 2 The Call to Repentance . . . 82

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

6 Greater Love Hath No Man . . . 85

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND . 89

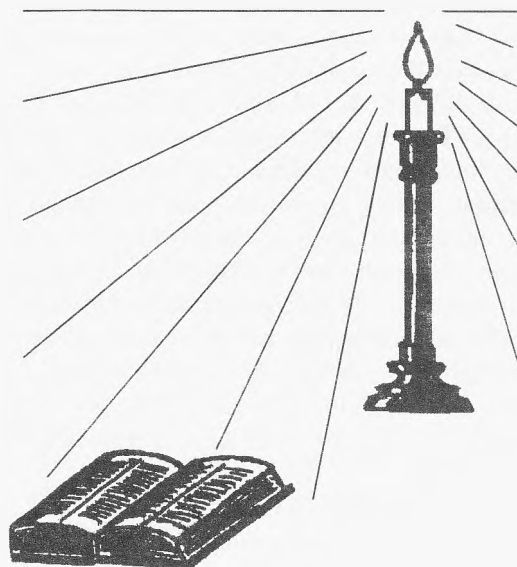
IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS 92

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

18. Chapter 15 93

THE TOWER OF STRENGTH 95

THE TERROR OF THE LORD 96



This Journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers.

Published by

Bible Fellowship Union (Registered Charity 1064607)

4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, England.

Email: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Editor & Secretary: DERRICK NADAL (*Nottingham*)

Treasurer: JOHN HAINES (*Gloucester*)

NOTICES

COST & GIFTS. The Bible Study Monthly is sent free to all who request it. We give information about costs because some readers wish to have guidance for their gifts. In view of increased costs of printing and postage and the current foreign exchange rates, it now costs approximately £10 or the equivalent in overseas currency to produce and dispatch one copy of the magazine to a UK or overseas address through one year (6 copies). BFU income is greatly augmented by readers who pay UK tax and who sign a form or write a letter to indicate that all money sent to us is a gift. This should be dated but need be done only once.

MAGAZINE & OTHER PUBLICATIONS' CONTENT. We wish to make all BFU publications of maximum benefit for all ages and in every land to which they go. We try to use language that can be understood by this wide variety of readers and also important is the length of articles and careful updating of those reprinted. We try to maintain high spiritual values and everything published is believed to be worthy of consideration by our readers. Nevertheless not everything published is necessarily the opinion of those responsible for the editorial work.

PUBLICATIONS DISPATCH. It was an oversight that the publications list was omitted from the March/ April issue and the inserted 'request form' was intended to replace the 'list'. The Lord overruled this change and within a few weeks a thousand booklets had been sent out in response to 'requests'. We much appreciate those readers who have kindly sent the cost of postage but others who cannot do this should not hesitate to 'request their needs'. It should be remembered when ordering larger numbers of several booklets that these

are intended for personal contact rather than indiscriminate distribution. BFU literature is sent free and should not be sold by anyone.

READERS ARE SPECIALLY REQUESTED TO NOTE Bible Fellowship Union is a registered charity that publishes and distributes its own literature. We do not send out Bibles or other books. BFU cannot send relief goods or stationery. We cannot send money abroad nor can we invite or sponsor visitors from overseas. There are other charities that deal with relief goods overseas and enquiries should be made directly to them.

The Christian African Relief Trust is one such charity which does a wonderful work in helping the needy in Africa and in co-operating with other charities in sending relief to other parts of the world. Its Trustees and Staff work voluntarily and they take no expenses. CART ensures that what is sent overseas really does reach those in need. CART newsletters and web-site are very informative about every aspect of its relief work with news of the benefit that the recipients are getting from what is sent. CART has accumulated great expertise in its various fields of activity, collecting, repairing, despatching in liaison with receiving Churches. They also have a fine shop that raises money for transport costs. Contact address for CART is Mr. Guildford Tompkins, White Gates, Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, HD8 0LR

Gone from us

Sister Molly Brockis (Sudbury)

Brother W H Simmons (High Wycombe)

"Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away".

KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

*The story of Israel's
most famous king*

15. Sunset

He was only seventy years of age, but he was an old man. The vigour of earlier days had departed, the fires of youth had burned themselves out, and it was time to depart. The great king of Israel was secluded in his palace and more or less confined to his bed, dependent upon the ministrations of others. He must have known that the end was near; perhaps he thought of his predecessor Saul, meeting his end on the field of battle, and was content that he, unlike Saul, was leaving his kingdom powerful and independent, secure from enemies. The Lord had promised him that his seed would reign on his throne after him for just so many generations as they remained loyal to their God. In any case at the end of time there would arise one of his descendants who would reign over Israel in peace and righteousness through all eternity. With that he was content. In some unknown way he must have realised that he would be there to witness that wonderful climax to all God's ways with His people. In a dim and obscure fashion he glimpsed something of the Messianic hope which was to blossom into full flower in the days of the prophets still some two or three centuries later. So he rested, content in faith that God would certainly order the course of His people after he had gone to the grave.

But there was yet to be more trouble for David. He was not to be permitted to enjoy even the last years of his life in peace. The plots and intrigues that were always being devised in and around his court were as active as ever. Now they began to centre around the question as to who should be king after him, and the contestants, sensing the obviously imminent death of the king, began sparing for position.

Adonijah, fourth son of David, by his fourth wife Haggith during the stormy days at Hebron, was the expectant heir to the throne. He was the eldest surviving son and in the ordinary way would have succeeded his father. Amnon, David's first-born, had been murdered. Chileab, his second born by his wife Abigail the Carmelitess, must have died young, for he is never mentioned again in the narratives. Absalom, the next, had also been murdered. There were fifteen more sons, by various wives, beside other sons by concubines, so that there could be a certain amount of competition should David die suddenly. Adonijah, now about

thirty-six years of age, sizing up the situation with a practised eye, decided it was about time to act.

The story is in I Kings 1. Following Absalom's example twelve years previously, he began to be seen in public riding in a convoy of chariots and footmen in order to ingratiate himself with the people. This was a subtle move to insinuate the thought in men's minds that the old king was no longer able to lead them in battle and direct the affairs of the nation. Here was an up and coming young man, virile and energetic, ready and willing to assume the burden. There must have been many in Israel who were beginning to concern themselves with the fate of the nation when the king came to his end. Adonijah hoped that he would be the answer appealing to them and acceptable to their hopes. David himself, confined to his palace, could be expected to have no idea what was afoot.

By this time Solomon was nineteen years of age and it was an open secret that David favoured him for the succession. There is no doubt that Bathsheba was David's favourite wife and this would be one reason for David's preference. There is also the fact that, according to David, the Lord had told him that Solomon was to ascend the throne after him (I Chron. 22.9). It is not possible to ascertain from the narrative just when he received this revelation, but it does seem from related circumstances that it must have been during the last four or five years of his reign. This coincided more or less with the time that he began to gather together the materials for the Temple which he knew, by the Lord's decree, was to be built, not by him, but by Solomon. Adonijah must have known all this and decided to risk everything in the attempt to gain control of the throne before his father issued the decree appointing his successor.

His first overt move was an astute one. He won over to his side that crafty old politician Joab. Joab had been a fiercely loyal supporter of David for more than forty years, right from the days of the wilderness when Saul was still king, and had served David loyally, unscrupulously and ruthlessly. But his every action was dictated by his intention to keep himself at the top. It looks very much as if Joab was conscious that the king was not going to last much longer and he had better look to his own future. The mild and peaceable Solomon

was not likely to be much to the old soldier's liking and it is possible that he decided his interests were best served by allying himself with Adonijah right at the outset and becoming the power behind the throne as he had with David. With Joab on his side Adonijah could depend on the support of the army. His next recruit was Abiathar the priest. Here again was a man who had been with David from the days of the wilderness. David had saved him from the vengeance of Saul when his father and brothers had been slain and he had been with David ever since. There is a fairly obvious reason for his defection to Adonijah. Abiathar, of the line of Ithamar, second son of Aaron, under Divine interdict since the days of Eli more than a century previously, was at present officiating as High Priest before the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem. But there was also a rival High Priest in the person of Zadok, of the legal line of Eleazar, son of Aaron, officiating at the Tabernacle of Moses which still stood at Gibeon, although without the Ark. (Why David installed the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem instead of restoring it to its rightful place in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle has never been explained). Both men knew perfectly well that when the new Temple for which David had now accumulated the material was erected and dedicated, the Ark of the Covenant would go into that Temple and there would be only one High Priest. One of them had to lose out. Abiathar, like Joab, probably reasoned that it was time to desert the old king and become well accepted by the new one. Adonijah probably congratulated himself in having the nation's principal political and military leader, and its principal ecclesiastical leader both on his side. So Adonijah organised a great feast, to which he invited the king's remaining sons, except Solomon, and such of the nobility of Judah as he felt would be sympathetic to his cause. During this feast his assumption of kingship could be announced and Joab's soldiers go out immediately to quell any resistance and set the new king firmly on the throne. It was what in our day is called a coup. By the time the common people heard about it the thing would be as good as done and resistance hopeless.

Of course the news was leaked. That sturdy and uncompromising champion of the Lord, Nathan the prophet, got to hear of the plot. Adonijah had taken care not to invite him to the feast; neither had he invited Zadok the High Priest at Gibeon, nor yet another noteworthy army general, Benaiah the son

of Jehoiada. All of these were noted for their loyalty to David, and so were many of David's "mighty men", those who had adventured with him in the days of his exile in the wilderness and had been his staunch supporters ever since. And before long Nathan was taking action on his own account. He knew that the will of the Lord was that Solomon should be king and it was about time all Israel was apprised of the fact. Although there is no hint of it in the narrative, Nathan probably had perceived the reverence for God and His ways which later years would reveal was latent in Solomon's character and was determined that he should be king rather than the more or less irreligious Adonijah. It is rather a remarkable fact that of all David's nineteen sons there are only two whose names are recorded as making their mark on history. They are Solomon the wise and most magnificent king of Israel, and his younger brother Nathan, (not the prophet of that name), whose descendants Joseph and Mary a thousand years later were to become the reputed father and true mother of Jesus, the Son of David.

Queen Bathsheba, sitting quietly in her apartments at the palace, received a visitor. Nathan the prophet was announced. She received him graciously and waited for him to reveal the object of his visit. He told her of the plot, and the danger that threatened both her and her son Solomon if it succeeded. "*Adonijah reigns*" he said bluntly "*and David our lord does not know it*". He knew that David, old and feeble, would need definite arousing to the seriousness of the situation if he was to be persuaded to take positive action. So he unfolded his scheme to Bathsheba. She was to go to the king and ask if it was true that he had appointed Adonijah king despite his promise to her that Solomon should reign. While she was still with the king Nathan himself would come in asking how it was that the king had authorised the proclamation of Adonijah as king without advising either he or Zadok the High Priest, or Benaiah, and they all had been excluded from the ceremonies. "*Is this thing done by my lord the king, and you have not shown it to your servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?*"

David was roused to action. He called his three trusty supporters, Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah before him and instructed them to proceed immediately to the formal induction of his son Solomon as king. They were to set him upon the king's own mule and present him to the populace of Jerusalem

in a public place. There Nathan and Zadok were ceremoniously to anoint him king in the name of the Lord, and Benaiah's men sound their trumpets and raise the cry "God save King Solomon". As the shout rose on the air, the spectators, seeing which way things were going, responded with considerable vigour "*God save King Solomon*". *"And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them"*. It would appear that the proclamation that Solomon was to be their new king met with general approbation. This young lad was perhaps more popular with the general public than was his older and probably more supercilious half-brother.

The noise of the rejoicing penetrated the banquetting chamber as the feast neared its close. By this time most of the guests were most likely in a condition where noises of any sort hardly registered. It was Joab who first noticed it. That hard-bitten old soldier would certainly be able to carry his liquor better than these men-about-court and his instinct told him there was trouble afoot. *"Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar?"* he queried and rose from his seat to investigate. Before he could do so, there was an interruption. Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest entered hurriedly and in an obvious state of agitation, which Adonijah evidently failed to perceive. The nature of his words gives some clue to his condition at the moment. *"Come in"* he cried *"for you are a valiant man, and bring good tidings"*. Jonathan's reply soon sobered the would-be king. *"Verily our lord King David has made Solomon king ... and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon, and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that you have heard. And also Solomon sits on the throne of the kingdom."*

There was a deathly silence. Everyone was quite sober now. Men looked at each other and saw their own thoughts reflected in each other's eyes. They looked at Adonijah, ashen-faced. They looked at Joab: for once that old campaigner was at a loss for words. They looked again at each other. They had staked their future on Adonijah, and Adonijah had lost. *"And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way"*.

The rebellion had collapsed almost before it had

begun. What happened next to Joab and Abiathar is not recorded. They too must have abandoned Adonijah, for the next incident in the narrative is the flight of Adonijah to the Tent in Jerusalem sheltering the Ark of the Covenant, with the altar before it, normally presided over by Abiathar as priest. Here, clutching the altar, he could claim sanctuary. Blood must not be shed on the altar of the Lord. But Solomon showed himself a wise and humane king at the outset. *"If he show himself a worthy man"* he said *"there shall not a hair of him fall to the earth; but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die"*. So the rebel came into the presence of Solomon and did obeisance, and was dismissed to his house. Although not mentioned, it is evident that the same leniency was extended to the other arch-rebels, Joab and Abiathar. It must have been at this time that David had his long talks with Solomon and made the detailed arrangements for the erection of the Temple which are recorded in 1 Chron. 22 to 27. He was now enormously wealthy. According to 1 Chron. 22.14 he had given out of his own resources a hundred thousand talents of gold and a million talents of silver. In today's terms that would have been three thousand tons of gold and thirty thousand of silver, well-nigh incredible figures. At today's prices the value of such a hoard would be so astronomical as to be meaningless. The 29th chapter gives another set of figures which imply that the ruling notabilities of the nation contributed 150 tons of gold, 300 of silver, over 500 of copper and 3,000 of iron. The chronicler may have exaggerated the figures but even so they do serve to indicate the enormous wealth of David's kingdom. Such riches could only have been accumulated by trade and the spoils of war but even so is an almost incredible achievement in the forty-year reign of David.

What were the old man's thoughts, as he lay quietly pondering the events of the past in which he had taken so prominent a place, and those of the future which he would never see. The great dream of his life, the magnificent Temple for the God of Israel, for which he had assiduously prepared, would be built one day but his eyes would not see it. His mind harked back to the days of his youth when he served Saul; he saw in vision the menacing figure of Goliath the Philistine and felt again the thrill of faith, that God would give him the victory over Israel's enemy. His memory traced the early conflicts when he led Israel's forces to battle

and returned victorious with the praises of the young women in his ears "*Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands*". He would not slay any more ten thousands, he reflected; yet he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had established Israel secure among her neighbours, a nation to be treated with respect. He thought of the times he had failed God and fallen from his own high standard of rectitude, and of the reproofs and judgments that had come from the Lord in consequence; he felt the comfort of knowing that at the last he had fully repented of his baser deeds, and become reconciled to his God and that whatever the future beyond the grave held for him, it could only be well. He recalled the promise God had made to him that of his seed, One should come at the end of days to reign upon His throne over all the earth, dispensing mercy and righteousness toward all men everywhere. For him, it could only be well. He recalled the promise, a rule and a world that would never end; a kingdom of Messiah which should be the desire of all nations. The Lord had been very pa-

tient and very good to him; he could safely trust himself now to the hands of God.

King Solomon came with hasty steps into the bedchamber in response to an urgent summons. He bent over the bed and looked into the face of his father. David gazed at him straight in the eyes; his voice, though low, was clear and direct. Level and composed, it had the ring of confidence.

"I go the way of all the earth. Be thou strong therefore and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do, and whither you turn yourself". Long and earnestly he talked, until the sun faded from the sky and the shades of evening began to gather.

"Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour. And Solomon his son reigned in his stead."

THE END AOH

Valuing the Word of God

"Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path." (Psalm 119.103)

For a long time I was content to use my computer completely under the direction of our two sons. The manuals on the bookshelf were rarely opened. The instructions with the computer programmes were virtually a 'closed book' to me. I was quite happy and willing to be 'spoon fed' by two very willing and patient experts. But they wisely began to nudge me into learning for myself and now I am grateful that they did. They are still available when I really need help, meanwhile I explore and experiment.

Christians sometimes have the same attitude toward the Bible. It decorates the bookshelf and it's nice to follow the preacher when it's read in Church but personal discovery, alone with God, seems too difficult. Such believers miss much. God's Word is a challenging book. It challenges our thinking and our attitudes. Led by the Holy Spirit the Word changes us if we are obedient to God leading us in our study. Our Father speaks to us in many ways but His Word is our touchstone and those 'other ways' can be checked for correct understanding by reference to the Bible.

So why study the Bible? Is it not sufficient to

just read it and accept it. As with any subject or discipline that we wish to understand clearly, it is sensible to study 'the literature'. The Bible was written by a number of people in different eras of history and in different languages from our own. By study we saturate ourselves with Scriptures so that at critical moments such as temptation, like Jesus, we can answer the Devil with God's Word. So we become skilful in using the Sword of the Spirit. By study we can compare how God revealed Himself to various people about His plan through the Ages and we can see how that revelation developed. Passages of Scripture can be obscured by ancient languages and long forgotten cultures.

Prayer is vital to the study of God's Word and enables us to make it a practical study. Let us thank our Heavenly Father that he had provided teachers in churches and families who encourage us to learn from the Bible.

"All scripture inspired by God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3.16,17)

THE HEAVENLY SOURCE OF EVERLASTING WATERS

Part. 2 of a Conference Discourse

Where does the water for the Spring actually originate as it is not dependant on rainwater falling on the sides of the mountain? Keep in mind that while Jesus Christ is like the Gihon Spring from which flows the river of waters of life, Almighty God is the Originator and Ultimate Source, the Fountain of all matter and life. The Spring is thought to be connected to a deeper natural reservoir in the heart of Mt. Ophel and Mt. Zion, and fed by a never-failing stream flowing under Mt. Moriah, the Temple Hill, the Mount of God.

"The streams from God is full of water" says Psalm 65.9, they never fail, never dry up, for with you is the *"well of life"* the 'fountain' or the 'source' of life (Ps. 36.8, 9). God is the *"fountain of living water"* (Jer. 2.13; 17.13; see Ps. 107.33, 35; 114.8). *"All my springs are in you"* (Ps. 87.7 NKJ). God is The Source and Cause.

That Jesus Christ is the everlasting channel of living water, having it's ultimate Source with the Almighty Life-Giver and is graphically portrayed in the gospel of John chapter nine involving the Pool of Siloam. But before we can describe what happened King Hezekiah has to set the scene.

Solomon engineered two water systems, one for the city, one for the Temple, and it was his and God's provision of water, which completely transformed a small town into a city of famed magnificence. Hezekiah added a third. It was added out of necessity. Solomon's reign was one of peace, and although he surrounded the city with a double wall, having inner and outer gates, he was not concerned about being attacked. Jerusalem's only source of water was relatively exposed.

One of Solomon's engineering feats was to run a surface canal from the Gihon Spring to the south of the city, outside the city walls, forming Solomon's Pool (Old or Lower Pool; Jos. War. v. 4, 2; Is. 8.6; 22.9, 11), and water for the Royal Gardens (1 Kings 15.4; Neh. 3.13; Eccl. 3.13. See p. 39 *Underground Jerusalem*). But the SE section of the city was the most vulnerable part of its defences. It was vulnerable as far as attack was concerned, for it not only exposed the source of waters, the system lay outside the city walls' protection. Solomon's rule was the Golden Days of the Kingdom, but the eighth and ninth centuries were periods of peril for

Israel and Judah. Assyria rose to power, its kings having territorial ambitions. The threat came in a series of waves with each new ruler, culminating in the Northern Kingdom of Israel being taken into captivity after a three-year struggle (2 Kings 18.9, 10), and its territory completely annexed by Assyria. This brought the threat very close to Jerusalem for the southern boundary of Israel was about 20 miles north of Jerusalem.

A series of ebbs and flows in Assyrian advances then led to the campaign against Judah by Sennacherib (described in 2 Ch. 32; 2 Kings 18 and 19, and Is. 36 and 37; see Ecclesiasticus 48.17). It was a campaign that reached right up to the walls of Jerusalem, right up to their necks. Hezekiah was able to postpone the siege for about ten years by paying a tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18.13-16; 2 Kings 19.8, 9).

During the intervening time he went to work sealing off the opening to the Gihon Spring, blocking and burying its opening with great trouble, also stopping the flow of water from the Spring to the south of the city, that could also be used as an access. It was the only Fountain of Jerusalem, it had to be hidden. It could not just be sealed over like a well for it was a source of running water, it had also to be diverted or it would overflow. The result was Hezekiah's Tunnel. Only then did they repair the Eastern wall protecting the inner access to the water source. Hezekiah's intention was to starve the Assyrians of water during the second invasion (Is. 36.2) stating, *"Why should they come here and find all this water"* (2 Ch. 32.2-5).

There is no record of Jerusalem ever having lacked water. In fact it was the besiegers who were apt to want water not the besieged. This was the case here, lack of water would lead to desperate measures resulting in drinking contaminated surface water disastrously leading to disease outbreak. This was Hezekiah's intention, for the Assyrian army could well have taken Jerusalem, but not if they were weakened by disease.

The only other sources of water from the Spring were within the cities walls, and as an act of faith Hezekiah left them untouched, and at this point an angel stepped in and checkmated the invaders, destroying the rest of the Assyrian army. Hezekiah's

Tunnel led water from the Spring to a hewn out cistern called the Pool of Siloam (Upper Pool; Is. 7.3). The tunnel is 1,750 feet long, an impressive engineering feat cut through solid rock, and a remarkable achievement of technical skill for Jerusalem's early engineers. The Pool was originally underground, for the construction of an extension to Jerusalem's walls would give the game away (2 Kings 20.20; 2 Ch. 32.30; 33.14; see Bible Study Monthly July/August 2000, The Siloam Inscription).

When eventually a twenty-three feet thick wall did enclose the Pool it was opened and became another of Jerusalem's ground Pools, from which people could draw water, and bathe in, because all water from the Spring had curative powers, full of mineral riches (2 Ch. 32.5; Is. 22.9-11).

The underground corridor, a conduit from the Gihon Spring, transported water from the Eastern valley to the Western valley, feeding the Pool of Siloam. It also had an overflow used to irrigate the Royal, the Kings gardens and agricultural plots just outside the city southern limits. It was this Pool of Siloam that featured in a man's miraculous cure in John 9, the day after the Feast of Tabernacles, a festival having vital connections with water (see John 9.1-7).

We know that the way Jesus often performed cures was often wholly unnecessary to Him for the actual healing. At times it was to assist the faith of the person being cured, and certainly it was with compassion upon the person (Mk. 7.33; 8.23), also at times to help others who would witness the cure. And it is interesting to note that Jesus told the man born blind, to wash in the pool of Siloam, John drawing vital attention to the fact in verse seven that the word Siloam means 'Sent forth', and is itself derived from a verb 'to send' (Gen. 49.10). Siloam derived its name from the fact that its waters were sent from the higher sources of the mountain's waters through channels to the pool. John was drawing attention to the fact that Jesus was the Sent One of God. He was sent by the Father, and in fact He spoke of Himself in this exact way 'the sent one' twelve times during discourses at this feast of Tabernacles in John 7 and 8 (John 7.16, 18, 28, 29, 33; 8.16, 18, 26, 29, 42; 9.4, 7; see also 3.17, 34; 4.34; 5.23, 24, 30, 36, 37, 38; 6.29, 38, 39, 44, 57; 10.36; 11.42, 44; 12.45, 49; 13.16 [2X], 20; 14.24; 15.21; 16.5; 17.3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20.21) and 32 other times in John's gospel.

Mt. Moriah, where the great Temple stood, and where God resided, was the ultimate source of the water that was sent by a conduit to the pool of Siloam at the foot of the mountain. It well typifies Christ Jesus sent from the Father, sent from God to give healing waters to man. And Jesus Himself, in sending the blind man to the waters of Siloam was demonstrating that out from the Father comes Living healing water that the Father was and is the Source of Jesus' powers. Waters that issue from rock is also an OT image of Christ. And so, you can imagine Jesus crouching down, making this sticky mess of clay with his saliva, smearing it layer by layer onto the blind man's eyes, until it looked like two bulging masses, it would take some time to make and apply. Then he would help the blind man get to his feet, and quietly say to him 'make your way to the pool of Siloam and wash it away.' And then Jesus went on His way.

So the blind man, with his stick, would tap his way to the pool, walking away from the crowd with clay over his eyes. Once at the pool the man would slowly wash the two masses of sticky clay from his eyes. And as he washed the mess away, gradually his sight would come. Bit by bit the first gleams of light would appear, small chinks of light, then a little more and the light would get stronger, bit by bit. Sight would come to him, he'd then begin to distinguish shapes and sizes, then colours, and light reflecting off surfaces, perspective, and what would be to him marvels of light colour and size. For the first time he would see his reflection in the waters. What a wonder it would be to him! Until finally, away from the crowd, his sight would be completely restored. Healing one born blind would also involve activating that part of the brain to do with sight, for seeing has more to do with the brain than the actual organ of sight. For true spiritual sight we must go to the True Siloam, the One who was Sent from the Father. We also have to wash away the dirt!

John chapter nine was a Sabbath day, the days previous were the days of the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles (Lev. 23.40-43) or Ingathering (Ex. 23.16; 34.22; Deut. 16.13, 16), which our Lord attended beginning at John 7.10-14. Some dispute with Him but He demonstrates that His teaching holds closely to God's law, that He is seeking God's glory. Then on the last day of the festival, the seventh day, something very special and precious takes place (John 7.37).

For the festival 892 Priests and Levites (446 of each) were required for its seven day sacrificial worship, that included 70 young bulls, seven kids, fourteen rams, 198 lambs, meal and drink offerings, worship involving processes we normally associate with the kitchen, water being an absolute necessity.

"*The last, the great day of the feast*" (John 7.37) was marked by special observances. The people left their picturesque booths on rooftops, courtyards, in public squares and even in the Temple and walked into the Temple courts (Lev. 23.40, 41; Neh. 8.15-17). They were then divided into three companies, some would remain in the Temple to attend the preparation of the Morning Sacrifice. Another band would go in procession to a place called Moza (lit. a going forth, a spring head), a place south of the Temple where the Gihon watered trees (Eccl. 2.5, 6), and from where the procession gathered willow branches to bring back to the Temple. (See the Talmudic (Babylonian) Tractate Sukkah, on the Feast of Tabernacles; *Sukk.* 4.5; *Jerusalem Sukkah* 4.3, p. 54b) The third company, holding leafy branches of myrtle, willow and palms, took part in a stupendous ceremony involving water. Priests sounded silver trumpets to begin a procession starting out from the Temple that was led by a Priest holding a Golden Pitcher capable of holding three log (just over two pints). The procession passed through the Temple's Water Gate to Mt. Zion and Mt. Ophel. all part of a single paved way, and from there descended the main steps to the Pool of Siloam (Neh. 2.14; 3.15).

Here the white robed Priest filled the Golden Pitcher from its waters. sacred water (2 Cor. 4.7). The Pitcher had the emblem of a dove inscribed on its handles (Underground Jerusalem, plate XIII). They then turned around with great ceremony and ascended the steps and back to the Temple. As the Priest, who headed the procession, entered the Water Gate (South side of the Temple) a threefold trumpet peal sounded by priests, and the people recited the words of Isaiah 12.3, "*With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation*". It was

so timed that they would arrive just as priests were laying the sacrifice on the Altar of Burnt Offering (Tos. Sukk. 3.8), toward the close of the Morning Sacrifice. The procession came up through the Temple courts toward the Holy place. As the Priest entered the Court of the Priests another threefold trumpet blast sounded and the people dramatically halted.

Just prior to this, and also timed to perfection and pace, the second division of people had already returned with willow branches also amidst trumpet peals. Priests took the willow branches from the people and created a leafy willow canopy over the entire Altar, a canopy of branches watered by the Gihon Spring. It was the grandest booth of the festival. A magnificent canopy surrounding the Altar of Sacrifice.

Another Priest who carried a pitcher of wine for the drink offering joined the Priest who had entered the Court of Priests carrying the Golden Pitcher full of the living water. The two Priests ascended the steps of the Altar, and turned left. The High Priest with the Golden Flagon of Water walked around the Altar on this the seventh day of the festival seven times. At one corner of the Altar were two silver fluted funnels leading down to the base of the Altar, which led down into channels cut in the virgin rock. Lifting their pitchers high so all the people could see, the water and also the wine were poured into the Altar funnels to the great and ecstatic rejoicing of the people.

Their rejoicing, an especially marked part of the festival, from the highest to the lowest were to rejoice, even for the lowly servant it was a time of rejoicing (Deut. 16.14). It was in direct contrast to the Day of Atonement, five days before the Festival of Tabernacles. The Day of Atonement was marked with great solemnity, and it was said, "a man has never seen sorrow, who never saw the sorrow of that day"; a day some scholars think was the day of the Fall (Bengel, etc), and the day prefiguring the death of Christ.

KW

"*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" (Matt. 5.3). Why did Christ call this condition blessed. It is, for one thing, the only condition of peace. It delivers us from all bondage to what others think of us. Their criticism does not wound us. We know ourselves too well for that. The feeling of the inferiority is lifted, for we know all we can ever be

is of His grace, and that is ours to the full. We cease to care about the applause of men, for the real story of whatever good we do, is all God's work in us and through us. But free from ourselves we can see and value others. The worst barrier to real fellowship is gone, or the thing that isolates us is pride.
(*Herald of Christ's Kingdom*)

THE VISION OF JOEL

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel*

2. Call to Repentance

"God ... commands all men everywhere to repent." (Acts. 17.30 RSV). That challenging declaration was flung out to the world by Paul on Mars' Hill nearly a thousand years after Joel had spoken, but here in Joel's prophecy there is the seed of that later exhortation. In this first chapter the listeners to the prophet's impassioned words are being carefully led from the lower plane of dire lament at the troubles that are coming upon them to the higher one of repentance and dependence. Repentance was needed for the sin that has caused the trouble and dependence upon God for recovery from that trouble. In the first part of the chapter, up to verse 12, the lamentation is a purely self-centred one; there is no indication of any thought of appealing to God. In the latter part of the chapter the lament moves to a higher stage in that the cry of woe and despair is taken into the sanctuary of God and ascends up before him, even although there is still no hint of true repentance.

"Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth" (Joel 18). This picture of the betrothed maiden who loses her affianced husband before the actual marriage has taken place might very well be a subtle allusion to Israel's loss of her God ("your Maker is your husband" Isa. 54.5) because of her unfaithfulness, before she had attained the full glory of her destiny. Israel had broken the covenant; that is why this trouble was coming upon her. That truth is further stressed in the succeeding verse (v.9) "*The cereal offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord.*" Suspension of the Temple offerings was the gravest and most heart-searing of all the afflictions that could come upon the nation. It meant that the covenant had fallen into non-observance, and all the gracious promises of God were null and void. No wonder that, as Joel said, "*the priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn*". The ecclesiastical dignitaries of every age have been quick to bemoan the breakdown of their institutions and organizations and ritual even although they may have tolerated for far too long the social evils and religious abuses which may have led to that breakdown. The priests of Joel's day were no exception to the rule. Be it noted, however, that the prophet, even in the act of denouncing their unfaithfulness, acknowledges their Divine office; he still calls them "the Lord's

ministers". It was like Jesus in after days who maintained that the scribes and Pharisees occupied Moses' seat although He reprovved and denounced them, Joel honoured the Divine ordinance.

From the work of God that has broken down, the prophet turns his bitter gaze to the work of man which also has failed him. "*The fields are laid waste, the ground mourns,*" he cries, "*because the grain is destroyed and the wine fails, the oil languishes. Be confounded O tillers of the soil, wail, O vine-dressers, for the wheat and for the barley.*" He puts the blame where it rightfully belongs; all men are jointly responsible for the catastrophe. Men of the world, husbandmen and vine-dressers, have neglected their duty to their God just so surely as have the priests, and the work of their hands has failed them just as that of the priests has failed. The disaster is universal; the vine, the fig, the pomegranate, the palm tree, the apple (this is really the orange) all the trees of the field are withered.

Joel says (in v.12) "*gladness fails from the sons of men.*" That last phrase is the climax of his first message to the people. Disaster, utter and complete, is come upon them and there is a great, nation-wide, universal cry of distress and woe rising upon the air. Like Jeremiah in later days, witnessing the final calamitous scenes of the whole series of troubles which Joel in his day was only beginning to foresee, "*I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking and all the hills moved to and fro, I looked, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled I looked and the fruitful land was a desert, and all the cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger.*" (Jer. 4.23-26 RSV). And so it was that Joel, in his masterly handling of this unfaithful people, showed them the utter ruin and desolation of all their world and their own impotence to remedy their undone condition, before he began to turn their minds to their true Healer and Saviour, God.

Is this a pointer to us for guidance in our own preaching to the world around? Do we tend to paint a rosy picture of the blessings God has in store for man before we have shown man how utterly he has ruined and destroyed the heritage God gave him at

the first? Is it not right for us, as it evidently was with Joel, to lay proper stress at the first upon this fact, that man has proven unworthy of his privileges, unable to govern himself, and unfit to be allowed any longer to desecrate God's creation with the abominations of his inventing. Truly today, as in the land of Judah at that far-off time, the vine, the fig, the pomegranate, the palm, the apple, all the trees of the forest, are destroyed; and joy has fled away from the hearts of men. Surely at this point we, like Joel, should begin to turn men's minds, not only to the golden days of promise, but first of all to the need of repentance.

"Gird on sackcloth and lament, O priests, wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in and pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because cereal offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry to the Lord" (vv 13, 14). Repentance is the first step toward Divine salvation, the gathering of the people, the elders, the priests, all together into the house of God to cry unto Him. The power of corporate worship to elevate the spirit and inspire the heart is well known. Consciousness of the Holy Spirit's presence in a prayer meeting of believers is an experience that many know. Who knows what power for cleansing and reformation may not reside in the gathering together of people, joined in the knowledge of a common distress or common danger, to cry to God in their trouble and so be led to prayer for relief and deliverance. It was when Israel, apostate and captive as they were time after time in the days of the Judges, *"turned unto the Lord; and cried unto him in their trouble"* that He *"heard them and delivered them out of their distress"*. Joel knew that, and his first impulse was to bring his people face to face with their God and bring them to that condition of heart in which God could bless them.

Verse 15 to the end seems almost to represent the prophet's impassioned appeal to the people gathered within the precincts of the Temple. The injunction of verse 14 has been heeded. The countrymen have left their vain watching of their blasted fields and dying herds. The pleasure-seekers have left their wine, the priests their conning over the dead law and their interminable discussions of legal points, and all have come together to hear the voice of the prophet. The

ringing tones echo through the building and pierce the ears of the people standing in the courts. *"Alas; alas; alas, the day!"* so the Septuagint has it. Woe, three times repeated. *"The day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come."* Later on in his message Joel has wonderful words of comfort and cheer for this people; he is going to paint at the last a gloriously sunlit picture of the time when God turns His face toward His people again, and pours out His Spirit upon all flesh. He will talk of new wine and milk in abundance, flowing waters and fertile valleys, and conclude with the heart-cheering promise *"the Lord dwells in Zion"*. But not yet! Here at the first his message is like the one that came to Ezekiel, one of *"mourning, and lamentation, and woe"*. The Day of the Lord is at hand, and it is to be a day of destruction.

Now that is not that Day of the Lord with which we are so familiar. That Day, God brings this world into judgment and causes it to pass away with a great noise, and the elements to melt with fervent heat, that He might build in its place a new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet. 3.10). It is not the day of which Isaiah speaks in his 34th chapter, the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompense for the controversy of Zion (Isa. 34.8). It is not the day that Joel asks about in his second chapter (Joel 2.31), that great and terrible day which is to be heralded by great wonders and signs in the heavens. The prophetic vision that came to Joel later on has not yet shone through to him. He still sees no farther forward than the next century or so, and the day of the Lord, as a destruction from the Almighty. This he announces to the gathered people in chapter 1.15. This is the day of judgment, of tribulation, of disaster, which began with Shalmaneser of Assyria and ended with Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. That is a day that witnessed the downfall of both the Houses of Israel, the captivity of all their people, and the extinction of David's line of kings, in obedience to the Divine decree. *"I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is. and I will give it to him"* (Ezekiel 27.27). For the moment, this is all that Joel sees, and this the burning message that he strives to impart to his listening people.

"Is not the meat (food) cut off before our eyes," he pleaded *"joy and gladness from the house of our God?"* Mark how cleverly he allied the natural and the spiritual. How like the condition in our own

land today! For several generations past our people have been steadily drifting away from God; His house in every place neglected and deserted; even our traditional regard and friendship for the 'people of the Book', the ancient people of promise, has suffered measurable eclipse on account of modern political rearrangements and developments. That is what is happening today, and in that we have a repetition of Joel's own experience. *"The seed is rotten under their clods" he says "the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken, for the corn is withered"* (v.17).

All this, because Israel has left the Lord her God, renounced His covenant, and taken every man his own way. What a sermon for today could be preached on these few verses; the language of the Holy Word so eloquent and so fitting to our present condition that it hardly needs expounding.

So Joel comes with a mighty sweep to that which was in his heart all the time. Perhaps by now he had got the people with him; perhaps it was as speaking for them, and on their behalf, that he, as it were, turns to the Almighty and pours out his heart before him, *"O Lord, to you will I cry, for the fire has devoured the pastures ... the beasts of the field cry also to you: for the rivers of waters are dried up..."*

There he stops. There is no entreaty, no supplication, no request that the threatened doom be averted. Perhaps already he sensed that the canker had eaten too deep, that it could only be burned out with fire. Perhaps he distrusted himself too much to make request for a specific deliverance. He confessed his people's sins and cried unto God, not for deliverance, not for comfort, but that **God might hear**. Did he realise that if but God would bend to earth and listen, there would be no further need for distress; for the Judge of all the earth would surely do right? Like Isaiah, in the days of Sennacherib, he took the haughty invader's insolent message into the Temple and laid it before the Lord,

and thereupon going out to await the Lord's good pleasure, so did Joel turn the people's faces to God, call His attention to them, tell Him of the sorry pass to which affairs on earth had come, and then quietly stand aside to await, in faith and confidence, the salvation of God.

If this book is a poem, this is the end of the first stanza. If it is a history, this is the end of the first episode, the gathering in the Lord's house. If it is a prophecy, and it is, surely this is the point at which Joel's vision ceased to be circumscribed by the time and space of his own day and his own people. Was it the intensity of his supplication that opened his heart and mind to greater things and showed him the re-enactment of these scenes on a grander and vaster scale in distant ages yet to be. Did thus his wondering eyes take in the dim and shadowy outlines of Armageddon itself? It would seem so, for the opening words of chapter 2 breathe a new spirit and a deeper intensity. In that chapter we are translated at once into a setting of deeper shadows and more intense colours, a movement much more rapid, hastening onward at increasing pace until it merges into the maelstrom of trouble with which the world shall end, and ending, find its destiny.

So chapter 1 of Joel's prophecy is a picture in miniature of the greater trouble. It had its fulfilment in Joel's own day and the times immediately following: but it served to quicken his mind and draw for him the outlines of things that must one day come to pass, and the Kingdom of peace that is to succeed that last trouble of all. And because that is so, the principles enshrined in this first chapter are applicable to the nations today as surely as they were applicable to Israel in the days of Joel.

It is in chapter 2, to be discussed in the next issue that we are taken in great strides out of the day of Joel and brought into our own day, the focal point of prophecy, when the Lord rises up to fight for his people as when He fought in times of old.

AOH

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE continues to serve God's people as a residential home for elderly brethren and a centre where friends can enjoy worship and study. There is also other Christian fellowship in the area. Gainsborough currently has six residents and space for five or six others. The trustees would welcome enquiries and these may be made through the Bible Study Monthly address. Maintaining this fine house with its ongoing repairs is a big responsibility and the trustees are grateful

to those who remember their work in prayer. Please pray also for the residents, the housekeeper and all those associated with Gainsborough Centre. Visitors are welcome to enjoy all the facilities of the centre and full board or bed and breakfast are available. Bookings should be made through the resident housekeeper, Mrs. Corrinne Vaughan at 01963 250684. **Please do not write or ring Corrinne except for booking.**

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*A panorama of
the way of Christ*

6. Greater Love than this

"Jesus, knowing that he was come from God, and went to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself." (John 13.3-4)

This act of humble service that Jesus performed for His disciples is part of the general picture of His abnegation, His complete surrender to the service of God and man. We read that *"He emptied himself of his glory" – "He made himself of no reputation"*. He was among men as one who serves. He glorified the life of service, made great the common task, bestowing honour upon givers and making the meek the inheritors of the earth. It was a complete reversal of the system of mankind where the strongest took all and the simple, unassuming poor remained poor. The great were waited on by a retinue of slaves who were looked upon as an inferior breed of the human race. Those who had riches usually gained more. Few would have stooped from their social heights to mingle with the unsuccessful or to serve with their own hands the infirm or the unfortunate. But Jesus, fully aware of His high estate, rose from supper table and girded Himself after the fashion of the lowest slave for the performance of a very humble service. Whatever theologians wring from this incident or read into it of Christian doctrine, to the lay mind it presents the lovely picture of a King meekly laying aside His majesty to wash the dusty feet of twelve very ordinary men. If Judas had not yet gone out Jesus washed the feet that were to carry him on his treacherous errand.

The intolerance of religious leaders thirsting for power has stained the pages of history red with the blood of the martyrs. The great Founder of the Church humbly washed the feet of His chosen few with affectionate care, washing and wiping the feet of His known betrayer, without rancour or reproach. "Did e'er such love and sorrow meet?" asks the great hymn, to which the observer of human nature must reply – "Never!" The most earnest and sincere of His pilgrims are often seen to fall far short of the magnanimity of the Master. They are, when true to self, conscious that they fail to live up to that sublime selflessness that was the essence of the Lord's life and teaching. He said and He did. His deeds matched His words and they live

forever as the supreme example of human conduct the ideal, the standard, the yardstick to which men and women may aspire and by which God measures His saints. There can be no competition about who is greatest or best or cleverest in any circle since the greatest of all stooped to perform the lowliest task. None of those men who knew His worth had thought to do the same thing for Him. Not because they would have thought the task beneath them; they had not yet learned to be considerate and act for others. They did not think of it. It did not occur to them. The lesson was new, to be learned slowly with the passing years and in memory of that upper room. The feet of Jesus had already been anointed with the costly spikenard by the hands of a devoted woman, an office and a gift reserved for kings.

It is the will of God that His chosen children shall be like His Son. Jesus is the elder brother of all His pilgrims who have plodded on to the eternal city. Entry there will not be by any verbal examination of creeds and doctrines. The loving heart is the entrance ticket to eternity. Love is the only passport into the portals of Life. Those who keep that great commandment, *"that you love one another as I have loved you."* will be those who receive the crown.

A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love Divine,
Perfect and right, and pure and good
A copy Lord of thine.

"If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13.17). "If you love me keep my commandments" (John 14.15). Knowledge unapplied, if it is good knowledge, is knowledge wasted. If a man knew the secrets of wealth and remained poor, or of health and remained sick, or of happiness and remained miserable, or of wisdom and remained ignorant, he would rightly be called foolish, a dog-in-a-manger type, neither enjoying the good things himself nor sharing them with others. All the wise and wonderful words of Jesus are just so much useless treasure unless rightly applied to life. One may become a scholar, able to recite the Bible from end to end, quoting chapter and verse with formidable accuracy. Or one may be a student of the Word, dividing, applying, dissecting and extracting from history and incidents

an astonishing range of types, codes and forecasts. If however the spirit of God and the love of Christ as contained in the life-giving utterances are not expressed in word and deed, that knowledge is nothing but dead letters.

Many a seeking soul has had its yearnings after God and the love of God quenched by an endless stream of high-sounding rhetoric. Dogmas have wrecked more barques than they have saved and the straitjacket of sect and creed have crippled and disillusioned many a feeble faith fleeing for sanctuary to the great Rock of Ages. Love is the source and secret of all great happiness. "Love that is not narrow, is not small, is not for one or two but for them all."

Hatred drives people mad. Envy, ambition, greed and selfishness fill the world with strife and mad deeds. Love is the best preserver of sanity, health and beauty. The commandments of God and Christ are not beyond the abilities of man. Love of God ensures safety. It keeps the feet from the pitfalls of idolatry. Whatever the object of worship, its feet are clay, sooner or later cracking to reveal the temporary nature of its satisfaction. The unchanging One requires of man, mercy, justice and humility. The presumptuous are never happy. Those who accept the blessings of life as God's gifts, being thankful, are joyously happy, with the carefree happiness of good children in a world of wonders. To love your neighbour as yourself is not a harsh command. A friendly soul is a happy soul. If neighbours remain aloof the loss is theirs. The fountain of love can shed its perpetual dews without loss to itself. To love as Christ loved, to serve as He served, to give as He gave, to empty out self as He emptied Himself of His glory, is to know peace, riches and contentment of a quality unknown to the pursuers of worldly success and prosperity. It is possible to be poor and blessed, to be rich and wretched. Poverty and superb happiness do not always go hand in hand. Christ never laid it down that to be a pilgrim we must be poor. To be poor in spirit is different from being poor in pence. Poverty and pride may hang together, where the better endowed, linked to Christian gentleness and generosity, will be led to give again all that he has as a faithful steward of God's goods.

The happiness of life does not depend on what people have or who they are, but on what they are,

on how their whole nature responds to the commandments of God and to the world around them. Most especially does Christian happiness depend on carrying out the commands of Christ, not through fear or self interest but from the earnest desire to please Him who set so glorious an example before the minds of men, and from a glorious conviction that these commandments are the finest laws ever issued to any world. In them is the very breath of life, and in the doing of them is great joy.

"But what to those who find? Ah this, nor tongue nor pen can show,

The love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know.

Jesus our only joy be thou, as thou our prize wilt be.

In thee be all our glory now, and through eternity."

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." (John 14.27) Jesus owned nothing except the clothes He wore. These, the Roman soldiers who crucified Him took as their lawful gratuity for the awful service they had rendered to the priests who had thrust Him into the hands of Roman power for such an end. He had therefore nothing to give to those who had left all to follow Him. There are the legends of the Holy Grail and the seamless Robe but they are only legends. The peace of Christ was no legend. It was a legacy, which like the anointing oil on the head of the High Priest has run down to the hem of His garment, touching and blessing all members of the Church till now. The calm serenity, the tranquility of that peace is a state of heart and mind that cannot be described by a dictionary. It is *"not as the world gives"*, therefore the world can neither know it nor define it. Peace as the world desires it is freedom from war, from hostility, tumults and quarrels. Freedom from social, political and national disturbance is something governments of men are forever seeking and forever losing. When the cry goes up of 'Peace!' tumult breaks out in some other quarter of the globe. Humanity sits on the side of a volcano, never knowing from day to day when the rumbling monster will blow up, involving them all in its ruin. Peace of any kind is hard to obtain and keep. Domestic peace is a brittle thing. Whenever two or three are gathered together a division of opinion, a tug of wills, a clash of personalities creates the

inevitable disturbance. The earth resounds to the crash and roar of the machine, to the noisy tumult of the streets, to the shouts and yells of the discontented, rolling and swaying like the waves of the restless ocean.

Truly, the world cannot give peace, it cannot get peace. It has never known peace, nor will it know peace until the Prince of Peace commands silence and the angry billows of the nations fall before His omnipotent will. A tiny bird is known to build a swinging nest over a roaring cataract and to flit in and out with the most cheerful alacrity. This jewel of Nature is a fit picture of the Christian pilgrim who lives above the roar and turbulence of the world with a cheerful composure of mind, an undisturbed freedom from agitation, because both are in complete harmony with the laws of their Maker. There is no questioning of how, why or whither; no revolt against the law written within. Only a joyous living, a complete trust, an assured confidence, a calm repose, an unsurpassed tranquility, a serenity of heart and mind which cannot be shaken. Though the earth be removed, these remain unmoved, confident in the power controlling the stormy elements of earth, knowing that in His own way and time He will bring peace and order from the moral chaos of mankind.

Peace! Great Peace! The Peace of God! The Peace of Christ! The great gift has been to the few who have treasured it, lived with it and died with its sunset glow upon their calm faces. The world loses its peace; the ambassadors of peace weep over their failure to create peace between divided nations. But for this peace, 'My Peace', the Christian counts the world well lost.

Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging
found?

On Jesus bosom nought but calm is found.

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?

Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

"I am the true vine, my Father is the husbandman," (John 15.1). When Jesus wished to give an illustration of the harmony and cooperation between God and Himself and His chosen, He turned readily to Nature. In the parable of the vine He taught a living truth which cannot be misunderstood. A branch draws its sap and sustenance from the tree of which it is an essential part. Cut off from the tree a branch soon withers and dies, its use and beauty gone. A tree shorn of

branches is a maimed and pathetic sight. Both trunk and branches combine a symmetrical beauty of shape and colour. When laden with fruit the vine with its luxurious clusters and handsome leaves is an arresting and desirable plant. No fruit-bearing tree is so severely pruned. When trimmed by expert hands its growth and produce are phenomenal. So Jesus described himself as the main stem, rooted in time and eternity, out of whose life should grow branches, climbing and spreading throughout the world for twenty centuries, under the personal supervision of God the great Husbandman. Nourishment, care and pruning were to be the Divine work of the Father, seeking fruit from the branches and waiting patiently for it.

"I am the true vine, my Father is the Husbandman". As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, neither can the vine prune itself. Without expert training it runs wild. Any fruit it produces is scarcely worth gathering. The Christian in Christ has the very life of Christ running through his being as the sap of the tree supplies the branches with life and the power to produce fruit. Under the watchful eye of Divine providence the branches are shaped, trimmed and trained, all excess growth is cut away, so that they appear as so many strands of one harmonious whole. When fruit appears the rich pendant clusters complete the picture in the natural tree. In the true vine Christian lives are trimmed and trained by the varied experiences of life. The pliable, talented mind capable of producing good results may be more hardly dealt with than the lesser branches, too frail to support the weight of heavier clusters. Talents, temperament, ability to imbibe knowledge to survive circumstances, amid the rough assaults of doubt and discouragement, are all indications of a good fruit bearing branch that will produce those rich fruits of character which will be found to the glory of God. The ignorant jeer at character but it is by character that God transforms and reforms the world. If a good branch is pruned and a barren branch is cut off for destruction, the purpose and decision is that of the chief Gardener. The fruit God desires of His creatures is love. Christ-like love, selfless, disinterested love. If by means of the True Vine He produces the characteristic rich, fruitful clusters, it is by this means He intends to restore mankind to that ideal state of harmony with Himself and among themselves.

In God's kingdom on the earth He intends to make for all nations "*a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined*". Wine is the juice of the grape and this wine is without sediment or impurity, a choice vintage, a life-giving liquid. "*He will have all men to be saved and brought to a knowledge of the truth.*" Truth is Christ, love, life, God's way of bringing mankind to a knowledge of Himself, away from sin, violence, fear, superstition, sickness and death, into a new, clean, healthy atmosphere of knowing the living God as He truly is and rejoicing in Him. The true Church, saints of God, the branches, the True Vine, are the first-fruits, developed to pour their sparkling blessings on a weary world. To be such a branch is a rare honour of the ages, given to few. Fruit is the slow produce of a lifetime. It is neither works nor scholarship, though these may go into its making. It is the richness of God-like love. Its source is neither in sect nor system but in Christ.

"Abide in me and I in you. Without me you can do nothing."

I am Thine O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
And it told thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith
And be closer drawn to thee.

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15.13). The heroic self-sacrifice of one man to save the life of another is regarded as the highest form of valour. Life is the most valuable possession of every human being. When this is freely risked and given that others may live it constitutes the finest and most fearless of actions. It demonstrates a concern for others, greater than any concern for self. It is the principle of altruism pursued to its utmost end. Many noble ones have perished that others may live and their memory is preserved in history. Their fame is remembered in sculpture, in tablet and medal, in the halls of fame and in the hearts of those who loved them. These are not the sum total of those who have laid down their lives that others might live. There is a less spectacular giving of life that wins little of the world's applause. It lacks the one splendid deed, the one generous throwing away of self and passes unnoticed in the general throng of living. Yet how many men and women could testify to their own daily laying down of life,

to an endless chain of common tasks, to a constant shouldering work, burdens and responsibilities, each demanding their daily mead of courage and patience, that other lives may run in a smoother channel. Whether life be given in one magnificent act or in years of daily offering, it is life given, life poured out that other lives may live, and live more abundantly. The prime theme of the teaching of Jesus was service and salvation. He came to minister, to serve others, to salvage human life from the wreckage of sin and death to seek and to save the lost life and inheritance of man. He was a doer of His own word for He poured out His soul unto death, completing the last giving away of Himself by going voluntarily to the Cross, enduring the agony and despising its shame.

It was an act of heroism which won the applause of the crowd. The priests jeered, the Roman soldiers gambled indifferently beneath the cross, the ignorant despised and reviled Him, women wept, His friends stood afar off, and the average citizens were dumb with sorrow and foreboding. The man who had healed their sick, blessed their children, raised their dead, spoken kind words to weary hearts, suffered death as a criminal, yet no greater hero ever died for man than He who paid the penalty for sin, between two thieves. It was love's last action. Clearly setting the final end of His course, the alienation, the slander, the jeers, the ignominy, the torture of slow death. He yet continued unwavering on His way, willing to suffer wrong, refusing to seek deliverance or to assert His just claims. After nearly two thousand years His example has inspired many but His giving still remains without parallel in human experience.

Greater love than this no man has ever shown. He laid down His life for His friends, His chosen, His believers. Even His enemies will yet see Him with clear eyes, as before the King of Love they taste the over-spill of His generosity.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

The end
FAS

"All things are yours." You cannot add anything to that ... except troubles.

Do you pray for tasks equal to your powers or for powers equal to your tasks?

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

The disciples were perplexed. Here they were, in the empty country on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, with five thousand men and a number of women and children who had spent the entire day listening to Jesus preaching. Evening was coming on and they had suggested He send the crowd away to the nearby coastal fishing villages to obtain food. He calmly replied. *"They need not go away. You give them something to eat"* (RSV). They looked round them and then at each other, puzzled. They knew that there was no food in sight. They had not even brought any with them for their own simple needs and Jesus knew that perfectly well. They looked at Him again. He was standing there with that well-known understanding light in His eyes and they sensed that, somehow, something new and rather wonderful was going to happen. But in the meantime there was this question of food for the multitude, and there was no food.

Philip protested a little *"Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little"* he said. One denarius was a normal day's wages for a working-man. Such a man expects about thirty-five to forty pounds or more for a day's work today. Eight thousand pounds would be wealth unimaginable to this little band of peasants and fishermen. They looked at their Lord again. What could He be thinking of? *"How many loaves have you?"* asked Jesus suddenly. They all looked round rather helplessly. *"There is a lad here"* said Andrew *"who has five barley loaves and two small fishes"*. He regarded the boy with his little store. *"But what are they among so many"* he concluded hopelessly.

Jesus turned to the boy. "Will you give them to me?" He asked him. The lad came forward rather shyly and handed them over, then stood looking to see what Jesus was going to do. "Tell everybody to sit down!" Glad of an excuse for activity, the twelve disciples separated and moved among the crowds, marshalling them into serried ranks and groups. Pandemonium was reduced to order: the hubbub ceased and there was a great silence. The twelve returned and stood before their Master. The boy who had given the loaves was still there. Holding the fishes and the five loaves in His hands, Jesus lifted His eyes to heaven. "We thank you, O Father in heaven, for this bread which you have given for the service of man". Motioning His disciples to

come closer, He began to break the loaves in half and fill each man's *kophinos*, the little wicker basket normally used for carrying food when on a journey, dismissing each in turn to distribute his basketful among his section of the waiting crowd.

It was only when Philip came back for his second load that he realised Jesus was standing there breaking pieces of bread with no apparent diminution of those He held in His hand. The lad was standing there, open-mouthed. He stood for a moment, irresolute, a question framing itself on his lips, and then he met again that understanding look in the Master's eyes; he moved away to continue his mission, wondering.

So they came and went, and came and went, until at last all in that vast gathering had eaten their fill. And because they were satisfied, and nightfall was at hand, they began to disperse, first in ones and twos, then in groups until at last the entire field was deserted and only Jesus and His disciples were left. The lad who supplied the original loaves and fishes was gone too, gone with a story to tell that he never forgot to his dying day.

"Where are they all?"

"They have gone, Master!"

Jesus looked at twelve weary men, then at the field, littered now with scraps of bread. *"Gather up the fragments that are left over that nothing be lost"*. Silently they obeyed. Presently they stood again before Jesus, each with his food satchel filled with scraps of bread and fish. Jesus looked at them compassionately. "The labourer is worthy of his hire. You have food now sufficient for your evening meal".

That was how the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand must have appeared to the disciples. It made a profound impression, for it is recalled, in practically identical terms, by all four of the Gospel evangelists. It is the only one of Jesus' miracles that is recorded in all four Gospels. It is unlikely that the recipients were similarly impressed. The vast majority of them would have had no idea of the miraculous origin of the food they were eating. All they knew was that men were coming round serving them with bread and fish; whence it came they knew not and in the main they did not care. Here was a prophet who backed up His preaching with food for the body and very acceptable it was too.

They seemed more interested in the food than the preaching. Is the story literally true? Did Jesus really stand there creating bread and fish out of nothing? Of course it is literally true. Its veracity rests in the joint testimony of twelve reliable men who were there at the time and saw it happen. But it is a fallacy to talk about Jesus creating things out of nothing. Bread and fish are composed of elements common in nature, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and an admixture of other basic atoms. There was plenty of all this in the vicinity of Jesus. Divine power which at the very beginning brought together sufficient of these same elements to produce the body of Adam, was abundantly able to do the same thing when a little bread was needed. The wheat grain in the farmer's field is produced from "nothing" in much the same way. Solar energy, sunlight, acting upon the elements of the earth, builds up the ripened grain, no fraction of which was there at the start. Nature takes a year to do it; Jesus did it in a moment of time.

One criticism sometimes levelled at the veracity of the story is the assertion that it is told in two forms; in one case five thousand are fed and twelve baskets of scraps are taken, in the other case, four thousand are fed and seven baskets taken. This, say the critics, demonstrates the unreliability of the story. In point of fact, it only demonstrates the unreliability of the critics. The Gospels are clear that Jesus performed this type of miracle twice. The first time was just before the second Passover of His ministry, at the time of the death of John the Baptist, when He fed the five thousand. This one is recorded in Matt. 14.13-21; Mark 6.35-44; Luke 9.10-17 and John 6.5-13. The second occasion was some six months later at a different place when He fed the four thousand, recorded in Matt. 15.32-38 and Mark 8.1-8. The scene of the first incident was near Bethsaida-Julias on the north-eastern shore of the lake, and Jesus then crossed the lake to the other Bethsaida near Capernaum and the people were with Him for one day only. That of the second was halfway down the eastern side of the lake and He afterwards crossed to Magdala near Tiberias and they were with Him for three days. The distinction is verified by Jesus Himself when in Matt. 16.9-10. He referred to both incidents, thus removing all justification for confusing the two.

There is a more profound difference. The men of the later incident, the four thousand, glorified the

God of Israel in consequence of the miracles that Jesus performed during those three days (Matt. 15.31). There is no indication in the case of the five thousand that they manifested any such reaction. True, they regarded the man who had done this thing as perhaps John the Baptist or as Elijah or as one of the other prophets of old, risen from the dead but that was all. (Luke 9.19; John 6.14, 15) There was no glorifying God for this great thing. All the evidence is that the five thousand, unlike the four thousand, were more interested in the material blessings, the "loaves and fishes", than in the spiritual content of our Lord's ministry. This is best brought out in John's account. The day after the miracle, the people came back to the scene and found that Jesus and His disciples had gone. They, or at least some of them, took to the boats and crossed the lake to Capernaum, seeking Jesus (John 6.24). When Jesus saw them, He said "*You seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves*". In other words, the food He had given them meant much more to them than the wonder of the healing He had brought to their sick. So He went on "*Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you*". But they were not interested in that which was not perceptible to their natural senses. "*What sign do you do*" they asked "*that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?*" (RSV) Their interest in Jesus was only to the extent that He would give them material blessings. "*Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness*" they told Him (6.31) as much as to say "God did that for them; what will you do for us?" to which the Lord replied "*My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world*". But they were in no mood for this abstract thinking about a spiritual bread which would give heavenly life. They only wanted to know what Jesus would give them here and now, and so impatiently they requested "*Lord, give us this bread always*", the literal bread of which they had tasted the day before. Here was a prophet with the power to give them bread without limit, and that was all they wanted of Him.

Sadly, Jesus replied "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you*

that you have seen me, and yet you do not believe." And when at last they perceived that there was going to be no more bread and no more fishes, they began to display their resentment "*because he said 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.'*" They said *'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven?'"* There was no appreciation of the kingdom message of Jesus, no longing for Abrahamic blessing for all the families of the earth. No spiritual insight; no understanding of the might and majesty of Israel's God. All they wanted was a continuation of the loaves and fishes. Anything that tried to lift their dull minds to a higher plane of thought was incomprehensible to them. "*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* they queried contemptuously (6.52). Not even a prophet now; just "*this man*".

It may be asked why the Lord troubled to perform so signal a miracle for the benefit of so undeserving a people. It must of necessity be that it highlights a principle of God's dealings with

men. After all, their own ancestors were just as unbelieving yet God wrought great signs and wonders on their behalf; the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters of Elim, the manna in the wilderness, the crossing of Jordan. Is it that in His infinite wisdom God "*sends rain on the just and the unjust*" (Matt. 5.45), that all may at last come to realise His patience and His mercy? It is probable that Jesus found many more followers among the four thousand than He did from the five thousand. Yet in a day that will surely come those five thousand will again stand before the Son of Man and receive of His hands something of infinitely greater and more lasting worth than the loaves they mistakenly asked Him for, on that far-off occasion. They will, at the last, realise what He really meant by the bread of heaven which is for the life of the world, and will without much doubt joyfully and believingly take of that bread of which, if a man eat, he shall live for ever.

AOH

ANGER!

"Put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, ... and put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator." (Col. 3.8-10).

'Wasps have been an absolute pest this year,' said a hardworking housewife as she finished her autumn jam making. Insects did seem to have enjoyed the long hot summer and autumn, especially butterflies on the buddleia. 'But what good are wasps?' Pursued the frustrated housewife as the little beast buzzed around her head.

Like all God's creatures wasps fit into a wonderfully balanced system but human behaviour spoils that balance, making us feel that certain organisms are a nuisance. But a Christian brother who is an expert on mini-beasts (an entomologist) says that they should be treated gently and it works. Anger and animosity have probably been the biggest single factor in man's failure to be friends with many in the animal world. They create fear,

distrust and conflict.

Is that not so in human relationships also? In home and school, factory and office, on roads and in sporting events people get angry with each other and friendships are tarnished. It happens in churches and Christian communities. We allow the old human nature to spoil the "image of the Creator".

Paul says that we must take off the old nature and put on the new, as with a coat. It is a radical removal of that which we have inherited from Adam. We can't just cover over the old nature; we need a fresh start. The Christian faith alone is able to do that. If we feel angry with someone, a boss, a teacher, a neighbour, the most effective way to change attitudes is to pray for the one we feel angry about and for ourselves that God will give us a warm heart of gentle patience and we shall find our anger evaporates.

The creation of the visible universe is great but the creation of countless invisible laws is greater still.

Some appear steadfast and nothing moves them. Some are excessively active and nothing concerns them.

IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

*Some considerations
regarding worship*

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are." (1 Corinthians 3.16,17 RSV).

In these words Paul states plainly that the temple of God in this Christian era is not one 'made with hands' but one composed of 'living stones', with whom and in whom God dwells. The place where Christians meet for devotion or for the exposition and study of the Word of God is often spoken of as the 'House of God' as though He is there in a particular sense. Some therefore believed the furnishings and decorations should give an atmosphere of quietness and dignity usually associated with 'the House of God'. While a suitable environment is good, is it right to think of 'sacred' furnishing as adding beauty and dignity to the real house or temple of God, or to His true worship?

The Spirit of God moves powerfully where His people assemble in reverence, regardless of their material surroundings. Is His house His people or a beautifully furnished building? Jesus once referred to a building of Herod the Great as His "Father's House" (Luke 2.49). In the words of the hymn "Such ever bring thee where they come, and going take thee to their home." Wherever the Lord's people meet around His Word in sincerity, as they perceive the glory and majesty of their God and the wonders of His grace, their material surroundings are of little concern to them. Their one desire is to know Him better, to serve Him more perfectly, and to bring forth fruit in their lives that shall be to His glory (John 15.8; Galatians 5.22, 23). This fruit is the beauty that the Lord desires to see today in His temple of 'living stones'.

"We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. A minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched; and not man." (Hebrews 8 1). The Lord Jesus said *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matt 18.20) He also said *"... neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him."* (John 4.21-24 RSV)). The prophet Isaiah (57.15) tells us *"Thus*

says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him that is of a humble and contrite spirit." No mountain, city or building marks the particular place for the worship of God but *"In every nation, he that fears God and works righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Acts 10.35). The worship and devotion of such consists of a life of full and joyous consecration to God and He dwells with them. They are His temple and precious in His sight. As such, *"we have boldness to enter into the holiest"* (not made with hands Heb. 9.24) *"by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and having a High priest over the House of God"* we draw near to God in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10.19-22). If we love the Lord Jesus and keep His commandments, His sure promise is that we shall be loved by the Father and by Him *"and they will make their abode with us"* (John 15.21-23). Where the Father and the Lord Jesus dwell, there is the true temple, the Sanctuary of God.

The early Christians in time of bitter persecution did not have or need special buildings in which to worship God. They served and worshipped Him even when hiding in the catacombs. Faithful ones of the past worshipped God whilst they wandered about *"in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented, in deserts, in mountains and in caves of the earth"*. (Hebrews 11.36-39). When Jacob cried out, *"This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven"*, he was not in a lofty church. He was a fugitive fleeing from Esau his brother who had threatened to slay him. God was in that place with Jacob because he was heir to the promises concerning the "land" and the "descendants". There He gave Jacob the assurance "I will never leave you".

As "children of the promise" and "heirs according to promise" (Gal. 4.28; 3.29) we have the same assurance from the Lord. His presence is with us, not because we are in a holy place but because we are in His promise. We are living stones built up as a spiritual house, a people to show forth His praise. When Jesus said *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again ...*

He spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2.19-22). Paul says, "The temple of God is holy which temple we are" (1 Cor. 3.17). Peter says "As He which calls you is holy, so you must be holy in all manner of behaviour." The writer to the Hebrews tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together and he also says that the earthly Tabernacle in the wilderness is but a picture of the true Tabernacle. As Christians we are raised up and seated in the heavens with Christ. We must maintain this living, vital, spiritual relationship to our Father and to the

Lord Jesus Christ.

Father where're thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy seat.
Where' re they seek thee thou art found
And every place is hallowed ground.

This article, taken from a 1953 BSM, has been abridged and is submitted as of interest. Not every Christian reader will agree with some of its suggestions. Alternative views would be interesting to receive. The editorial committee do not endorse every statement of every article published in the BSM but submit articles as having some spiritual value. – Ed

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

18. Chapter 15

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

The Parables about the 'Lost' are some of the most well known and best loved stories in the world. These remarkable stories were told because of the contrasting attitudes of Jesus and the religious leaders to the great mass of Jewish people. To the Pharisees, ordinary people were 'unclean', immoral who often did work which was incompatible with the Law. The religious leaders feared contamination and eating with common people implied a 'welcome'. Jesus behaved just as His Father would behave towards such people. He sought their company and even had meals with them. Rabbinical teaching spoke of joy in Heaven when a sinner was destroyed. The Scribes and Pharisees could not conceive of God seeking the lost in order to save them before they had repented. God takes the initiative in restoring humanity and He plans and works before people go to Him pleading for mercy. It's still a problem with many religious folk because they have never come to terms with John's words in his first letter, "*God is love*". Equally it's a problem for God's people to realise that the contrition of heart that comes with repentance must remain with them throughout their earthly lives. If we would be like God, we must be ready to put aside our self-righteous inhibitions so that we may seek the salvation of all. Like so many things that Jesus said and did, this comes as a challenge to our confused religious zeal that springs from a conceited human nature.

The first of these parables reminds us of Sankey's great hymn that was based on the parable; "There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold". George Adam Smith describes the middle-eastern shepherd as one who is

sleepless, far-sighted, weather beaten. armed and leaning on a staff. Barclay describes how a whole community often owned several flocks and would specially celebrate the return of a lost animal. The shepherd who was responsible for the lost sheep (not lamb as in so many stories) would travel many miles through hazardous conditions in order to bring back the sheep that had strayed. Many of Israel's flocks roamed the central plateau but could easily plunge down a cliff as they moved westward toward the great plains nearer the sea. The Good Shepherd who cared so much for the sheep that He was willing to die on their behalf, searched **until He found it**. For the good shepherd, no sacrifice or suffering was too great. There was no turning back till the sheep was once more safely in the fold and the sheep was never punished or reproached. No religious philosophy in the world matches the Father in Heaven of whom Jesus spoke. He spoke with certainty of what went on in Heaven – rejoicing. How broad and deep is that Divine love.

The shorter parable of the Lost Coin is important. It emphasizes the thoroughness of the search for that which was lost. The woman's coin was precious to her even if of small money value. It may have been a coin saved for her bridal frontlet head decoration, even something of the equivalent of an engagement or wedding ring. The coin may just have been one of a string of ornamental savings of a poor woman. She too was not satisfied till it was found in a room with one small round window and a floor of beaten soil.

The third parable is a longer story. It contains so many gospel truths that it has been called the gospel within the Gospel. The younger son's

request and receipt of a portion (probably one third; Deut 21.17) of the father's wealth was not abnormal and could be accepted as a gift. Having obtained what he wanted he quickly moved out from the bondage of home life to a bondage far greater -slavery to sin. This was not thoughtless wandering or an accident but deliberate self-centred pride breaking the fifth commandment. Sin is monopolizing God's gifts for selfish use. Now, far away from home he 'lived it up', having a grand time. Soon his money was gone and there was little employment in a country under the scourge of famine. He starved. The carob 'pods' (*Keratia*) were either the fruit or the seeds of the plant. Feeding pigs was about the most repulsive job that a Jew could do. It was then that he came to himself for up till then he had not been living the kind of life to which he had been brought up. As he pondered his past home life he realised he could trust his father not to refuse him. The first step to repentance is a consciousness of the misery into which he had got himself and the parable pictures

God going halfway to meet the sinner and there is immediate forgiveness.

The older son's attitude shows the folly of some religious people. The father had perfect love for both sons and uses tender language to the older boy. The younger son recognised that sin is primarily against God (Heaven is used by some records to avoid the use of God's name) and this is acknowledged in the Old Testament by David's confession (Psalm 51.4). But like other parables this has only one or two lessons to teach and is not a 'theological compendium'. Above all Jesus wanted to teach about God's great love and this He demonstrated as He talked with, and had meals with, ordinary folk who the religious people despised. Jesus had shown that a person away from God was not himself and that Divine love is able to defeat temptation and the voices of rebellion.

(In preparing this study Geldenhuys, Morris, Plumptre and Barclay commentaries of the Gospel of Luke have been used as well as Campbell Morgan's 'Parables and Metaphors of our Lord')

DN

INTERCESSION

"Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you in my prayers" (Eph. 1.15, 16 NIV).

Intercessory prayer is an activity in which every child of God can be involved. It requires no special formula or gifted expressions. The skills can be learned by all with practice. It has no limits or boundaries. Our God loves everyone although 'saints are His peculiar care'. If we are in doubt about the validity to pray for something or someone, it's best to pray for it or them and leave the Heavenly Father to sort out the answer. He knows that we genuinely want to do His will. We live in a world that is full of need. We serve a church that is full of need. It is part of being in God's family that we ask Him about all those needs. Let us pray -

O God our Father, forgive our unwillingness to pray for others. We want to reach out to the needs of your people and of the whole world. We want to care as you care. So we pray for those who have too much water around them because of flooding, and for those who haven't enough water in dry and thirsty lands. We pray for those who are caught up in the conflicts between peoples and those who

suffer because of natural and manmade disasters. We pray for those who suffer because of the misuse of chemicals and drugs. We pray for those who are very poor and for those who are very rich. We pray for those who lie helpless in a hospital or other institution. We pray for those who are in positions of authority and have momentous decisions to take. Lord, teach us to pray and to be sensitive to the opportunities to meet the needs of others.

"Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you." (1 Samuel 12.23 NIV).

God unlimited

I know that you can do all things	Job 42.2
Is anything too hard for the Lord?	Gen. 18.14
Nothing is too hard for you?	Jer. 32.17
Is anything too hard for me?	Jer. 32.27
For nothing is impossible with God	Luke 1.37
Everything is possible for him	
who believes	Mark 9.23
Nothing will be impossible for you	Matt. 17.20
But with God all things are possible	Matt. 19.26
Abba Father, everything is possible	
for you	Mark 14.36
Love never fails. God is love.	1Cor. 13.8;
	1 John 4.16

THE TOWER OF STRENGTH

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." (Psa. 46.1-2).

It is a comforting thing to find shelter in a storm. To be in some secure place, witnessing the fury of the elements, while conscious of being out of harm's way, is at once a sublime spectacle and a stirring experience. The great upheavals of Nature have a way of uprooting, overthrowing and removing old landmarks and familiar objects. When calm prevails, the spectator is astonished at the change brought about in a few hours of havoc. The work of renovation and restoration is of prime importance, but no place looks the same again. New work brings change often for the better. Wise builders, with better ideas, never repeat the old mistakes.

If, in any of the creative epochs of the earth there had been any intelligent observers of those stupendous scenes, when continents rose from tumultuous oceans, dripping with warm silt and marine life the whole process might have been regarded as a calamity. So might it seem when one age with all its strange creatures perished that another of a 'finer' order might take its place. Yet steps like these, mighty and world shaking, prepared the planet for man.

Since his advent, his social world has endured all the great changes of history. Peoples and nations have lived through shattering events. They have survived the storms and eruptions of war, revolution, plague and famine. The tempests and shaking of the natural elements make feeble, man's own efforts at destruction. Empires have fallen, old systems have been swept away, inevitably changing the outlook and progress of the survivors.

The tumult of the nations is like the roaring of the seas. Like the restless tide of many waters, it surges forward clamouring at the bulwarks of faith and idealism, assaulting the age old laws and constitutions which, like bastions have long withstood the relentless floods of anarchy and

infidelity. When mountains of power are carried into such seas; much that is old, treasured and venerated, begins to sink beneath a tide which cannot be turned, then everything that can be shaken is shaken. It takes courage to witness such changes unmoved and wisdom of a rare kind to believe they are all for the best. It needs faith extraordinary to remain still, confidently expecting the great calm and the new future of glorious reconstruction and progress, free from the old evils and errors of the past.

Throughout the dark, historical periods of mankind, there have been men and women who have found the eternal God their refuge. Human tumult has been prevalent but the sheltering Arm sure; therefore the Scriptures abound with examples of assurance and invitation. God never failed the faith of His people or forsook the heart that trusted Him. Hidden, triumphant, unmoved, they saw and shared His victories. So they tell ... *"Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord"* (Ex. 14.13).

"Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God is an everlasting rock" (Isa. 26.4 RSV).

"He will cover you with his feathers and under his wings shall you find refuge" (Psa. 9.4).

Outside of Him there is no hiding place when forces are unleashed that are beyond human control. In all storms, whether social, domestic or personal, the Christian pilgrims in the world will flee to the rock tower of refuge and defence.

"I will say of the Lord. He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust" (Psa. 91.2). From this blessed place of safety they who have a genuine faith, endure, strengthened within and fortified without by the everlasting arms. Though all around is tumult, defiance, desolation and waste, *"yet will we not fear"*. God is still the strong tower of His people.

*"A strong tower is He, to him will I flee.
In Him confide, in him abide,
My Strong Tower is He!"*

TH

"Oh God keep us from the arrogance that dares to judge either ourselves or others. We know not which is the most treasured of your vessels, the

crudest earthenware, the finest porcelain, only that both fashioned by You. Loved by You, used by You."

THE TERROR OF THE LORD

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5.11). What is this "terror" of the Lord?

Any idea that the Lord endeavours to frighten men into conversion by fear of the consequences of refusal is out of the question. A conversion motivated by fear is not worth anything to God. He will have His creatures' loyalty and allegiance by love and gratitude or not at all. In this respect some of the old time revivalists who tried to scare men into repentance by lurid descriptions of the fate awaiting the unregenerate were, however sincerely, grievously in error. The text must be understood in relation to the Apostle Paul's argument and in harmony with the known purpose and character of God.

The main theme of 2 Cor. 5 is that a spiritual body, adapted to the conditions of life in another world, a "house eternal in the heavens", is waiting for the believer after the termination of this life, and that this is an object of keenest anticipation to the Christian. Nevertheless we are content in this present life, labouring, whether absent from the Lord or present with Him, to be acceptable in His sight, knowing that we must ultimately *appear before the Bema, the place of judgment* where our Lord will review the life's work of each believer and give His verdict. It is in the knowledge of the solemnity and majesty of that "Last Assize", says Paul, that we "persuade men" – conduct our missionary work.

The word "terror" in the text is *phobos* which is generally used for fear or terror in the N.T. According to Thayer the word has two main meanings, (1) Fear, dread or terror in a subjective sense; (2) Reverence or respect for rank, authority or dignity. It is easy to understand how the second meaning was derived from the first in an age when respect for authority normally had an element of fear associated. The extent to which this element has to be given weight in any particular instance must depend upon the nature of the case. When Paul says "*Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil*" (Rom. 13.3) the usage is terror or fear in its most elemental sense. When on the other hand Paul says "*Let the wife see that she reverence her husband*" (Eph. 5.33 – "reverence" here is

phobos) the idea of respect is uppermost and that of fear entirely absent. Likewise 1 Pet. 2.18 "*Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear*" (i.e. with the respect due to their position). The injunction of Rom. 13.7 "*Render to all their due, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour*" can only be understood as referring to the normal respect due to civil authority. In just the same fashion the numerous references to the "fear of God" in the N.T. have to be understood as referring to that respect and reverence which is due to God on account of his high authority.

The N.E.B. rendering of the passage in question is perhaps the most helpful. "*We must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ; where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad. With this fear of the Lord before our eyes we address our appeal to men*". It is to be noted that the softer word "fear" is substituted for "terror" in the NEB, RSV and RV and all modern translations. "Terror" came into the A.V. from the Geneva Bible which was the only one of the pre-A.V. versions to adopt the word some say due to the influence of John Knox, who had much to do with that version. It is probably true that "terror" was adopted in view of the close relation of the text to Paul's words regarding the judgment seat of Christ", at a time when the Last Judgment was looked upon as a day of foreboding and dread. The character of the Most High is better understood today. So far from being a stern and merciless despot He is in reality an all-wise Creator, who will by no means loose His hold of anyone of His creatures whilst any hope remains that such can be persuaded to turn from sin and serve the living God. It was with this kind of "godly fear" in his mind that the Apostle Paul went about his business of "persuading men".

AOH

"*Hallelujah! Give thanks to the Eternal! – he is good, his kindness never fails. Who can proclaim the Eternal's mighty deeds, or do justice to his praise.*" Psalm 106.1-2

A new translation of the Bible, James Moffatt, Hodder & Stoughton 1926

1. The Lord's Army
 2. The Lord's Army
 3. The Lord's Army

4. The Lord's Army
 5. The Lord's Army
 6. The Lord's Army

7. The Lord's Army
 8. The Lord's Army
 9. The Lord's Army

10. The Lord's Army
 11. The Lord's Army
 12. The Lord's Army

13. The Lord's Army
 14. The Lord's Army
 15. The Lord's Army

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

1. The Lord's Army
 2. The Lord's Army
 3. The Lord's Army

4. The Lord's Army
 5. The Lord's Army
 6. The Lord's Army

7. The Lord's Army
 8. The Lord's Army
 9. The Lord's Army

10. The Lord's Army
 11. The Lord's Army
 12. The Lord's Army

13. The Lord's Army
 14. The Lord's Army
 15. The Lord's Army

Vol. 81, No. 5

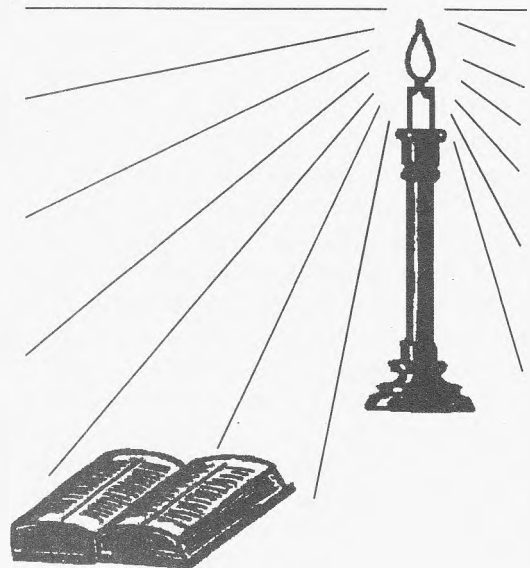
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2004

Published September 1st

Next issue November 1st

CONTENTS

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	99
THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	103
THE VISION OF JOEL	
3. The Lord's Army	104
ASKING QUESTIONS	107
THE COVENANTS	
1. Patriarchal Days	109
MOSES' ETHIOPIAN WIFE	111
A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE	
19. Chapter 16	113
LUKE THE EVANGELIST	115
FULL GROWN – MATURE – PERFECT	116
"GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD"	118



*This Journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request
renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers.*

Published by
Bible Fellowship Union (Registered Charity 1064607)
 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, England.

Email: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Editor & Secretary: DERRICK NADAL (Nottingham)

Treasurer: JOHN HAINES (Gloucester)

JUST A THOUGHT

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord; are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another;" (2 Cor. 3.18 RSV). We may spend time amid the wonders of Creation admiring and searching the natural world and also have an exact knowledge of Genesis but unless all this makes us more like Jesus, it matters little. We may know the words of the prophets by heart and have a clear vision of the Revelation to John but unless this knowledge makes us gentle and patient like Jesus we are wasting our time. We may serve our brethren faithfully and entertain them regularly but unless they begin to see the hands and feet of Jesus at work in us, it will all be forgotten. We may think we have clear insight into the Scriptures and understand the intricacies of the covenants, but unless they make us love others as Jesus loved, then our knowledge is but a tinkling bell. We may be able to recite the words of Jesus perfectly but unless He lives in us every moment of every day, those words stored in our memories are not doing their work. We may move among some of God's people and enjoy their company but unless we are prepared to wash the feet of everyone who knows the Lord and ... beyond ... we may not be ready to see Him as He is. We may give a helping hand to a weary traveller but unless we can love the unlovable and touch the untouchable we have not become fully like Jesus.

O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
Come in Thy sweetness; come in Thy fulness;
Stamp Thine own image, deep on my heart.

W. J. Kirkpatrick

DN

NOTICES

Convention at Gainsborough House. During the week-end 19/20 June there was a very happy gathering at the Retirement Home, when the friends at Yeovil and Milborne Port together with the Trustees of the Residential Centre received guests from various places as far afield as Poole and Lydney, Tring and Chesham, Llandudno and Bolton. There were times of worship and fellowship and two addresses that were much enjoyed. Nearly thirty brethren sat down for lunch and tea to enjoy the excellent fare prepared by the Housekeeper, Corrinne and her daughter Shelly. Visitors were able to see for themselves in June sunshine, some of the blessings of Gainsborough House.

There was perhaps a sad note on this occasion. Brother Bill Simmons recently died after twenty years of faithful service as a trustee of Gainsborough. For many years he had been treasurer to BFET and had faithfully attended meetings until last year when it became apparent that he could no longer make the long drive from High Wycombe. Described by one admirer as 'a lovely man' he was a gracious and generous brother in the Lord whose visits to Milborne Port will be much missed. We pray for Sister Doreen.

Renewal of the Bible Study Monthly will be slightly different this year. In your November/December issue of the magazine, the two centre pages will 'pullout' and they will contain a renewal form, a literature request form and a 'Sword Against All Nations' order form. If you have not contacted us in the last three months, please use the renewal form even if you do not require any literature to be sent. If you have written to us recently please ignore renewal forms. We do not lapse long standing readers who forget to renew immediately.

BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word baptism is of Greek origin and is carried forward into the English language. It always applied to the religious life of Jews immediately prior to the Christian era or to those who embrace Christianity. The word means to dip or immerse although treatises have been laboriously compiled endeavouring to prove the word means 'sprinkle' rather than 'immerse'. The fact, that John was baptizing near Salim, because there was much water there, is sufficient proof of the word's meaning. But while it is from the Greek and is not to be found in the Old Testament, it is usual for commentators to imply that baptism for the remission of sins is hinted at in the Mosaic washings. The connection is remote, for while water was used, immersion was not practised and the trespasser washed himself as part of the purification, whereas baptism is always performed by another. Further, there are other baptisms mentioned in Scripture that have no connection with water immersion. It is an essential part of the teaching of baptism that the candidate cannot immerse himself. Most Christians prefer to hold that baptism, whether of water or of the Holy Spirit, whether into the body of Christ or into death, is an act done for them. But though baptism is not found in the O. T., New Testament writers reason that two instances of baptism are portrayed there. One is where the family of Noah was saved through water (though water was the destroying agent in the Flood and they were saved through being in the Ark). The other is where Israel, walled round with water and roofed by cloud at the Red Sea, were immersed into Moses. (1 Pet. 3.20-21; 1 Cor. 10.2).

It is probably advisable to approach this subject by copious reference to Scripture and to ignore the thoughts of commentators. To do this we need a concise statement of the initiation of baptism; and so to commence our travel through an interesting and edifying tenet of Scripture we select Mark 1.5 "... and were all baptised of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins". Did the waters actually wash away their sins? Did their confession of sins secure them forgiveness? The only means whereby sin can be absolved and its penalty remitted is the atoning death of Jesus Christ. At the time of John's mission that had not been achieved, though it was near fulfilment and we may well believe that John's work was in anticipation of

coming redemption. Mark 1.4 defines the true work of John and makes a link with the atonement by Christ – "*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins*". Thus his work was toward, or with a view to, the coming deliverance.

It was proper that those Israelites who regarded John as a prophet sent from God should acknowledge his office by answering his call. They would remember the remarkable circumstances; that he was born as a consequence of Divine intervention. They would have heard of the sign given to his priestly father of the surety of the fulfilment of the promise of a son; he became dumb until the child was born and named according to instructions. The miracles attending his birth were so well known that the people expected great things of him and said "What manner of child shall this be!" Clearly he was marked as a man of God before his birth; and when thirty years later he began his short lived mission, the question of the priests and Levites "Who are you?" is not to ask his name but to find out his rank and authority. The cry of John in the wilderness calling to repentance and baptism caused the people to muse in their hearts, whether he was the Christ or not (Luke 3. 15). Upon his confession that he was not Christ, their thoughts turn to two other prophesied characters of the O. T. – Elias and "that prophet". But he affirms that he is neither of these. They knew of the promise of Messiah; they knew of the prophecy of the coming one like to Moses and they knew that Elias must first come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. If they could identify him they would satisfy themselves and those back in Jerusalem who had sent them to make enquiries. "Who are you?" they asked (John 1.20-22). In answer, he tells them that he also is a character prophesied in the Old Testament, mentioned by the prophet Isaiah. Apparently they did not think of the prophecy of the voice in the wilderness, the forerunner of Messiah. Here was a sign of the times. All were in expectation, and by understanding his mission they would realise that Messiah was to come very, very soon. What an answer to those who had sent them! But the questioners wanted further information – "*Why do you baptize then, if you are not Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet*" (John 1.25). They assumed that only a prophet of very high rank

would call Israel to baptism, thus instituting something new to the Mosaic practices in which they were trained. But John does not answer why. They were always more concerned with "Why do you teach?" rather than "What do you teach?" It is clear from John's words that as the forerunner of Messiah, he had come to prepare a people for the Lord. Such a people, being baptised and acknowledging their sins (thus admitting they were not satisfied with the clearance from sins made under the ceremonial law) would be the very people fit to accept the coming Messiah. Such was one of the objects of his baptizing mission.

That is not the only reason why John proclaimed baptism. Among the many who came to be immersed was one whom John knew himself unfit to immerse. John knowing his baptism was for remission of sins was surprised that Jesus should ask to be immersed, and felt rather that he himself should be baptised by Jesus. However, he yields to our Lord's request. We might think that of all men He should not be immersed if baptism is for or unto remission of sins. We might think that if He were not immersed He would the more stand out as the sinless one and so be manifest to Israel. Be that as it may, John's instructions were that upon whom he should see the Spirit descending and remaining, He it was for whom he was seeking and thus He would be manifest to Israel. The descent of the Spirit and the voice from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son", sealed John's work. These revealed the Son of God and promptly next day he announced the Lamb of God, He who would give true remission to those who by water baptism had confessed their sins.

In this connection we see a third reason why John came baptizing – that He upon whom the descending Spirit remained would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In verse 33 we have reference to baptism not connected with water, but still the word has the thought of immersion. In fact, the more one considers the allusions to baptism the less do they suggest sprinkling. Nothing more is then said by John about the Holy Spirit, and only by reference to other Scriptures and incidents in the early days of Christianity are we able to see its meaning. However, it will quickly be seen that water immersion is momentary and that the other baptisms are each full of meaning and relate to the whole life of Christians. In fact, water baptism would have seemed fit to have fallen into disuse

like the old sacrifices of the law, were it not that our Lord was immersed at the commencement of His ministry. Had our Lord not been immersed Christians would have thought baptism to have been exclusively Jewish and that they were not called upon to observe it. Here we must consider further why Jesus was baptised in water. Later in His ministry (Luke 12.50) He said He had a baptism to be baptised with and that He was straitened until it was accomplished. Shortly after He had asked the sons of Zebedee (Mark 10.38) if they were willing to drink of His cup and be baptised with the baptism that He was being baptised with. By this He was plainly showing that baptism related to His immersion into the will of God, which for Him meant baptism into death. And in this view of baptism we may reason that water baptism was an outward sign of the commencement of His great mission, and that His death on Calvary was the outward sign of its fulfilment. The sons of Zebedee would not at that time comprehend the full import of His question to them (and maybe we do not today) but they said they were willing to be immersed with His baptism, and later they followed their Lord into death as faithful witnesses. The words of the apostle John in 1 John 5.6 fittingly corroborate the thought that baptism in its fuller meaning referred to His whole life and death – *"This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth"*. John clearly has in mind the beginning and end of our Lord's mission, and to maintain the true meaning of our Lord's baptism repeats the words "not by water only, but by water and blood". And said He "It is the Spirit that bears witness". The descending Spirit bore witness at His immersion and again that His baptism unto death fulfilled His mission by descending upon the waiting brethren at Pentecost. John further adds *"There are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one"*. They agree in one eternal testimony to Him whose life on earth was summed up in one word, "baptism". Thus we may see, that Jesus' baptism in water was not for the remission of sins like other Israelites, but was a beautiful portrayal of His immersion into the will of God. This being one of the meanings of baptism, no Christians who are willing to follow their Lord would object to water immersion for themselves,

for the servant is not above his Lord. We may of course reason that water baptism as a means of cleansing from sin could be applicable to themselves but never applicable to their Lord, but we must remember that water immersion does not remove sin – in fact, it cannot. We know that forgiveness of sins ensues as a gracious gift of God upon their belief in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ. We may refer to washing away of sins, as in Acts 22.16 but we know in ourselves that the calling on the name of the Lord is the effectual means of cleansing, not the water immersion. So then freeing our minds from all thoughts of remission of our sins by immersion, we can, as did our Lord, use water immersion as a symbol of our willingness to be immersed into the will of God. And what a fine portrayal there is, in the fact of total immersion! But having said that, we must remember that water immersion is only a symbol, and the real immersion into the will of God is far more important than the symbol. We say this because many Christians in time past faithfully did the will of God as they saw it, but had not been immersed in water, and we cannot think that their standing before God is jeopardized by their lack of knowledge or compliance. But for ourselves, if we see it as a symbol and remember that the Lord Himself was immersed, we also should comply.

We must return in our thoughts to the prophet John's words in John 1.33. *"He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit"*. We have seen that these prophetic words began to be fulfilled when the Spirit bore witness by coming upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. To these words of John should be linked the words of our Lord in Acts 1.5 *"For John baptized with water; but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit"*. Upon the phenomenal descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter rises to explain to his Jewish brethren that this is also in fulfillment of the prophet Joel's words. He concludes his remarks by urging them to be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus whereupon they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This cannot be a repetition of John the Baptist's call, for John made no appeal in the name of the Lord Jesus. But now that Christ had been crucified and raised from the dead *"there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"*, and it was manifest that any appeal to Jews to return to harmony with God

should come through Him. In considering Acts 2.38 it should not be assumed that water immersion is immediately followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In fact there is no evidence as to when these 3000 souls received this gift. In Acts 8 we read of Samaritans being baptised (for the invitation was no longer exclusively Jewish) in the name of the Lord Jesus and yet they did not receive the Holy Spirit until the arrival of the Apostles from Jerusalem, who prayed for them and laid hands on them. Can we suppose that the Holy Spirit would have been withheld from any true Samaritan convert to the faith, if the Apostles had not intervened? It is difficult to assess the true position of Samaritans at that time. It seems that, beholding miracles and hearing the words of Philip, they believed and were baptised with speed and readiness-perhaps too readily, for baptism should not be hastily entered upon, and it appears that one of their number was not right before God. We leave them, as did Philip, who was called away by the Spirit to assist the eunuch of Candace, who with his inquiring mind and love of the Scriptures rings true. From the narrative (Acts 8.36) we observe that the first mention of baptism comes from the eunuch himself. Upon requesting immersion they both go down into the water, clearly for total immersion. And here it should be remembered that verse 37 is not to be found in the three most dependable manuscripts. This may not seem of great moment, for the question supposedly made to the eunuch seems appropriate. Yet it is far better to think that the eunuch (as should all other candidates) asked for immersion rather than Philip asked him and required him to make a declaration of faith before he would immerse him. The responsibility for immersion is the candidate's, and we should believe that any Christian asking for baptism has by that request declared his faith. (The responsibility in the companion ordinance, the Lord's supper, is the partaker's who should examine himself – 1 Cor. 11.28).

Another enlightening event in the practice of baptism among Christians is revealed in Acts 10 and 11. The story is vividly detailed by the writer and readers may well think it to be a turning-point in God's dealings with those outside the Jewish nation. We should read the narrative carefully for some are anxious to read into the story that Cornelius was, if not a proselyte of the temple, at least a proselyte of the gate. It is therefore assumed

that the entry of Gentiles into equal standing with Jews commenced under the apostleship of Paul rather than of Peter. The thrice repeated vision to Peter and his plain words on the subject leave no doubt in unbiased minds that God was from then on dealing with Gentiles as never before. Particular notice must be taken of some incidents in the story of Cornelius. First, that both Peter and he had visions, but whereas Cornelius complied with the angel's instructions immediately, Peter did not move in the matter until the vision had three times been given him. And we note that the devout Gentile is quick to respond to the heavenly call, but that the servant of God is slower to act, so ingrained in his Jewish mind are the traditions of Israel. But he acts at the request of the three men whom Cornelius sent, and still with the vision in his mind, goes back with his men to Caesarea. Cornelius is clearly expecting them, and on Peter's arrival falls down to worship him. It is to Peter's credit that he will not permit anyone to worship him because he is a servant of God. Peter hears the story of Cornelius' vision and could not withstand the clear leading of heaven, and so he preaches Christ to the assembled enquirers. While he speaks, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles, thus indicating God's blessing and acceptance of their devotion and belief. Here we should note that the Holy Spirit was given to these Gentiles before they were baptised in water. This undoubtedly proves that baptism of the Holy Spirit is not dependent upon water baptism; and that water baptism is a symbol. Gentile immersion was not in response to John's call to baptism for the remission of sins. On Peter's return to Jerusalem, the story had preceded him. Some still had Jewish bias and contended with him, but when Peter rehearsed the matter they held their peace, realizing that by the gift of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles, God had shown that they also were now acceptable to him. Peter saw, in all this, further fulfilment of our Lord's words (Acts 1.5; 11.16; Matt. 3.11).

We cannot leave the Acts of the Apostles without another reference to those early days. We read in Acts 18.24-26 of a Jew mighty in the Scriptures, yet knowing only the baptism of John; and because the purpose of God had progressed beyond his knowledge, two faithful brethren expounded to him the way of the Lord more perfectly. They showed to him that the way of

approach to God had changed through the coming, death and resurrection of Christ. The very next verses in ch.19 show the lack of knowledge among some disciples at Ephesus. Although it was perhaps seventeen years after Pentecost, they had not heard of the Holy Spirit and had been baptised with John's baptism. Briefly, the teaching of Paul's reply (v.4) is that John's baptism is outdated by the coming of Christ. These Ephesians were then baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit.

These striking references in the Acts show the change in baptism since John's days. The practice of water baptism does not cease, but its meaning alters and there is the newer baptism of the Holy Spirit fulfilling our Lord's promises. Later, when Paul wrote to the brethren at Ephesus, he would think of these twelve brethren when he said (Eph. 4.5) that there was one baptism. What baptism does Paul mean? It is unlikely that he means water immersion for of that subject he says very little. Surely he means that as concerns the Church there is but one Baptism, even as there is one Body and one Spirit. By holding to these we shall keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In an earlier letter he explains the relationship of the one baptism to the one Body – that the one Spirit has baptized us, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, into the one Body of Christ. Thus we see in 1 Cor. 12.13 and other words by Paul, such as Gal. 3.27, Col. 2.12 and Rom. 6.3, the full development of the Bible teaching on baptism. The story begins with the immersing of Jews, who, confessing their sins, were preparing themselves for the first coming of Messiah, and it is retained in the Christian Church as a symbol of their willingness to be immersed into the will of God. Those who accept this willingness of heart to do His will He baptizes with the Holy Spirit. This shedding forth of the Holy Spirit is the means whereby He sets the members in the body, or in other words, baptizes them into the body of Christ. He, noting those willing to be baptized with Christ's baptism, promises that if they are planted or immersed into His death they shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. These two are inseparable – he who is baptised into the body of Christ will also be baptised into His death. And in all these considerations we come to the full Bible meaning of the word baptism, immersion in whatever province it is used by the inspired writers.

BJD

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Bless the Lord, ye his angels, mighty in strength, that execute his word, hearkening to the voice of his word; bless the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye his ministers, that execute his will: bless the Lord, all his works in all the places of his dominion" (Psa. 103.20-22).

A remarkable passage, that, affording a fascinating though brief glimpse of activity in a world beyond the reach of human senses. We may call it the spiritual world, the celestial world, or just by the familiar name "Heaven", but by whatever name we know it and in whatever form we visualize it we refer to an order of things. It is a real sphere of intelligence, a department of Divine creation, in which the Divine Will is carried out without opposition or question. The Church has prayed for centuries "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and in that prayer testified her faith that there is a sphere of creation in which evil finds no place. There, all that is said and done is in full accord with the standards which the Most High has ordained for the orderly conduct of life in His Creation. It would seem that David was possessed of a rare depth of spiritual insight when he described that world as one of ceaseless activity, as he does in this Psalm. Angels, mighty in strength compared with we puny humans, hastening to carry the Divine word; hosts of ministers busy in the execution of His Will; all this denotes a world in which there is much to do and much being done, developments and progress and achievement on a scale perhaps undreamed of on our human scale of thinking. This is a world as real to its citizens as is ours to us, but a world much closer to that ultimate reality which is God. In man's world there is progress, of a sort, but there is also much that is

static and to a considerable degree there is retrogression. In that world, nothing is static and there is no retrogression. Everything goes forward; ever new fields to conquer and new peaks to scale. The famous astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked in his book *"The Nature of the Universe"* that *"it strikes me as very curious that the Christians have so little to say about how they propose eternity should be spent ... What the Christians offer me is an eternity of frustration"*. Perhaps the criticism is justified; much of Christian evangelism centres around the process of getting ready for the after-life without any clear idea of the nature, and more importantly, the purpose, of that life. The poetic imagery of the Apocalypse, its harps, trumpets, white robes, golden floor and all, has for far too long been tacitly accepted a sufficiently accurate description and in this day and age it definitely is not sufficient. No wonder the active mind of a man like Prof. Hoyle recoils at the prospect of an eternity in which there is nothing left to discover or to do. But, of course, it is not going to be like that. The only view of God consistent with all that Twentieth Century knowledge, sacred and secular, has to tell us is one that depicts Him ceaselessly creating, continually planning to enlarge His vast domain and to people it with fresh forms of life all willingly and happily engaged, like those angels and ministers of Psalm 103, in carrying out His Word and executing His Will. The fact that we see not yet men upon earth in that happy state is merely an indication that we are as yet in the babyhood stage; men will eventually attain maturity and be ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

AOH

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

When William Loftus was excavating the ancient city of Uruk (Erech of Genesis 10) in 1850 he unearthed a number of inscribed clay tablets two to four inches long and one to three inches wide which, when deciphered, proved to be banknotes of the time of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, precisely similar to the Treasury notes or dollar bills of today. Besides giving the date of issue in the day, month and year of the reigning king and the name of the monarch, the tablets were inscribed with their value, redeemable for that value in gold or silver

upon being presented at the Treasury. Not so convenient as our modern paper money, although a good deal more permanent – unless the owner dropped one on the pavement. Perhaps the banks of the day were accustomed to the presentation of a handful of shattered pieces of banknote and provided that the pieces fitted would issue a replacement. The prophet Daniel must have used such tablets when making purchases. Today forty of them repose in the British Museum.

THE VISION OF JOEL

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel
ch. 2.2-11*

3. The Lord's Great Army

"Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near," (Joel 2.1 RSV).

This is the second stage of the prophecy, and Joel's spiritual vision is becoming keener; he begins to see farther into the future. The language employed in the first part of this chapter is still fitting to the plague of locusts that formed the opening theme of chapter 1. The words and terms used are so much stronger and more pointed as to leave little room for doubt that under the figure of the locust swarm a great and devastating invasion of Israel's land is depicted. There is no resisting the oncoming hosts; even the sun and moon withdraw their light and no defence that the people can offer will be of any avail. The day of the Lord, great and very terrible, has come, and who can abide it?

At this crisis, (v. 11) the prophet points to a way of escape. Turn to the Lord he cries and repent for He is gracious and merciful. Who knows but that He will turn and deliver? It is while the people are considering this message that the second alarm comes (v. 15). The enemy is now at the gates and the crisis is upon them *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly."* The appeal to God for deliverance becomes a reality; priests and people make common cause in supplication and in the spirit of true repentance. Every ordinary occupation and preoccupation is suspended and the entire nation comes together in sincere and heartfelt prayer to God. He turns! From that point the danger begins to lessen. *"Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people."* (v. 18). He goes forth like a man of war and drives away the alien invader. He returns then to His own people and begins to bless them in basket and store. All that they have lost is restored to them, and they know at last that He is their God and is dwelling in their midst. At that point the prophecy merges so definitely into the events of this Gospel Age Time of Trouble that there is no mistaking the application. Here is where we have the promise, quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and deliverance, absolute and complete, will be the portion of those who call upon the name of the Lord. Verses 21-32 of this chapter have never yet

been fulfilled in the history of Israel. Their realization lies in the future; and this is a guide to us in our interpretation of the entire chapter. At this point Joel saw, in vision, into this time in which we are now living.

Now the first part of the chapter had a primary fulfilment soon after Joel's own day, when the northern armies overran Israel and Judah, and took the people captive, leaving their land desolate. But the thread of prophecy ran its course only as far as v. 14 and stopped because the people did not repent! The completion of the prophecy was postponed for many long days because of that fact. Came a day when Israel was afforded another opportunity; the Prince of Life Himself was among them, the nations again were threatening them, and again the thread of prophecy ran to v. 14, and stopped again. They *"knew not the time of their visitation"* and they did not repent. Once more their house was left unto them desolate. Now, today, after these many years, the cup of suffering of God's ancient people is filling to the brim. As in the past, their enemies hem them in on every hand. Once more the Lord's great army stands ready to execute judgment. But this time the prophecy will run on to its full end, for this time Israel will repent, and in faith and confidence look to God for deliverance. We must look at this chapter therefore as having its beginning in the days of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and its ending in our own day, the day of Israel's final deliverance.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord comes, for it is nigh at hand;" (v. 1). What is this "Day of the Lord" to which the prophets so often refer? It is nearly always associated with judgment. It is the day of reckoning, of retribution, the time when the evil harvest of this world's sowing has to be reaped. There was a day of the Lord to come to Israel because of her waywardness just as there is a day of the Lord to come to the entire world because of its wickedness. Here in Joel the special application is to Israel; the time of judgment was about to come upon them and nothing could save them from its impact, although repentance and faith would bring them through it, saved *"so as by fire"*. It is a long

day too. This "day of the Lord" began with the taking of the Ten Tribes, and then, a little later, the Two Tribes into captivity and it is to last for twenty seven hundred years, until the time of "Jacob's Trouble", yet future. It endures thus long because it can only end with Israel's repentance and Israel has not yet repented. So it is that the exhortation in vv 11-14 "*Yet even now' says the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart ...'*", stands as an impassable barrier to the completion of the prophecy, until Israel's blindness is turned away as described by Paul in Rom. 11.23-26. Well might Joel cry the urgency of his message and call for a trumpet in Zion, for the day of the Lord whose coming he pronounced as imminent was to commence a little less than a century after his preaching. "*A day of darkness and of gloom*" he cries "*a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains*" (v. 2). That last phrase is badly translated; the thought behind it is that of a stormy dawn when, instead of the light of the rising sun, there are masses of black thunderclouds banked along the mountain-tops, blotting out the daylight. As Isaiah said "*In that day if one looked to the land; behold darkness and sorrow and the light is darkened in the heavens.*" (Isa. 5.30). Zephaniah, also, saw "*a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities.*" (Zeph. 1.15-16 RSV). As Joel said later on, the sun and the moon were darkened, and the stars had withdrawn their shining, and above all men there hung the sable curtain of Divine displeasure.

Against this black background the prophet sees the advancing army. "*A great people and a strong*" he cries in a fright "*there has never been the like, neither shall be after it, even to the years of many generations*" (v. 2). In the advance guard Joel saw the Assyrians of his own day, marching relentlessly to the despoiling of Israel's fair land. Close on their heels he could perhaps, see the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, coming a hundred and fifty years later to overturn the Kingdom of Judah and bring the royal kingship to an end. Behind them, more dimly, maybe he could see Greeks and Romans and Persians and Arabs and Turks, all the forces of the Gentiles that were destined to oppress Israel down the ages and despoil their heritage continually. And it might even be that the vision of the prophet, supernaturally sharpened, saw, up against the

darkness itself, behind all the others, the shadowy outlines of that greatest oppressor of all, the mysterious King of Daniel 11, and those forces of the north which are described in Ezekiel 38, the last of all these locust waves, which are appointed to ravage Israel. All these are legions of the Lord's great army which He has sent to execute His word and all these have played or will play their part in executing the Divine judgments upon that stiff-necked and wayward people that marvellously becomes God's own people of faith at the last.

The history of the ages is sufficient to reveal how true it has been of this great army. To quote the words of v. 3, "*a fire devours before them and behind them a flame burns: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them*". The rest of the passage, up to v. 9, is a vivid description of the havoc wrought by a ruthless invader and although commentators almost invariably apply it to the devastation wrought by locusts and point to the fitness of almost every sentence to that application, it remains true that the passage even more fitly refers to the capture of a city by a hostile army, and when taken in relation to the following verses describing Divine intervention for the people's salvation, quite certainly to Gentile nations that have harried Israel in the day of her adversity and will be smitten by God in the day of her prosperity.

The section, verses 4 to 9, tells of the invasion from the first sight of the coming enemy on the far distant hills to that dread moment when the defenders, pressed back into their last stronghold within the city, behold with fear the ruthless soldiers climbing in at their windows and battering down their doors. So has it been, and will be, in Israel's long history; the enemy has continually advanced more and more closely to their total destruction until in their last days it seems as though they are appointed to utter extinction and nothing can save them. "*The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses: and as horsemen, so shall they run*". Here the alarmed watchers on the city walls discern the first signs of the attack, the dust clouds raised by the hoofs of the galloping horses and the following war chariots. The movements of those agile steeds may be observed before the outlines of the lumbering chariots behind them can be discerned. But not for long, for "*like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall*

they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array" (v. 5). The chariots are now in view, bumping and rattling over the rocky ground and precipitous slopes. The likening of the advance of this host to a sheet of flame eating up the dry stubble of a field as it advances at rapid pace is very apt. Now the invaders have reached the city walls. *"They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war: and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks"* (v. 7). They have stormed the walls and forced their way into the city, and the desperate defenders have retreated to the shelter of their houses, but to no avail. Their relentless enemies follow hard upon their heels. *"They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief"* (v. 9). This is the supreme crisis; the foe has besieged and taken the city and has appeared at the house doors to satiate his lust for pillage and ravage. Zechariah saw that same picture when he spoke (Zech. 14) of the city being taken, and the houses rifled, and some going forth into captivity. In Zechariah the statement is made that at that crisis the Lord will go forth and deliver His people, but without indicating just why that deliverance comes about. Here in Joel the reason is stated; it is because the people, at last, repent and turn to the Lord their God in faith, and so He delivers. But let Joel tell the splendid story in his own unhurried way. *"The earth shall quake before them. The heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executes his word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"* (vv. 10-11).

This is what the prophet sees in his vision, the utter disruption of all the normal course of nature in consequence of this calamity that has come upon

the city and the people. This can be nothing else than a symbolic preview of the Last Days, and so Joel must have understood the vision; no ordinary military invasion could justify the use of such extravagant language. Here, at this point, perhaps, his prophecy passes definitely into the sphere of the times in which we live, the times of the last great trial of faith upon God's earthly people. Later in his prophecy (3.16) he sees the issue more clearly and says *"the heavens and the earth shall shake; but the Lord will be the hope of his people and the strength of the children of Israel."* Isaiah saw something of the same thing when he said *"I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger"* (Isa. 13.13). Again, more fiercely, *"the earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage"* (Isa. 24.19-20). This is the time that the Lord rises up to judge the earth, but first of all He judges His own people Israel. That is the explanation of the strange word in v. 11, the word that refers to this savage concourse of barbarian invaders as the "Lord's great army" and their camp as "his camp". The only possible explanation is that He is using them as a means of judgment, His means of testing and purifying Israel. As with Pharaoh of old, He has called them that He might display His glory by them, and when they have served His purpose to that end, pass upon them, in their turn, the judgment they too have richly deserved. So Ezekiel, speaking of much the same thing, says *"I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when I shall be sanctified in you, O Gog before their eyes"* (Ezek. 38.16). So will the crisis come upon re-gathered Israel in the latter days. In former times they failed under the test, and they went into captivity. But they will not fail this time!

(To be continued)

AOH

Worship *"I fell at his feet to worship Him"* (Rev. 22.9). This act of worship so often mentioned in the Scriptures was in fact merely a humble obeisance or act of reverence. Even today in the Holy Land the recipient of a favour will throw himself on his knees, bow his head to the ground and kiss the lower part of his benefactor's clothing. Thus did Cornelius fall down and worship Peter (Acts 10.25) and the servant in the parable worship

his Lord (Matt. 18.26) and the three wise men worship the infant Jesus (Matt. 2.11). To the Philadelphia Church came the promise that their enemies would come and *"worship before your feet"* (Rev. 3.9) and probably this is what is meant when Satan desired Christ to fall down and worship him (Matt. 4.9) to submit to him, to engage in his service and to acknowledge him as overlord.

ASKING QUESTIONS

A thinking point

The habit of asking questions is one of the most valuable that one can acquire. A person who is always asking "How did this happen?" or "Why did he say that?" will never find life dull and what is more important, will be continually adding to his store of knowledge. This desire to get to the bottom of things has led to all the inventions of modern science. Probably the first man who invented the wheel saw some stones rolling down a slope, and asked himself some such questions as "Why does that particular stone keep on rolling when these others have stopped?" Such questions are at the back of all our knowledge.

We all know how children are always asking questions, awkward ones sometimes, like the pick-pocket's son who piped up loud and clear "Why did you put your hand into that gentleman's pocket, Father?" Children want to know: Jesus was no exception, for at the age of twelve He was found in the temple asking questions of the teachers. What questions we ask will depend on where our interests lie. Yet even in the things dearest to us, there is danger when we stop asking questions. There is the risk of taking things for granted. Familiarity, it is said, breeds contempt, and this can apply to the words of Scripture, which may become so well known to us that we fail to get the best out of them. It is here that the art of asking questions can be of real value.

Questions are of help to others besides those who ask them. Consider how much of Jesus' teaching we should have lost if His disciples hadn't always been saying "Master, explain this parable to us ... When will this be? Then who can be saved? ..." The great thing about the disciples was that they were humble. They were not afraid to admit their ignorance, and as a result they became less ignorant. Those who were puzzled at Jesus' miracles and teaching asked "What does this mean?" (Mark. 1.27) and were far more likely to profit from His ministry than those who had a ready-made explanation – "He has a devil" and were ready out of their wisdom to pass judgment on Him and His works. We have no need to be ashamed or afraid of asking questions, for we do not yet know fully as we are fully known. The time has not yet come when, with the first disciples, we need ask no questions (John 16.23).

Not all questions are asked by those who seek knowledge: questions can also be used to pass it on to others. Often we are well aware of certain facts but have not realised what they imply, and then a question may help us. For example, in the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand, the disciples had helped distribute the food, and were astonished at the number it had fed. But the next moment they were worrying because they had forgotten to bring any bread with them, and Jesus used questions to remind them of the miracle He had just performed. "*Don't you understand?*" He asked. They had failed to realise that what He could do for others, He could do for them, and they had no cause for worrying about so small a matter. And then again, they had seen His miracles, had heard His teaching and yet they had not fully grasped who He was and what He was. So He asked them pointedly, "Who do you say that I am?" It was Peter who came out with the answer, but by answering in their own minds they were all strengthened. It was to Peter also that Jesus, when He was risen put the question "*Simon ... do you love me?*" It gave Peter the opportunity humbly to affirm his love: but Jesus' thrice repeated question was followed each time by the reminder that loving Him means serving His flock. Jesus certainly knew that He was dear to Peter, yet He asked the question for Peter's sake.

There were others besides His disciples who asked Jesus questions. "*Is it lawful to pay taxes?*" they asked and "*What is the greatest commandment?*" and the story about the wife of the seven brothers in the resurrection, were put in a very different spirit from that of the disciples. The questioners tried to catch this new teacher out, yet though their desire was to discredit Jesus, their questions did elicit answers of real value, and He came successfully through their examination, so that they asked Him no more questions. In a way their conduct was very proper. Jesus set Himself up as a teacher, and before accepting Him they were justified in trying His worth with teasing problems. So with us; if we ever take it upon ourselves to examine a preacher or his doctrine, we should do so humbly: but there is nothing wrong with making the test.

It is in studying the Bible that the gift of asking questions is especially valuable. The one who

before a Bible study reads through the passage to be considered, and comes prepared to ask about points he or she cannot understand, does as much to make the study profitable as those who 'know all the answers'. For a study is something in which all should share and often the simplest points open up a whole field of discussion. On the other hand, the leaders in a group might do well on occasion not to expound a passage at length, but to imitate their Master and ask such simple questions as will gently draw their brethren to a fuller understanding.

But it is not always easy to ask the right questions. There is a limit to our knowledge, and to some questions we cannot know the answers. Yet many questions can often be answered by reference to other passages of Scriptures or to commentaries, or simply by reference to what is said in the next verse or the next chapter. The Bible was not written in a vacuum, it was written by and for believers in a particular time and place. Neither is it a collection of texts, for much of it is connected argument or narrative. Knowledge of customs, of history, of botany even, will help us first to understand what was written before we start looking for a lesson for ourselves.

It can be helpful both for public and for private study to pose questions methodically concerning any passage. First one might consider who wrote it and to whom and what was the particular need that it met. Next it is often profitable to read through the passage as a whole, noting the divisions of thought, how it falls into paragraphs. Verse by verse study is good in its place but it is probably better to pay attention to detail only after such questions as "What is the writer's message?" and "How does this

thought lead on to the next?", or "What inspired this remark, or this parable?" have been considered. Then is the time to pick through the passage, getting the meaning of difficult words and verses" Concordance references have two values, firstly in leading to other scriptures where the same topic occurs, and secondly because they help in the understanding of particular words. Finally, when the meaning and context of a scripture is grasped, one begins to wonder "Is there a lesson here for me or for our group?" or "What is the reason for this exhortation? Do we really need to follow this course?" or "What place did this event have in God's purposes?" Or "Surely in another scripture it says exactly the opposite?" These are but a few of the questions that one can ask. Of course, this is far from being the only method of study. Yet questions, whether asked in a desire for enlightenment or judiciously pointed to bring out a particular thought, can be of real help in bringing a passage to life.

Questions are the sign of a lively mind and of mental watchfulness. But it is not enough for our minds to be awake, our hearts too must be open and our consciences alive. At times we may be sleepy or lazy in our attitude to life and the study of the Bible. This should not be so and asking questions is one way in which we may provoke one another to good works. Above all, through prayer we can draw upon God's spiritual storehouse: and if Bible study does not come easily, or if any man lacks wisdom, *"let him ask God for it, who gives with open hand to all men without upbraiding; and it will be given him."*

Gemariah the son of Shaphan was only a name in Jeremiah 36. He was a scribe to King Jehoiakim just when the Babylonians were threatening the city and he figured in the political manoeuvrings of the time. They used to say that such personalities never had a real existence; the stories in which they figured in the O. T., were dreamed up by pious men of later centuries, on the basis of old traditions and legends, to invest Israel with a glorious history. Not so. About twenty years ago excavations in the City of David revealed a room deep down below the present city which proved to be some sort of administrative centre in the palace of the Kings at the time of Jehoiakim. There among a great number of seals bearing the

names of State officials with which they sealed or "signed" papyrus documents one bearing the name of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, royal secretary. Gemariah either perished in the siege or ended his days a captive in Babylon; he left behind his personal signature seal to witness to us, two and a half millenniums later, that he really did live, that the Bible is true.

Chapter and Verse The Old Testament was first divided into chapters during the 13th century by Cardinal Hugo, and then into verse by Rabbi Nathan, and first incorporated into the printed Bible by Robert Stephens in his edition of the Vulgate, published in 1555.

THE COVENANTS

1. Patriarchal Days

God's wonderful Creation is like a piece of beautifully embroidered fabric. Man's disobedience to God's law was like tearing that piece of fabric so that it needed repair. Our first parents broke the rules that God had given them and in doing so they broke the relationship between Creator and Creation. Their rebellion and sin affected the Earth over which they had been placed as stewards and restoration of the relationship could only be effected by reconciliation of the estranged parties. The universe is a system of relationships and when they break down there is need for reconciliation. Paul's words to the Colossians (1.20) wonderfully describe that reconciliation "*God made peace through his Son's death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.*" This was the repair of the wonderful fabric. Reconciliation is made by a covenant that provides the structure to bridge the gap between conflicting parties. The Creator suffered more than anyone else did by man's rebellion, but He was the first to act to bring reconciliation.

Covenants are used in the normal activities of national life. They are legal instruments based on promises and trust. In commerce covenants are called contracts. In politics they are called treaties. A marriage relationship is based on a covenant between husband and wife. Covenants made between charities and their donors are recognised by the Inland Revenue to repay tax on this basis.

The idea of a covenant can be expressed in different ways. The parties involved may be friendly equals as were David and Jonathan; or the covenant may be made between a stronger conquering tribe that dictates terms and rules to the vassal tribe. Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites was like that.

Covenants have been made between people, tribes and nations since very early times. The covenants of Israel have interesting similarities with those made by the Hittites who conquered tribes to enlarge their Empire 4000 years ago. The earliest Bible covenant was made long before that, in the time of Noah. Just as the old world was destroyed by the Flood, God told Noah that He would make a covenant with him (Genesis 6.18). As the eight persons emerged from the Ark and the waters sub-

sided, God established His covenant as described in Genesis 9. This covenant was between the Creator and creation. The covenants of later times were to follow a similar pattern with conditions and promises. On the human side the essential input is obedience. On God's side He offers mankind His loving friendship with care and provision for its welfare. To Noah and his descendants were promised safety from natural disaster and the regular seasonal supplies. Men might well have wondered if their sin would again cause all to perish, but God said that never again would all flesh be destroyed. Instead, He made it clear that He intended that the human race should flourish in spite of its sin. God made a covenant with Creation and gave the pledge or token that when light of the sun shines through the rain drops it would split into its spectrum colours in the shape of a bow as a reminder that God keeps His word. Within God's promise was the early evidence of God's love, He cared about His creation. The first step in the repair and reconciliation of the relationship broken in Eden between God and man was that first covenant with Noah and his family.

The next step is more fully documented in the Bible. Each of the four major covenants marked a turning point in the history of mankind. Just as the covenant with Noah expressed God's concern for the whole of Creation so the same principle was enshrined in the great promise to Abraham, that his family would bring blessing to the whole human family. That promise was made while Abram still lived in Haran (Genesis 12.3), the home that his father established after their migration from Babylonia. The actual covenant was not made till Abram arrived in Canaan. By that time he had been to Egypt because of famine and his nephew Lot had separated from him and now lived in the lush Jordan valley. The patriarch had rescued him from marauding but well organized tribes and it was after the encounter with Melchizedek that the full ceremony of the covenant occurred and was recorded in Genesis 15.

In the Bible our English word 'covenant' is translated from the Hebrew word 'berith'. A covenant is instituted by a sacrificial ceremony involving the 'cutting of the covenant'. This is when the

animal for sacrifice is cut into two parts, each part represents one of the two parties involved in the covenant. The remarkable account in Genesis 15 describes carefully the ceremony of 'cutting the covenant' – *karat berith*. The sacrificial animals were divided in two, representing the two parties involved in the covenant. In the Hittite parallel, the two halves of the sacrifice represented in some mystical way the joining of the lives of those participating in the contract.

Mildenhall has researched the way that the Hittites annexed smaller tribes which then became 'one' with the larger empire. The smaller party was promised protection and provision by the suzerain which demanded obedience to its laws including the payment of revenue in return.

Obedience is an interesting aspect of Abraham's life from his migration to Canaan to the offering of his son on Mount Moriah. But the obedience most closely connected with the making of the covenant is described in Genesis 17 where Abraham is told that he and his male descendants must be circumcised; and in fact it has been described as the covenant of circumcision. The ritual must continue so long as the covenant exists. When Israel marched through the desert, the ritual lapsed and there was a sense in which the covenant lapsed too. When the nation finally entered the Land of the Promise the custom was restored by the River Jordan in Gilgal (Joshua 5).

There is an aspect of God's covenant with Israel that is worth a careful study in itself. There are two main ideas concerning love in the Old Testament. Firstly there was His election-love whereby He chose Israel to be His own people and this is enshrined in the words 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'. There is however another form of God's love which is expressed in the Hebrew word 'cherith'. The Revised Standard Version rightly and consistently translates this word as 'steadfast love' and Psalm 136 is a fascinating example. Abraham must have known about it, for Eliezer uses 'chesed' in his prayer at the Haran well while searching for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24.12). Others may be false, forgetful and ignorant but our God is faithful forever. In faithful love He must punish wrong-doing but He also rewards corresponding faithfulness. If He makes a promise He keeps it; if He makes a covenant He is true to it. As a result He was trusted by His people for He kept His Word as no man has ever done. People inter-

pret facts and call it truth but it is never the same as the veracity of God. When God spoke to Noah he called His covenant an 'Everlasting Covenant' and that is the expression of the writer to the Hebrews in the great benediction (13.20). Maybe all the other covenants that God makes are phases or aspects of the one great eternal relationship that He makes with 'His People'.

God's promise in Genesis 12 included Abraham becoming the father of a great nation that would have God's protection. Later he was to learn that such a promise entailed he and Sarah having a miraculous son. In Genesis 15 the land of Canaan was promised to Abram and his descendants because it is God's land and He would live there with them. In Genesis 17 a further sign of the Covenant was God's change of Abram's name to Abraham indicating that he would be the father of nations.

A conflict arose between Abraham and Abimelech recorded in Genesis 20 and 21. Although it is not explicitly stated the trouble may have ended with a covenant between them. A similar conflict arose between Isaac and Abimelech, documented in Genesis 26 where in verse 28 there is a definite request for a covenant sealed with an oath. More importantly at the beginning of that chapter is a renewal of the covenant between God and Isaac, re-stating the promises originally made to Abraham.

When Jacob left Canaan – the land of the Promise and the Covenant – God appeared to him in that now famous dream. He spoke wonderful words to the patriarch assuring him that although he was leaving the land of the covenant He would be with Jacob wherever he went until he returned. As he was returning, richer than when he left Canaan, Jacob made a covenant with his father-in-Law Laban for their mutual protection against the other (Gen. 31.44). Then at Bethel (Genesis 35) the covenant promises were renewed to Jacob in a most moving experience discovering and rediscovering the greatness and kindness of the God of his fathers.

Finally, Jacob gave his blessing to his sons as his life came to an end. The main thrust of those blessings was toward Judah and Joseph. Judah's descendants would one day be part of the Davidic Covenant and the Messianic vision. Joseph had already begun to understand the wonder of the providential care and forgiveness of the covenant-keeping God.

DN

MOSES ETHIOPIAN WIFE

"And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman" (Num. 12.1).

Every now and again someone asks how it could be that Moses, the champion of the Lord for the chosen people, could have married an Ethiopian who was therefore of the descendants of Ham, youngest son of Noah. There was strong objection in Israel to such marriages although the assumption that Moses had married before he left Egypt only raises the second question how he later came to marry Zipporah the Midianite when he apparently had left one wife back in Egypt. The word "Ethiopian" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Cush" who in Genesis 10.8 is recorded as one of the sons of Ham. The Cushites became the people known to history as the Sumerians. Eventually many of their tribes migrated, some down the eastern side of the Persian Gulf and into India, where they established the Indus civilization which endured from about 2000 BC to 1500 BC. Others moved down the western side and across Arabia and over the Red Sea into Africa where they became the people known to the Egyptians as Cush, living mainly in what is now the Sudan. Jewish legend has it that Moses when at the court of Pharaoh led an invading army into Cush and returned in triumph but there is probably no truth in that.

"Ethiopia" in the A. V. is taken from old Anglo-Saxon versions that were based largely on the Greek Septuagint. It used this word to translate the Hebrew "Cush", but to the Greeks the whole of the southern world from Africa to India was denoted by the word Ethiopia (English travellers as late as the 17th Century still used the name in that sense). The Egyptians despised the Cushites and called them "vile Cush" and lost no opportunity of waging war on them. It would have been social suicide for Moses to marry into that nation while still at the Egyptian court and most unlikely. Another factor is that by deduction from Scripture records, at that time in history a man was rarely below the age of fifty at marriage, and since Moses fled to Midian at age forty, his marriage whilst there and return forty years later with two sons is perfectly logical. There is no evidence aside from this questionable statement in Num. 12.1 that he had been married before.

Zipporah, his Midianite wife {Exodus 2.15-22} was a descendant of Abraham through his wife

Keturah. She was therefore of Semitic race and there would be no valid objection on that score against the union. Midianites were scattered all over the lands south of Canaan and the tribal name of the Sinai Midianites was Cushan (referred to only once in the O. T. in Habakkuk 3.7 *"I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble"*). The almost certain explanation of Num. 12.1 is that by an early copyist's mistake Cushan was turned into Cush by the omission of the final N. The archaic Hebrew N in the days before Ezra was a very insignificant little "squiggle" and could easily have been missed. On this basis the text tells us that Moses had married a Cushan Midianite, which is what Exodus 2 says anyway. The objection raised by Aaron and Miriam to the nationality of his wife was probably evoked by jealousy. They feared that one of Moses' own sons by Zipporah would be appointed by him to succeed him as Israel's leader when the time came. They, and probably most of their fellows, would much prefer a full blooded son of Israel. They need not have worried; when the time did come, the Lord brought forth His own choice for leader, the stalwart Joshua. This is one of the lessons we all find hard to learn, that the Lord is perfectly able to raise up His own instrument to carry on any section of His work when the torch begins to fall from failing hands. We need not plan and devise and agonize for the continuance of that which He has left in our charge for a space of time.

One has to realise that many of the women of the Old Testament history were not of Israel, although of Semitic race Isaac married Rebecca who was of Nahor, brother to Abraham. Jacob married Rachel and Leah of the same stock. Salmon prince of Judah at the entry to the Land married Rahab of Jericho whose name shows she was Semitic, either of Abraham through Esau, Ishmael or Keturah, or of Nahor. Tamar who carried on the Messianic line from Judah was not of Jacob but her name too reveals that she was Semitic. Ruth who married Boaz was a Moabite, from Lot the son of Haran another brother of Abraham. There was no inconsistency therefore in the case of Moses.

There are theories that assert that the name "Cush" means black and that he was a black man, the ancestor of the African races. While it is true that purely Hebrew names often have a meaning which can be traced by the construction of the word

as for example Jesus in Greek is the Hebrew Joshua, or more properly Jehoshua, which means God is Saviour, the same practice cannot be applied to non-Hebrew names. There is no Hebrew word closely resembling Cush that means black. Cush was given his name long before there were any Hebrews or any Hebrew language. He was certainly the ancestor of the Sumerians and that language is the oldest one that is now known, but the Sumerian word for black is "gig" – not very similar. No one knows what the nature of the language spoken by Noah and his sons was and only that later languages were derived from it. It is probably true that many of the black peoples of Africa are descended from Cush but their black colour developed after they had settled in Africa and not before. The various colours of men in different climes are the result of long habitation under specialised conditions of climate and food, and probably other factors not yet completely understood. There is no reason for thinking that Noah had grandsons in a variety of colours. In fact there is evidence to the contrary. According to Genesis 10, Cush had a brother named Phut. The Phutites in later generations also crossed into Africa and colonised the north, right across the continent to the Atlantic in days when the present Sahara desert was a fertile well-watered country

abounding in forests and animal life. Today there are cave-paintings still existing in that barren and uninhabited waste executed by, and depicting, those Phutites of four thousand years ago but they are not shown as black. They are painted with red and yellow skins; their descendants today are deep brown.

There is no means of determining the colour of the first men, nor yet that of Noah and his sons. The white races tend to think that they must have been white; but the Chinese insist, quite as logically, that they were yellow. We just do not know. What we do know is that God "*hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.*" (Acts 17.16) and that all men everywhere, of whatever colour, are able to propagate their own kind with each other. Perhaps the Lord, who is the supreme Artist in creation, sees some advantage in having men ultimately develop five outward colours, whilst still being men inside, just as He has ordained variety in the rest of His Creation.

Coming back to the main point, there is not much doubt that the only woman Moses married, the mother of his children was the daughter of the Midianite Chieftain. Jethro gave him hospitality during his term of exile and proved to be as much a reverential worshipper of the true God as was Moses himself.

AOH

NOTE ON THE DECREE OF CYRUS

Cyrus the Persian, who captured Babylon in 538 B.C. and ended the Babylonian captivity by restoring the Jews to their own land has been given a great deal of credit which may or may not have been deserved. According to Ezra 1.2 he made this proclamation "*The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up...*" This sounds as though he had a considerable reverence for the Lord God of Israel. But at much the same time he gave orders for the restoration of the Temple of Sin, the Moon-god at Ur of the Chaldees, and had bricks used for the restoration inscribed with a very similar story. "*Sin, the illuminator of heaven and earth, with his favourite sign delivered into my hand the four quarters of the world; and I returned the gods to their shrines. The great gods have delivered all the lands into my hands: the land I have caused to dwell in peaceful*

habitation."

It is of course possible that Cyrus perceived little or no difference between Sin, the Moon-god of the Babylonians, and the God of heaven of the Jews, and used in each inscription the term which he thought would best suit the people to whom he was proclaiming his intentions. Ezra himself has the best light on the matter. He says that "*the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia*" (ch. 1.1) to do this thing. Cyrus himself may have had his own motives and they were probably mixed ones. Behind him and unknown to him was the overruling power of God, causing times and circumstances to work together in such a fashion that it only needed the astute mind of the Persian monarch to perceive the advantages of a friendly nation installed in Jerusalem to effect the long awaited and long promised deliverance of Israel exactly on time, as promised by Jeremiah some seventy years earlier (see Jer. 25.11, 12 and Dan. 9.2).

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

19. Chapter 16

vv 1-13 The Parable of the Unjust Steward.

Many have regarded this passage a difficult one to interpret because Jesus appears to be commending immoral behaviour. Yet this cannot be so because of the totally moral uprightness of His character and teaching recorded in the Gospels and this is clearly upheld by the context. It is a parable addressed primarily to His disciples. It is a story about rogues. Firstly, there is the steward (*oikonomas*) who is more than a slave because he has considerable authority. He was sacked not because of dishonesty but slackness, perhaps laziness, wasting his employers goods and not making the kind of profit that was expected of him. Secondly, there is the Master or owner of the establishment who may have been a landlord absent in a foreign country. He left his estate in the care of others who were expected to care for it and make it profitable. He might have been lazy in not using his money for the benefit of the poor or nor caring whether his steward made a profit honestly. The Law did not allow a Jew to extract interest from fellow Jews. Thirdly, the debtors were rogues because they were willing to have their debts dishonestly reduced so that they had less to pay the 'Master'. They all suffered from the modern weakness of believing it is all right to break the law providing no one notices it. One schoolmaster told his students to learn the 11th commandment – 'You shall not be found out'. But that is not the spirit of the law as taught by Moses, the prophets or Jesus.

The steward was not brought before the magistrate but allowed to depart quietly. He interviewed each of his master's debtors to discover their debt and promptly reduced it. There is considerable difference in the amount of reduction – one by 50% and the other by 20%. He was dealing in very large quantities – about 4,000 litres of oil and nearly 40,000 litres of grain. When the Master heard about the false dealing he commended the steward rather than turning him over to the law. Perhaps they all had something to hide. But why did Jesus tell the story.

"The sons of this world (aion - age) are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." Jesus' followers live in the world and handle the blessings of this world as gifts from God whether its wealth or the many things which

money can buy. But they handle them as wise stewards for building up the Church or spreading the Gospel and in so doing they are laying up treasure in heaven. There are many needs within the Church and in this world to which Christians can make a wonderful contribution. It is very important to identify fellow members of God's family and the places where God wants us to serve Him. It is also vital that children of God clearly understand that all they have and all they are must be used totally under the direction of their Father and only thus can they make the spiritual capital that leads into His presence room.

The point Jesus is making is that many people in this world show a commitment to their particular interest, whether it's a sport, or a university discipline or a political party which sadly puts Christians to shame in their service of the King of Kings.

vv 9, 13 *mammon* is derived from the Aramaic and generally refers to wealth. To serve *douleuein* of v.13 is of a household slave unlike 'steward' *oikonomia* (manager) in the earlier parable.

vv 14-18 Ethics of the Law. The Pharisees' attitude (literally held their noses in the air) to Jesus about money sprang from their belief that God had rewarded their 'righteousness' with riches. They therefore derided Jesus in both teaching and practice because He and His disciples were poor. Jesus was aware that their giving to charity was a cloak for their extortion from the poor. Like His Father He knew their motives. They held in honour those who gave much to charity as many do today. Jesus clearly showed that through the changing scenes of human history, moral values cannot change. So He brought to their attention two fundamental principles of human behaviour; attitudes to wealth and chastity. Abuse of God's gifts has appalling results affecting the fabric of human society especially during periods of change. Was this change in the 1st Century from a legal strait jacket to freedom of conscience or were they disobeying God's rules?

v.17 'tittle' *kerea* literally 'little horn' – a little stroke or serif to distinguish the meaning of certain Hebrew letters and Jesus used the word to show that tiny details of the law are important. Some commentators regard them as 'scribal ornaments' therefore of no importance.

v.18 Men interpreted the marriage laws totally

to the disadvantage of women. Jesus may have been defending the woman's position. Normally Jesus' teaching was nearer to the broad minded Rabbi Hillel but here He aligned with the strict teaching of Rabbi Shammai so it has been in the Christian church for most of the last two thousand years.

vv 19-31 The Parable of Dives (Latin for rich) and Lazarus. Like the earlier parable, this is not the easiest story to interpret. Dives lived in luxury. He had all he wanted in comfort and food. He never hurt or wronged anyone. His sin was that he failed to notice or do anything to help a fellow human being in trouble. His was a sin of omission rather than commission. People matter more than things in God's sight. "It is the plain fact that if men possess the truth of God's word, and if, wherever they look there is sorrow to be comforted, need to be supplied, pain to be relieved, and if it moves them to no feeling and to no action, nothing will change them" not even someone returning from the dead – Barclay. There is a practical lesson to be learned from Jesus' story and if we want to spend eternity with a caring God we must become like Him; but if we take the parable entirely literally we could interpret it that poverty brings eternal bliss and wealth brings eternal misery. Campbell Morgan takes the view that the unsaved will have an opportunity to make good in the Kingdom to come.

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 that 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, gadget-less 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. They do not, however, bring that serenity of mind that is above the fret and strain of the competitive life endeavouring to keep up appearances or aiming to amass more and more goods and money. Poets and

He emphasizes the principles of the parable. He notes that this was probably a true story and is the only parable in which a character is named. He says the description of the rich man's life shows him to be flamboyant. But the principle is that our way of life now, affects our life in the hereafter.

There is a rather different interpretation of this parable to be found in the Bible Study Monthly page 92 of 1992. There it is pointed out that there is a Babylonian Talmud story of similar character upon which Jesus may have based this parable. The article demonstrates how the parable does not deal to "the future life or with the respective destinies of the righteous and wicked after death." The interpretation given is that Dives represents the cast off Jewish nation headed up by its religious leaders who have not fulfilled their commission as ambassadors of God's kingdom and that Lazarus represents the Gentiles who are drawn into the Kingdom after centuries of spiritual poverty. The fixed gulf is shown to the "the immutable purpose of God" but Dives is called 'son' by Father Abraham. Hades will one day pass away.

In handling all parables, principles count more than detailed interpretation. The value of all great teaching is not academic but its power in turning lives to God. All that Jesus had to say, including His parables, is the greatest teaching ever.

DN

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 parked up in a glistening grief and wear a golden sorrow." To be content with little is sometimes difficult, with much almost impossible. They are the happiest who find their joys outside of things. Nature's calls are few; in this the art of living lies, to want no more than may suffice and make that little do.

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.

"And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." (Hag. 2.7)

LUKE THE EVANGELIST

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote the most beautiful book in the world. He was a brilliant writer and his gospel is of high literary value. He had great freedom and ability in the use of the Greek language, yet the style is simple and pure. There is a charm and earnestness in his anecdotes which appeals to the youngest reader; yet there is exactness of detail which holds the interest of the careful student.

In the third Gospel we have the setting of Christ's life in the Roman world, and historical data is given which links our Lord's life with the society in which He lived. Most of the information that we have of the birth and early years of Jesus are in Luke's record. He it is also who depicts our Master in the home and family life of His day. The religious trend of the first century was to keep women and children in a place of inferiority and it is mainly Luke who showed that Jesus ignored the fashion. He emphasizes the place of the gentle and simple things in the purpose of God. All this gives evidence of Luke's wide sympathies, which extend still further when consideration is given to the parables and miracles that are peculiar to his record.

He was interested in the poor and despised, and our Lord's appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4) is an appropriate opening for His ministry. But for Luke's pen we should not have had the great illustrations of compassion given in our Lord's parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. He too retold the striking contrasts between Pharisee and Tax Collector praying in the Temple and the real life study of Simon and the "sinful woman". Luke recognised the evil of racial and class distinction in the parable of the "rich fool" and Dives and Lazarus, and of Jesus' tolerance towards the Samaritans.

Hand and heart, instinct and motive, the whole life within and without must be transformed up to the "Ideal". And only the Omniscience of God knows what that is! And only the Omnipotence of God can sustain in the making! Thus the Will of Him who knows must of necessity lie across the will of him who knows not, to direct and cause them to aspire up to God's perfect Ideal of Glory. Thus the Power of God must overshadow the weakness of those who leave the haunts of sin. Thus the Love of God must fill and enlarge the

As a medical doctor he would be intimately acquainted with human suffering, and his method of recording miracles of healing reflects his knowledge and his sympathy. This is apparent in his description of "*a man full of leprosy*" in Luke 5.12. In writing of the woman in the crowd who touched the hem of Jesus' garment (Luke 8.46) he uses a more professional term for the word "virtue" than Mark although this is not clear from the English version. His reference to Peter's mother-in-law as having a "*great fever*" is similarly the distinguishing mark of a physician. His delicate and restrained treatment of our Lord's experience in Gethsemane is masterly and again there is a singularly professional reference to the "*drops of blood*" (Luke 22. 44). The word "*wholesome*" adopted by Paul in his later epistles is peculiar to Luke's Gospel among the evangelists, (Luke 5.31; 7.10; 15.2).

However he was not only a scientist and historian; he had great interest in the devotional aspect of the Christian life, and he has been called the first Christian hymnologist. The remarkable poems of Mary in the Magnificat, and of Zachariah at the birth of John the Baptist are a tribute to Luke's diligence. The third Gospel provides us with the greatest insight into our Lord's prayer life, recording some of His prayers and teaching upon the subject. Several of these were at critical points in His ministry, for example when He spent all night in prayer prior to selecting the disciples. In narrating the Transfiguration on the mount, Luke alone informs us that Jesus was praying. Finally, on the cross, the prayer of forgiveness (not spurious as some have supposed) was a precious reflection of our Saviour preserved only by Luke.

Hearts that hitherto had been chilled and frozen amid evil things.

God is not sparing in His riches. He gives not a trickle but a torrent. As His power is great, so is His grace. (2 Cor. 9-8).

Gone from us

Sister Beryl Winwood (Hitchin)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

FULL-GROWN – MATURE – PERFECT

"Strong meat belongs to them that are of full age." (Heb. 5.14) or "Solid food belongs to them that are full-grown" (R.V) or "...for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (RSV) or are of "adult" stature or in some contexts, "perfect". All of these translate from the Greek *'teleios'*. It is derived from the word "telos" which means "end", "consummation" or "conclusion". "Full-grown" or "mature" are good words to stand over against "babes" in the context here and to indicate that the growing process has reached its climax and consummation as nature intended it. And to these "strong meat" or "solid food" is the appropriate nutriment. The A. V. frequently translates 'meat' – which indicates the general usage of the Greek *'trophe'* as a term in former Elizabethan days – but most modern translations use the word "food". *'Trophe'* denotes "nourishment - food", akin to *'tropho'* to rear, nourish, feed says Vine in his "Expository Dictionary" so it does not necessarily mean animal flesh, though it would not be excluded if used in the wider general sense of food. Strong meat or solid food *stereoo*, is food that can make hard, firm, or solid, to make firm or establish. Strong meat or solid food stands for an advanced form of teaching or doctrine in contrast to elementary topics suitable for 'babes in Christ'. Solid spiritual food is appropriate and necessary for the full-grown, adult, mature, spiritually perfect and these are they whose senses can be exercised to discern or discriminate between good and evil. It is with that sense of being full-grown, mature or perfect that this study is concerned. Some have stumbled, jealous for the Mosaic Law, claiming not to have sinned over a period of time. They imagine the Law of Christ (Gal. 6.2) to be identical with the Law of Sinai. They have come to think that because they have not openly dishonoured their parents or killed someone, committed adultery or stolen, borne false witness or coveted their neighbours goods they are without sin and may claim to be perfect in God's sight. There is a possible way in God's sight for us to be perfect. It is easy to err by pressing our own definition into it, and making a standard of conduct that we may claim to attain and fulfil Christian perfection or maturity. Abstinence from doing forbidden things is often defined as being without sin in moral behaviour but Christian

perfection is much more than that. It is much more than a mere negative attitude to evil and to evil things! It is one thing to hate evil – but that in itself is not enough. Of our Lord Jesus it is said He loved righteousness as well (Heb. 1.9). The true nature of Christian perfection is in basic principles. And for this standard of perfection our Lord Jesus is the one and only pattern. A man may not have killed or robbed his fellow man, but if in his heart under intense provocation he may have felt that he could have done, in the sight of Heaven, the act has been performed. If at any time he has looked upon a woman in lust, the transgression is accounted to have been committed. Negative withholding from the deed is not sufficient to fulfil the Law of Christ; there must be a positive attitude to it, so that if the opportunity really came, the act would not take place.

Absolute perfection is not possible so long as we lack knowledge. As our knowledge grows we constantly discover evil in the things we formerly did or allowed without qualms or misgivings. As we continue to grow older and in grace, we come to see unchristianlikeness in things, which we still do, so that we can never say we have reached full and complete attainment in moral things. Paul knew well that he had not attained that for which Christ had arrested him and if he, giant that he was, had reason to say that for himself, surely we of lesser stature must say that for ourselves. Whether we confess them or not, our shortcomings in God's sight are none the less real.

Yet on the other hand, in spite of our shortcomings and defects there is a state of perfection accredited to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. In each person and each case, the term must be applied in accordance with its setting and with its context. "*The man of God must be perfect*" wrote Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. 3.17) but here it is the perfection of the workman with his tools. It implies the full kit of tools and an efficiency and dexterity in using them. The tool-kit here is Holy Scripture; the ability of the man of God is in using it for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness. But the possession of the tool-kit and the dexterity in the use of each tool does not imply absence of sin in the man of God himself. Again when Jesus bids us be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, He bids us use the same

impartiality in the distribution of our bounty and be like God who shows no distinction between the just and the unjust, but distributes rain upon everyone, everywhere (Matt. 5.45-48).

When God called Abraham to walk before him and "be perfect" surely it did not mean that Abraham was to walk before God without sin. (Gen. 17.1). That was impossible for the patriarch to attempt, but to walk before God with a whole-hearted devotion was something else and was definitely possible. That is what God seeks always, everywhere, according to ability. The standard is, more a matter of "what we would if we could" than of actual deed, though it must be said, the "what we would" of tomorrow must exceed the "what we would" of today. There must be growth to attain the "full-grown" estate. If then God is graciously pleased to accept the 'will' for the 'deed' and it is our will to offer him the utmost devotion of our soul, that act of worship and surrender is the state of soul which God accounts as 'perfection' – 'perfection' at our present stage of growth. It indicates the attainment, assisted by the Holy Spirit of God, of the utmost of which our "new-man" is capable today. It will help us to become assured that God will not look for more from us, till we have had time and training to grow up more nearly to full maturity.

Paul tells us in Eph. 4.11-12 that God gave to the Church, Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers for the purpose of the perfecting of the saints which was to be a continuing procedure until each believer had attained through unity with his fellow-brethren and a deepening knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (teleios, mature) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. All the service of this God-given ministry is intended to promote development and growth in each individual saint, as well as in all saints collectively till the "full-grown" Christ-like condition is attained.

This growth and development manifests itself along four principal lines – of faith, of knowledge, of holiness, and of love. Each part, although separate, inter-links with each other part to produce the ideal perfection of Christ-likeness.

Paul wrote to his Thessalonian friends assuring them that night and day he was praying intensely to see their face in order that he might help to "*perfect that which is lacking in your faith*" (1 Thess. 3.10).

They needed to be informed more fully concerning the purpose of God to enable them to grow up from the "milk" stage to that of "solid food". In this acquisition of the necessary information their faith would attain perfection. But any kind of information would not attain that end. Only that which set the love of God and the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord before them would be effective for their growth. To the Colossians Paul wrote "*We ... do not cease to pray and make request for you that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*" Peter also adds his admonition to the saints, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Knowledge that does not enhance our knowledge of our Lord Jesus is not likely to increase in us a likeness to Himself. Increasing knowledge of the Son of God (Eph. 4.13) plus a maturing of faith, will then lead to the next step of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. "*Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*" (2 Cor. 7.1). As the knowledge of the Lord Jesus is received by a deepening faith into a good and honest heart it will be to us as the reflecting mirror in which we behold the glory of the Lord. As we gaze therein, we shall be changed (another picture of our growth) into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord. It is only as we come to "know him" (Phil. 3.10) that this transforming work proceeds apace.

The crowning feature of this perfecting process is that of Christ-like love. John says "*If we love one another God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.*" (1 John 4. 12). "*Perfect love casts out fear*" (1 John 4.18) and this perfect love says Paul "*is the bond of perfection*" – the bond that binds and holds every grace together into a perfect Christ-like unity.

Grouping all these things together – faith, knowledge, holiness and love – John says "*And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Herein is love made perfect...*" (1 John 4.16-17). Thus belief (faith) based on knowledge (of the right kind) leading us to dwell in God and to have God dwell in us (holiness) results in perfection of love, and this matured and full-grown love is the hall-mark of perfection in the sight of God. Of all such, John

says "*whoever keeps His word (after learning it) in him verily is the love of God perfected.*" (1 John 2.5).

To this full grown maturity, perfection, both the Word of God in precept, and the indwelling Spirit of God in practice, urge us on. It is no more thinkable that the Christian believer should desire to remain a babe, feeding only on "milk", than that a lad should lack desire to grow up to be a man. The inward "urge" which turns bud into flower, child into adult, should prompt the desire, and promote the activity in every Christian's "inner man" to attain maturity, and be thus able to absorb and assimilate 'strong meat'. Christian perfection is not a perfection of the flesh, but a maturing of the "New Creature" into the likeness of Christ Jesus the

Lord. When believers come to understand that God's great desire for them is their sanctification, and that "Christ should be formed in them" and that this perfecting is the work of God who will both 'will' and 'work' in them according to His good pleasure (if only they lie responsive in His hands) they will then realise that all that God asks of them is to present themselves a living sacrifice to Him that they may prove, in actual experience, what is "*that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*" concerning them. This will work perfection in them, and bring them up to the full stature of men in Christ Jesus. "*Now he that hath wrought this self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.*"

TH

"GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD"

Of all sacred Scripture, there is none more familiar nor more loved than John 3.16. "*For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Simply believe and our faith in Jesus Christ will save us. No Christian will deny this, though some groups may point out additional requirements. It is not the purpose to discuss these here but rather to consider **the free gift** and how we are saved by faith. Is it so simple that it does not merit discussion.

There are so many perplexing problems; should we not devote available time and energy to the more complex? Paradoxically the simplest problems are often the most difficult to understand. Comprehension of basic truths is essential to understanding higher concepts. It is impossible to master algebra or trigonometry until we understand addition and multiplication.

"*Believe and you will be saved*". Believe what? How can Jesus' death save billions? If we are saved, why do we need to believe? Do we need to be saved? In his sinless state Adam had no need of a Saviour. Adam was in heart and mind before he sinned, able to live forever. Until the fatal transgression he lived without sin. When he disobeyed, an incomprehensible change came over him; from that moment it was impossible to live without doing wrong. He was lost; he was dying. His state, in so far as any effort on his part was concerned, was hopeless: he was condemned.

Why could not Adam by will power and effort overcome his tendency to sin, live down his condi-

tion and come out from under condemnation? Some teach this, saying that the glory of God is seen through the eye of faith and through the wonders of creation. The goodness and splendour of it, the selfless life and death of Jesus of Nazareth draws us to imitate. Through an unparalleled example, they say, we are inspired to do our best, magnify our will power and effort, and in time come to live a nearly perfect life. Likewise, non-Christian faiths use the same method – copying a great historical leader.

The true Christian faith, however, recognizes man's total inability to save himself through any effort or will power of his own. No matter how great, no man can save himself; no man can save his brother. In so far as the sacred record reveals, there is only one way out of Adam's condemnation. He has nothing with which to pay his debt. So God, in His great love and mercy provided a way. "*He gave his only begotten Son*" Jesus the Lamb of God from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13.2). Jesus died instead of Adam, thus setting him free, paying the penalty in full. "*He gave himself a ransom for all*" (1 Tim. 2.6).

When Adam sinned he carried the whole human race in his body in a representative sense. When he was condemned, the whole race was condemned, though still unborn. When a human being is conceived it carries with it part of the original sinful, condemned parent organism. The new life is therefore under condemnation at the moment of conception. "*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Cor. 15.52) "*wherefore*

as by one man sin entered the world and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5.12). Note especially that "all have sinned". They sin because of an inherited nature. They cannot help sinning. There are no exceptions!

Rom. 5.12 is worthy of a closer look. The expression "death **passed** upon all men" is significant. Death passes not when we reach adult life or as a child, or even at birth. It is inherited! It passes at the union of male and female cells when a new life is formed. Many infants die prior to birth, before there is any possibility of personal sins, and yet they die. All who do live, sin personally, which is added to the original sin. Each individual is fully, completely and hopelessly lost even before birth, except that Christ came. Jesus is especially clear in His statements of this truth. *"He that believes on him (Jesus) is not condemned; but he that believes not, is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"* (John 3.18). And again *"He that believes in the Son has eternal life; he that does not obey the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him"* (3.36 RSV) *"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3.3). Believe and you will be saved!

We can now consider the question: believe in what? What must we believe in to be saved? Will believing in self and works, save us? Will believing in the law or the prophets or some great religious leader? First, we must recognise our inherited condemnation and our personal sinfulness. Then we must recognise that Jesus died to take our place as a redemptive price, the ransom (1 Tim. 2.6). The term "ransom" is commonplace in connection with kidnappings. It is the price paid for the one abducted. Jesus, in our place, served as the redemptive price, the ransom. *"The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20.28 RSV). *"Who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a people for his own who are zealous for good works"* (Titus 2.14). Everyone, regardless of age, colour, education, where and when they live, are condemned and need a saviour. *"For the love of Christ controls us; for we are convinced that one has died for all therefore all have died"* (2 Cor. 5.14 RSV). All were dead in God's sight, condemned to death. So Christ died for all. *"He gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."* (1 Tim. 2.6) *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower*

than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2.9). *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed"*. (1 Pet. 2.24 RSV). We must, then, first realise that we are lost, that Christ redeemed us from all iniquity and gave himself a ransom for each of us personally. This is the faith that saves us! *"You are not your own; you are bought with a price"* (1 Cor. 6.19). It is faith in the One who gave Himself to save us, Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son.

There is an unqualified statement in Acts 4.12 *"Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"*. Jesus Christ is the one who died for us, who took our place and paid our debt. His is the only name in which our faith can save us. How can the death of one man pay the penalty for millions? No one knows the number of humans who have been born since Adam's creation. How can one take the place of many millions? When Adam transgressed, he brought condemnation on the whole race. All mankind were within his body, though yet unborn they numbered many millions. In the same way, when Jesus died and redeemed Adam, He redeemed the whole race along with Adam just as though they were yet unborn. *"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive"* (1 Cor. 15.22). This does not mean that all will be saved but that all will be raised out of their graves. *"All that are in the grave shall hear his voice and shall come forth"* (John 5.28). *"Therefore as through one trespass judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so through one act of righteousness, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life"* (Rom. 5.18 RV). Thus, when Adam sinned, and the whole race with him, we personally died. When Jesus died in Adam's stead, He redeemed not only Adam but the whole race. He redeemed us personally.

Now where does faith come in? If Christ saved us at Calvary nineteen hundred years ago, why do we need to believe? How can faith save us? Perhaps a story from civil war days in the United States will cast light on this admittedly perplexing question. In the Old South, on a plantation, there were many slaves. Among these was one we will call Mose. Old Mose worked hard doing chores; tilling the fields, chopping cotton, and feeding stock. He had

always wanted to be free but there was no way for him to be set free. As far as he knew he was condemned to slavery for life. But President Lincoln decided differently. He drew up and issued his now famous Emancipation Proclamation. Upon its formal publication, all slaves, everywhere, within the United States, were set free. There were no radios or TVs in those days. Newspapers were few. Mose could not read, so if the glad news were set in front of him he would still be in darkness. So Mose toiled on and on. Week after weary week went by. There was no change in the old plantation. The crack of the slave drivers' whips could still be heard. Then one day, excitedly, a neighbour came over with **BIG NEWS!** Breathlessly he told how President Lincoln had set the slaves free. They could pack their few belongings and go – north. They could marry according to their own desires. They were free. Mose could scarcely believe it. It all seemed too good but in time he did believe it. He understood the great truth. Raising his hands to heaven, and with a tear in his eye, he praised God! **"I'm free! free!"** And at that moment he was free! Mose had done nothing to earn his freedom. He could not. Lincoln did all that was necessary or possible. When Mose heard, and believed, then he was free.

So it is with us. Though Christ died for us nineteen hundred years ago, and paid our penalty, both for inherited sinfulness and our own transgressions and omissions, we must still hear and believe. He paid it all, but until we hear and believe that we

are free, we are still in our sins. Jesus died to save us. But only hearing, believing and acting on it, can make it effectual.

Man is more in need of a Saviour than ever before! More in need of a Redeemer! These are perilous times, of seducing spirits, of gross darkness. The Greek words *antilutron* and *lutron* – unlike many Greek words, have but one meaning and that is "ransom", a redemptive price. In addition the word redeem, in its several forms, is used twenty times in the New Testament. To deny the ransom, that we were in need of redemption, that Christ redeemed us with his precious blood, is no less than to deny the Christian faith! It is but the first step in the process of atonement. But redemption is the very foundation of Christianity. Without it we are in this age or any age, **lost** hopeless, perishing in our sins.

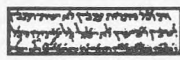
Great as it is, the priceless gift, bringing salvation by faith in that gift, does not constitute all of the Gospel. Rather it is the stepping stone to the high and heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus. To those who hear and heed goes the promise of sonship, participation in the Divine nature, heirship of God and joint heirship with Christ, to be seated with Him in His throne, and to live and reign with Him. The saints will judge both men and angels. The mind of man is utterly unable to comprehend the glory and honour that God has in store for His own.

An abridged article by BJD

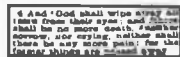
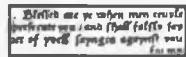
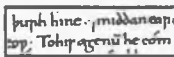
The rector of St. Edmund's Salisbury, many years ago described "wheeled Christians" when he said *"they come to church for the first time in their perambulators, for the second time in their wedding car, and for the third and last occasion in a hearse. How much happier would people be if they came on their own two feet in between times"*. True enough! We are reminded of the somewhat similar observation which first appeared in print many years ago under the caption *"Four kinds of Christians"*. First there is the *tired* Christian. He is active enough in theory but the enthusiasm vanishes when there is work to be done. Then there is the *retired* Christian. He was a good worker once, but that was a long time ago. Next comes the *rubber tired* Christian, all right if the way is straight and the road is smooth. Finally, the *flat tired* Christian. He ran well until he suffered a puncture and since then he has never recovered his wind.

Not everyone is inspired when they go to Church or some other Christian meeting. May be they can't follow the books provided, be it Bible or a prayer book. May be the various forms of worship are strange, be it kneeling, standing, sitting or just trying to follow archaic language. Most Christians have never read a commentary or concordance and the vocabulary used in Bible study can be a bit strange at times. It's easy to find reasons why 'strangers' don't find our style of worship inspiring. It's a little more difficult to get the message across, without using jargon of another era. *"But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news'"* (Romans 10.14, 15 RSV).

Abridged and adapted from a BSM in 1980



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY



Vol. 81, No. 6

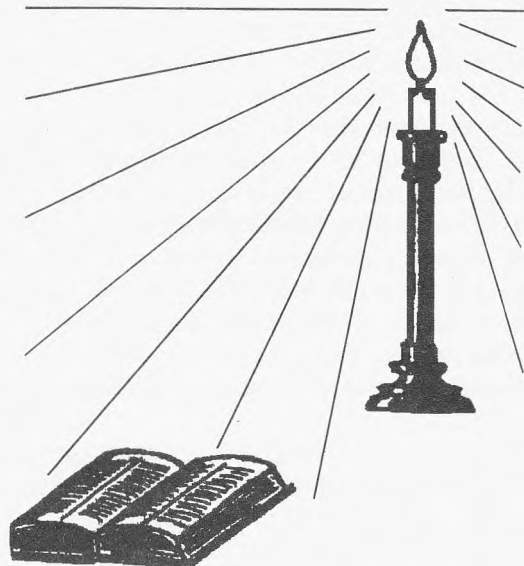
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2004

Published November 1st

Next issue January 1st

CONTENTS

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	123
THE VISION OF JOEL	
4. The Cry of Faith	124
A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE	
20. Chapter 17	127
JAIROS' DAUGHTER	129
PRAYERS WITHOUT WORDS.	132
THE COVENANTS	
1. Covenant at Sinai	135
AFTER THE FLOOD	
1. The Subsiding of the Waters	137
KNOWING HIM	141
'SO BE IT, O LORD'	143
ANNUAL INDEX	144



*This Journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request
renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers.*

Published by

Bible Fellowship Union (Registered Charity 1064607)

4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL England

Bible Study Monthly

FOUNDED 1924

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

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

Communications and donations to Bible Fellowship Union, 4 Manor Gardens, Barnstone, Nottingham NG13 9JL, England.

Email: editor@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

Editor & Secretary: DERRICK NADAL (*Nottingham*)

Treasurer: JOHN HAINES (*Gloucester*)

NOTICES

RENEWAL TIME Instead of the usual inserted renewal form, you will find a 4-page pull out supplement in the centre of this issue of the Bible Study Monthly. Please fill in the Renewal Form section, 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 they should not worry. We do not cancel a copy of the magazine until we have reason to believe it is no longer wanted.

Occasionally BSM copies are returned unopened and when we have not heard from a reader for several years then we have no option but to cancel. Please tell us of any change of address or corrections needed on the address label.

THE TALKING BOOK SERVICE continues to be a blessing to a number of readers. The audio-cassettes are sent out without cost to the recipient 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 microphone.

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 helpful as possible to all readers who 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 a 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.

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE in Milborne Port continues to function as a Christian Retirement Home for the benefit of six residents and for friends who visit through the year. At the time of going to press there are vacancies for permanent residents – a double flat for a couple and three single flats. All the flats are self-contained with shower and kitchen units. They all contain gas heating units, adequate power points and some furniture. The modest fee includes council tax, insurance, heating and lighting, TV licence and a hot mid-day meal. The residential centre does not include full time nursing care but the resident housekeeper keeps a very watchful eye and gives all kinds of extra help especially in times of emergency. Residents make their own arrangement for morning and evening meals and they are also expected to keep their own flat clean. There is a utility room where residents do their own laundry using a washing machine and tumble drier. Gainsborough is grateful for help given in the garden and there is plenty of scope for it. The centre has its own library containing many books given by residents in the past. Local friends join with residents in Christian worship in the 'meeting room' or chapel. Any who are interested in further details may in the first instance write to the BFU address.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"He taught them as one having authority." We live in a world of political leadership and power blocs, where individual submission to the will of the party is the priority. So this text might cause disquiet were it not that we know Him of Whom the words were spoken. Not for Jesus the blustering arrogance of the bully, nor the cold passionless orders of the man of steel. Christ's teaching was warm, tender, vibrant with the love of humankind and pity for their unhappy conditions. Underlying His words was a calm authority that carried conviction that this Man who "*spoke as never man spoke*", told of things He had both seen and heard. His words came with the force of authority engendered, not by the outward trappings of physical force or mental superiority but the inward power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Christians rejoice in our Heavenly Father's own way of imputing to mankind knowledge not only of Himself and His Plan, but also of themselves; their relation to each other and their mutual obligations and responsibilities as fellow-citizens of the earth. Those who remain to listen are far smaller in number than those who turn away "*to walk no more with Him*". The day will dawn when the emptiness of today's idols will be recognised by all. In the appointed day when God shall judge the world in righteousness, the gentle, insistent teaching of the stranger from Galilee's shore shall be accepted.

Knowing this to be the outcome of the Divine Plan for humanity we can with confidence turn to our own position as men and women who have already accepted God's way and teaching and have rejected the earthly policies. Is it for us to sit at the feet of teachers who impress their claims to

rulership by a vote-catching cry or who enforce the acceptance of their dogmas by appeals to the intellect? Does our loyalty to some Christian group or Church teaching of the past affect our loyalty to Christ? Is there evidence in our Christian fellowship of that spirit that is producing in the political world menacing forms of government and national life? Worldly thinkers are filled with apprehension for the future of humanity. "Mass-thinking" and the restriction of personal liberty may yet prove an important factor in the final show down. This principle within the Church will produce spiritually the same results.

We turn then to Christ's words with relief. Here is our salvation in very truth. "*If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" In calm, quiet discussion of Scriptural teaching between ourselves; in constant appeal, not to force, not even to intellectual reason, but to the enlightening and illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, "dispensing to every man severally as he will", shall the Word of old be fulfilled. "*And they shall be all taught of God; and great shall be the peace of your children*". Thus shall every teacher and pastor the Church has known, be held in rightful esteem and honour, "for his works sake" and the truest feelings of loyalty to those who in the past have been our personal mentors, manifested. Thus shall we progress into further revelation and understanding of the Divine Will, until at length, like Christian in Bunyan's immortal allegory, we shall see with our own eyes the city to which we journey and hear with our ears the strains of celestial song.

JUST A THOUGHT

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, ... wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" (Matt. 2.1 RSV). Matthew 2 is a thought-provoking chapter. Who were the 'magi'? Were they the clever men of a Persian coup? Did the star actually move faster than other stars? And why did they need to ask the way if the star stopped right over the place where Joseph's family lodged? Did the priests remember the occasion? How could Herod kid himself that he

could fight against the God of the Universe? Was it religion or superstition?

This chapter tells much about Joseph's character. He was an upright man to whom God's messenger came. He was much involved in Jesus' early life. He was obedient and did as he was told. He took Mary to be his wife, then they did a lot of travelling. Did he have time to be with Jesus? Have we time to be with the Son of God this Christmastide?

DN

THE VISION OF JOEL

4. The Cry of Faith

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel
Chapters 2.1-27*

"Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and repents of evil." (Joel 2.12-13 RSV). This is a wonderful invitation, wonderful because God has at this very moment allowed the heathen executors of His judgment to come in amongst the holy people to ravage them. God could have kept them at arm's length but He allowed them to come, as it were, into the city and right into the people's houses. It is then, when all hope seems at an end, that He invites the afflicted ones to turn to Him in sincerity and faith and He will deliver them. *"Who knows"* cries Joel *"whether He will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?"* Evidently Joel himself was one who did know that God would so do, for in the preceding verse he has stated his conviction, that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. Jonah, half a century later, used precisely the same words, when remonstrating with God over His clemency with the Ninevites. *"I knew,"* he says, *"that you are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repents of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take my life away from me. I beseech thee, for it is better for me to die than to live"* (Jonah 4.3 RSV). Strange that one prophet should exhort His people to repentance because God is merciful and another should reproach God for His mercy to people who had repented. But we are just as inconsistent in our own profession and our walk before God in many ways. Both prophets really sought the same end; they both wanted to see righteousness exalted and evil destroyed, and to both of them evil and the Assyrians were one and the same thing. And even so late as this present day men have not learned that evil is not banished from the earth by the mere destruction of one nation which has practised evil things.

So Joel's exhortation here was one to repentance in the face of threatened and imminent disaster. As the chapter is followed down to verses 20 and 22 and onward, it is seen that the exhortation must have been heeded, for here, at last, is the evidence of Divine deliverance, full and complete. The northern invaders are driven into the wilderness

and destroyed. The land recovers from the ravages that it has suffered and brings forth its harvests once again, there is a great restitution of all that was lost, and, most wonderful of all, Israel is converted and turns to the Lord in sincerity (v.27). And the question immediately springs to the mind, has this part of the prophecy had its fulfilment?

As the pages of history are scanned, the answer must be 'No!' Never yet has there been a time in Israel's history when by any stretch of the imagination such things as these could be said to have been true. When at any time has it been that *"I will no more make you a reproach among the nations"* (2.19)? From Joel's time to our own day they have been a reproach and derision. From Joel's time to our own day they have been the spoil of the nations. When was it true of any alien power that has ever invaded the Holy Land that God has revealed Himself to their destruction, led them into the barren wilderness of the Dead Sea and made them a wonder and an astonishment in their end? When has God ever restored to Israel the years that the great ravaging powers have taken from them, restored to them all that they have lost, and given them to eat in plenty and be satisfied? And when, above all things, has it been true that Israel has known and acknowledged that God is dwelling in her midst, and has put her trust in Him, and never again been ashamed (2.26)? The signs of such a wonderful national conversion have never been manifest. Today they are more lacking than ever. The only logical interpretation of this passage is that it refers to a time yet to come. When that fact is realised it is easy to see that these events are the immediate predecessors of the promised pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh spoken of in vv 28-32.

At v.12, therefore, Joel's mind has passed completely out of touch with his own day and its dangers, and entered into the then far distant day of which his own was merely a picture in miniature. From v.18 the verbs are properly in the past tense. *"Then the Lord was jealous for His land, and he had pity on His people ..."* Joel was seeing, in vision, the result of the sincere repentance and pleading with God described in verses 15-17, when the priests, the ministers of the Lord, wept between the porch and the altar, calling upon God to deliver. Evidently, therefore, he saw something that

represented to him the stirring events of the Time of the End, when the greatest invader of all time would be hammering at the portals of the Holy Land *"to take a spoil and to take a prey"*.

It is significant that in v.20 the phrase is *"I will remove far off from you the northern army."* Israel's enemies of Joel's own day – Assyrians, Scythians, Babylonians – came from the north, down the great highway that ran from Carchemish on the Euphrates, through the Plain of Esdraelon, the literal 'Armageddon' of the Bible, down into Egypt. But after the Babylonians there were no more invaders from the north until the Time of the End! Greeks and Romans came from the West; Persians and Saracens from the South; Mongols from the East; Arabs from the South; and in more recent days, Britain from the West. It is not until that mysterious King of Daniel 11, the "King of the North", comes upon the scene, that Israel is again afflicted by a "northern army". That is still future.

If it is true, then, that by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Joel is now seeing in vision the events of the last great conflict in the end of this Age, we do well to stand by his side and endeavour to see the same things in the same way. There is a striking correspondence between this chapter and those of Ezekiel 38-39 and Daniel 11. In each of these passages the invader comes from the north and enters the Holy Land, attempts to ravage the land and its people, is met by the rising up of God Himself, and comes to an ignominious end. The fame of the happening goes out to all the world, and not only Israel, but all men know that Divine power is manifest and supreme at Jerusalem once more. In all three accounts the place of the invader's defeat and destruction is given as between the two seas, the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean. *"I will ... drive him into a parched and desolate land, his front into the eastern sea (Dead Sea) and rear into the western sea (the Mediterranean)"* (Joel 2.20). *"I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the valley of the Travellers, east of the sea"* (Ezek. 39.11). *"He shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and glorious holy mountain, yet he shall come to his end."* (Dan. 11.45).

What is the significance of this three-fold testimony? What are the associations connected with this district round the Dead Sea that it should be chosen by three prophets, each speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to symbolise the overthrow of the last great power to rear itself

against the incoming Kingdom of God?

History records two stirring events of which that district was the scene. One is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham and the other the miraculous deliverance of Jehoshaphat and his people from the Moabites in consequence of their faith in God. Are these the pointers for us? Is this a hint that the destruction of the hosts of Gog and Magog will come about, not by the people of God defending themselves with earthly weapons but in consequence of calm faith in God and His rising up to defend them? That seems to be the consistent testimony of Scripture. *"At that time shall Michael stand up"* says the revealing Angel to Daniel. This second chapter of Joel becomes eloquent in that case. The last great invasion, the last onslaught of the powers of evil against the regathered holy people and the Kingdom of which they are to be the nucleus, will be in the face of a people whose attitude of heart is depicted in 2.12-17.

This is a condition of repentance, supplication and faith that God can and will deliver. If this is so, that is the sign we must look for in the present unhappy so-called "Holy Land". The gathering of the northern host is to "enter the countries" and "overflow and pass over" as Daniel 11 tells us. This may be obvious enough but the *"land of unwallled villages"* of Ezekiel 38, where the people dwell in prosperity and security, is not yet discerned. Evidently there is more water to flow under the bridges before all is ready for the climax that is described in these prophecies. But time is marching on with great strides toward their fulfilment. We must take the lesson of Joel 2.12-17 to heart, and wait for its fulfilment in reality.

Now the prophecy passes on, beyond the great invasion, "Jacob's trouble", and the great deliverance, into those early years of the Kingdom when the Lord will *"reign in Zion, and before His ancients, gloriously"*. *"Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice ... the pastures of the wilderness are green, the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and the vine give their full yield"* (vv.21-22). These verses are reminiscent of Isaiah's "Millennial" passages for they refer to the beginning of that same blessed day. The Time of Trouble is over, the Kingdom has been set up, the presence of the King proclaimed to all and sundry and the law of the Lord is going forth from Zion. Appropriately enough Joel sees all this in terms of the restored and renovated earth for one of the first evidences of "restitution" will be the

great fruitfulness of the earth itself providing food for the soon-to-return multitude of the dead.

Hence comes v.23 "*Be glad O sons of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given the early rain for your vindication. He has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain as before.*" (RSV). The Vulgate turns the first phrase "the early rain for your vindication" into "a teacher of righteousness" and on this basis some have found in this verse a prophecy of the coming of Jesus. In the century prior to the First Advent there was a movement or sect among the Jews that looked for such a "teacher of righteousness" to precede the "Last Day" and the pouring out of the Spirit. The expectation thus aroused did much to cause men to be "in expectation" as stated in the Gospels. But it is not likely that Joel did prophesy thus; his picture is one of the fields and crops, and in this verse he is likening God's treatment of Israel at the End Time to the regular succession of the seasons. The first expression really means "*rain in just measure,*" and the three "rains" after that, the three stages into which the agricultural year was divided. First, in October, came the "rain", the heavy downpour that softened the dry ground, and made ploughing and sowing possible. Then, from December to February, the "former rain", or as the Hebrews called it, "sprinkling rain", continuous light rain that encouraged steady growth. Lastly, in April and May, the "latter rain" that refreshed the ripening wheat and crops.

What a vivid picture of this trial and trouble upon Israel, and its outcome! First, the "heavy rain" of intense trouble that ploughed men's hearts and made possible the sowing of Divine seed; next, the "sprinkling rain" of Divine care and deliverance, and the early processes of Kingdom work calculated to bring Israel into conformity with the new laws and lead them to a condition of harmony with the Kingdom arrangements. Finally, the "latter rain" that finished the ripening work in their hearts and made them full citizens of the Millennial Kingdom. This is a finely-drawn picture of the providence of God descending upon men "*like the gentle rain from heaven*".

What was the result? "*The floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil*" (v.24). Millennial abundance is to follow immediately, and the cry goes out to all the nations "*Ho, everyone that thirsts, come ye to the waters –*

come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55.1). "And I will restore to you" – the precious promise – "*the years that the locust have eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you*" (verse 25). If this "great army" does in fact embrace all Israel's oppressors through the ages, there may be more than a coincidence in this selection of four out of the many species of locusts with which the country was so often afflicted. Moffatt gives the variants in clearest language; he renders "*the lopping, the swarming, the leaping, the devouring locusts.*" The gazam, the "loppers", might very well picture the first great world power, Babylon, that "lopped" Israel from their land, and took them into captivity. The arbeh, the "swarmers" (cankerworm) could equally well picture the overspreading might of Persia, that, although it did restore Judea and Jerusalem, did so only as part of its campaign to subdue and cover all the nations of Western Asia. Quite appropriate is the application of *yelek*, the "leapers" (caterpillar) to Greece, the nation that is pictured in Daniel 8 as a tempestuous he-goat coming against the ram (Persia) with such fury as seemingly not even to touch the ground in his mad onward rush. Of course the epithet of "*devourer*" (the chasil, palmerworm) is very fitting of Rome, the fourth, and, in its derived successors, the greatest of Israel's oppressors. And God is going to restore to Israel all that these have devoured. No wonder that Peter at Pentecost associated this prophecy with the Times of Restitution of all things, spoken of by all the prophets from the beginning.

So Israel will be delivered at the last, and "*eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of ... God ... and never be ashamed.*" (vv 26-27). Joel in his haste has run a little too far forward; in the next verse he has to come back somewhat and talk of the Spirit that is to be poured out upon all flesh. For the present he is absorbed in his vision of the deliverance of Israel, and for a moment has forgotten the rest of the world. The rest of Joel's prophecy is taken up with what happens to them and Israel's mission of conversion, and in order adequately to deal with that aspect of his message, he has to go back and tell of the same time of trouble from the standpoint of the Gentile nations.

(To be continued)

AOH

A STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

20. Chapter 17

vv 1-10; Sin and Forgiveness; Faith and Service. It would be interesting to know just how these topics came to be placed together here. Jesus' use of the millstone metaphor is recorded in Matt 18.6 where it more closely refers to children and in Mark 9.42. There the millstone referred to was so heavy that animals were used to operate them. In Luke the smaller hand operated stone is indicated and 'Little ones' may refer to less mature disciples. This punishment by drowning was used by Romans possibly in Galilee. The use of the word 'woe' indicates how seriously Jesus regarded those who lead others astray or place a stumbling block in another's path. Was He suggesting that a violent death is better than the judgment they will receive?

"Take heed" perhaps indicates that Jesus had noted their willingness to condemn without bringing the fault to the notice of the one who trespassed. Whatever kind of tempting allurements causes offence there is a need for repentance and the one that might have been hurt, must forgive. At sometime in our Christian walk we all hurt others and need repentance and forgiveness. No Christian is exempt from these principles.

Barclay points out that the word 'offences' is translated from '*skandalon*' (from which comes the word 'scandal') that originally meant a bait stick but later referred to a stumbling block. Have we ever twisted a sign post and so sent travellers in the wrong direction or altered the railway points so that someone is shunted into the wrong siding? Is the extent to which we hurt others an index of our faith?

In Matt 18.22 Jesus says that we must forgive till 70 x 7 which is generally interpreted to mean that our forgiveness should be unlimited. It has also been suggested that use of 7 refers to completeness. There is a difference in Mark's record but in both texts the inference is that forgiveness is unlimited.

"*Lord increase our faith*" is a prayer and Jesus appears to give quite a sharp reply. The disciples felt that Jesus' demand to always forgive those who hurt them, was very taxing to their faith but Jesus showed that the right kind of genuine faith however small produces compassion because God rewards our 'little faith' with power to succeed. Jesus' reference to the sycamine tree was probably a black mulberry and He was not advocating damage to the

environment. It is typical eastern figurative language and for those who really trust God, tree or mountain moving are quite small jobs compared with what He can and does do, now, when occasion demands.

Jesus comments about 'unprofitable servants' should not lead us to believe that He approved of the way servants and slaves were treated in the first century. He is using this as an illustration that should help us to realise our place in God's purpose. As Barclay says, we can never put God in our debt and nothing can ever satisfy the claims of love – that is the difference between the Old Testament law and the New. The Old Law is satisfied when its demands are met. Love is to the uttermost and demands that we spend eternity expressing love. Edwin Plumptre suggests that the parable shows that when our outward service is done it is time for personal devotion.

vv 11-19 Ten suffering from leprosy. Jesus was now heading for Jerusalem and he passed between Galilee and Samaria to avoid the latter. Normal caravan routes were through Samaria or Perea. Common tragedy had broken down the artificial barrier which kept Samaritan and Jew apart. These ten men kept together partly for friendship and partly for security. Leprosy as translated in the AV is probably one of several very infectious diseases. It is unlikely to have been leprosy known today. These men kept their distance to speak when they pleaded with Jesus and He respected that and the Mosaic laws governing this kind of disease. But Jesus saw the value in touching such a person (Matt. 8.3) – that would help to heal the mind so badly damaged by society's treatment of them. Jesus wanted God to receive the glory and He was so glad that one, the hated foreigner praised God. Giving thanks is derived from an attitude of mind and from it we can see the interdependence of social life. It is part of the human scene that we all depend on one another and Jesus knew this. The value of Old Testament examination by the priest should be understood in the light of modern practice where infectious diseases are monitored by health and care authorities.

vv 1-10; Sin and Forgiveness; Faith and Service. It would be interesting to know just how these topics came to be placed together here. Jesus' use of the millstone metaphor is recorded in Matt 18.6 where it more closely refers to children and in Mark 9.42. There the millstone referred to was so heavy that animals were used to operate them. In Luke the smaller hand operated stone is indicated and 'Little ones' may refer to less mature disciples. This punishment by drowning was used by Romans possibly in Galilee. The use of the word 'woe' indicates how seriously Jesus regarded those who lead others astray or place a stumbling block in another's path. Was He suggesting that a violent death is better than the judgment they will receive?

"Take heed" perhaps indicates that Jesus had noted their willingness to condemn without bringing the fault to the notice of the one who trespassed. Whatever kind of tempting allurements causes offence there is a need for repentance and the one that might have been hurt, must forgive. At sometime in our Christian walk we all hurt others and need repentance and forgiveness. No Christian is exempt from these principles.

Barclay points out that the word 'offences' is translated from '*skandalon*' (from which comes the word 'scandal') that originally meant a bait stick but later referred to a stumbling block. Have we ever twisted a sign post and so sent travellers in the wrong direction or altered the railway points so that someone is shunted into the wrong siding? Is the extent to which we hurt others an index of our faith?

In Matt 18.22 Jesus says that we must forgive till 70 x 7 which is generally interpreted to mean that our forgiveness should be unlimited. It has also been suggested that use of 7 refers to completeness.

The failure of the Christian Church to win converts for Christ is due in no small measure to the fact that the message and fellowship of the early church has been lost sight of. Our only means of discovering our commission to the world is by an attentive observation to the life and teaching of the early disciples. We cannot preach a social gospel merely because it is fashionable in some sections of the church. We cannot cease to preach the hope of the coming Kingdom merely because it is unfashionable in some sections of the church. We cannot cease to preach the hope of the coming Kingdom merely because it is unusual in the usual

There is a difference in Mark's record but in both texts the inference is that forgiveness is unlimited.

"*Lord increase our faith*" is a prayer and Jesus appears to give quite a sharp reply. The disciples felt that Jesus' demand to always forgive those who hurt them, was very taxing to their faith but Jesus showed that the right kind of genuine faith however small produces compassion because God rewards our 'little faith' with power to succeed. Jesus' reference to the sycamine tree was probably a black mulberry and He was not advocating damage to the environment. It is typical eastern figurative language and for those who really trust God, tree or mountain moving are quite small jobs compared with what He can and does do, now, when occasion demands.

Jesus comments about 'unprofitable servants' should not lead us to believe that He approved of the way servants and slaves were treated in the first century. He is using this as an illustration that should help us to realise our place in God's purpose. As Barclay says, we can never put God in our debt and nothing can ever satisfy the claims of love – that is the difference between the Old Testament law and the New. The Old Law is satisfied when its demands are met. Love is to the uttermost and demands that we spend eternity expressing love. Edwin Plumptre suggests that the parable shows that when our outward service is done it is time for personal devotion.

vv 11-19 Ten suffering from leprosy. Jesus was now heading for Jerusalem and he passed between Galilee and Samaria to avoid the latter. Normal caravan routes were through Samaria or Perea. Common tragedy had broken down the artificial barrier which kept Samaritan and Jew

thought of the Christian church. Our message must be based solely and simply upon the Word of God. There has been no radical change in the condition of men's hearts or of their need since Christ's first advent, nor even since men first lost their fellowship with their Creator as recorded in Genesis 2. The first step in coming to a knowledge of the truth in God is 'getting right with Him.'

Gone from us

Sister Doris Brockis (Sible, Headingham)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

A Dissertation on
Mark 5.22-43

Here was at least one leader of a synagogue who had faith in the saving power of Jesus. To what extent he accepted that the Lord was the Messiah is not possible to assess but at the very least he looked upon Him as a teacher sent from God endowed with the power possessed by the prophets of old. One usually unnoticed word in v.35 reveals that. Whilst Jesus delayed His progress to the child's home in order to comfort the stricken woman whose faith in touching His garment resulted in her healing, some of the servants came to Jairus with the news that the child was dead and added "*Why trouble the Master any further?*" Their use of the term 'Master' implies that Jairus must have showed and shared his faith to his servants so that the whole household were believers in Jesus and His mission, however inadequately or imperfectly they comprehended it. Orthodox Jews though they were, loyal to the laws of Moses, they had a belief in Jesus which set this household apart from most of their fellows and Jesus knew that. So Jairus came, and fell at Jesus' feet. "*My little daughter is at the point of death. I pray, come and lay your hands upon her, that she may be healed, and she shall live*" (Mark 5.23). This is the voice of faith; Jairus knew that Jesus could heal and his faith told him that Jesus would heal; He would by no means be unresponsive to his plea.

So Jesus set out to the house of Jairus, the anxious father doubtless urging Him to accelerate His pace, "*and much people followed him and thronged him*". It is easy to visualise the scene; the crowds that had already witnessed His miracles following in His steps were all agog to witness another. But now there was this delay caused by the woman who, in Mark's rather scornful words, "*had suffered many things of many physicians and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse*". Jairus must have watched the little interlude with increasing anxiety and impatience, eager to get Jesus on the way again, an anxiety that was turned to hopeless anguish when the messengers arrived with the sad news. To heal the grievously sick was one thing; to raise the dead, quite another. For a moment Jairus, for all his faith, must have gone down into the depths. But it was only for a moment. The voice of Jesus, calm, assuring fell upon his ears; "*Be not afraid; only believe*". One is perhaps justified in thinking that

Jairus did believe, for they two went on together to the house. Only Peter, James and John, were with them; Jesus had sent the crowd away. What He was going to do now was for the family and the household only. By the time He arrived at the house the professional mourners were in full cry. It was the custom among the higher classes of the people to enlist the services of these "professionals" to initiate and lead what amounted to an organised ritual expression of grief; anything less would be construed as an attitude of indifference and disrespect to the departed. So when Jesus entered the house, "*he saw the tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly*" (v.38). He must have stood a moment, regarding them calmly, and then asked quietly "*Why do you make this tumult and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping. And they laughed at him.*" They, the professionals, ought to know a dead body when they saw one. What did this wandering prophet know about death? Let Him go on with His healing of the sick and casting out of demons, services He could render to the living. After death, which ended all things, there was nothing even He could do. So they derided Him and went back to the weeping and wailing for which they had been engaged. But, all unknowingly, they were in the presence of One who had power over death, and could infuse new life into the mortal frame from which the spirit of life had departed. They could only weep and wail over the lifeless body; here was One who could restore life to it. "*I am the resurrection and the life*" He said on another occasion. "*He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die*" (John 11.25-26 RSV). That can only become a reality when there is true belief in and acceptance of Christ and that involves the conscious giving and surrender of oneself to Christ. This child had not yet come to that point; neither was the life Jesus was about to give her the eternal life which is spoken about in that passage in John's Gospel. All that Jesus could and would do at this moment was to give back to the child the measure of human life she had possessed. One day she must inevitably pass into the grave to await the time when "*all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth*" (John 5.28). Then she will share in that full and final opportunity to believe, and so enter

into everlasting life. So this revival of the little daughter of Jairus was in no sense a resurrection; it was resuscitation to the life she had formerly enjoyed.

Now Jesus turned, and with an imperative gesture silenced the wailing mourners and ushered them out of the house. There was a great quiet, a quiet in which He led the girl's parents into the room where she was lying, white and still. He looked down at her compassionately, the others waiting, wondering, hoping, fearing. Moving forward, He took her by the hand, saying as He did so "Talitha cumi", which is an Aramaic expression meaning "Little girl, arise". It is said to be the expression normally used in that day for a mother to arouse her sleeping child in the morning. "Little girl, arise." Straightway, says Mark, using his favourite word, she opened her eyes, sat up, and got to her feet. The faith of her father, tested to the extreme, was honoured at the last. One likes to think that this man and perhaps the child also were among those hundred and twenty disciples who gathered immediately after the Resurrection to form the nucleus of the Christian Church.

* * * * *

The precise nature of what was undoubtedly a miraculous act is worthy of some consideration. The word used for "sleeping" in this account is one that in the New Testament is never used to indicate death; always to denote natural sleep. It is *atheuso*. The word which is used in the story of Lazarus "Our friend Lazarus sleeps; I go that I may awake him out of sleep" is *koimao*, which is often used as a synonym for death beside its normal meaning of sleep. Thus Acts 13.36 "David fell on sleep"; 1 Cor. 15.20 "Christ the first fruits of them that slept"; 1 Thess. 4.14 "Them that sleep in Jesus" are all from *koimao*. It is this latter word which passed into Latin as *coemeterium*, from which we get our English word cemetery – place of sleep. It may be debatable whether the Gospel story as it stands justifies the common impression that the girl was actually dead. Jesus Himself said "the maid is not dead, but sleeps". It could be that she was in some kind of trance or coma and that our Lord awakened her out of it and at the same time cured the disease or abnormality that had occasioned it. The friends and neighbours, convinced that the girl was dead, would obviously have concluded that she had been raised again from the death state and would not

have believed anything else. Hence Jesus cautioned them not to make the incident generally known, a caution they promptly rejected. Whatever be the truth of the matter, of course, it was equally a miracle. Luke, a physician, says (Luke 8.53-55) that "*her spirit (pneuma – breath) came again*" and records the expression "*knowing that she was dead*" (*apathnesko* – literal death). From this it could be argued that in fact the maid had died immediately before Jesus arrived and was in a condition analogous to modern cases that have died in the medical sense and have been revived by the "kiss of life" and similar methods. This might very well be a correct reconstruction of the incident; it is impossible to be dogmatic, for the vagaries of successive copying and translations from the original manuscript tend to blur and distort details from which closer accuracy could be attained. The chief point is the apparent stress placed by Jesus on the assurance "she is not dead (*apothnesko*) but sleeps" (*katheudo*). This phrase is preserved in exactly the same wording in all three gospels, indicating that it was for some reason or other a well-remembered declaration. It is evident that Jesus intended something different from the parallel case of Lazarus, of whom He said "Our friend Lazarus sleeps" (*koimaomai*, used either of sleep or of death in its aspect of a sleep because it ended by a resurrection) but when His disciples took Him literally "then said he to them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (*apothnesko*, John 11.11-14). He declared definitely that Lazarus was dead and equally definitely that the maid was not. Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days and corruption had set in (John 11.39). The miracle on that occasion involved the reconstruction or recreation of living organic matter in addition to infusing the spirit or breath of life, almost completely analogous to the Genesis account of the creation of Adam. In the case of the maid it would seem that whether trance, coma or "medical death" the practical effect was the same. It might have been a coma that would eventually have ended in death; it might be that, medically speaking, modern forms of artificial respiration would have restored her to consciousness anyway. In point of fact it was the power exercised by Jesus which caused the vital organs, presumably as yet undamaged, to resume their functions. It must be remembered that logically the disease, whatever it was, from which

the child suffered to cause this result, was cured at the same time, so there can be no doubt that we have here a miracle. The expression "*knowing that she was dead*" has little weight either way. "Knowing" is *oidia* from *eidon*, a derivative of *horao*, and means knowing only in the sense of perceiving or seeing for oneself. Positive and accurate knowledge is rather indicated by *ginosko*, which is a different word altogether. The bystanders "*laughed him to scorn, perceiving that she was dead*" – in face of what was to them the apparent fact, but their knowledge was based only on the outward appearance. Jesus did not himself endorse their impression and in fact in so many words contradicted it. When all is said and done it remains that Jesus used two directly opposite expressions in respect of this girl and of Lazarus. Of one He said "She is not dead"; of the other "Lazarus is dead". Perhaps the real point lies in the shade of meaning inherent in the word here rendered "dead" a meaning that does not come out in English. *Apothnesko* is derived from roots that include the idea of complete cutting off or separation, of "dying out" of corruption or rotting away, as though it indicates death indeed with no possibility of recovery from the standpoint of

human knowledge. The dying out or rotting away of a wheat grain in the ground before giving rise to new life, and the state of a withered tree in which life has become extinct and the wood rots away are instances in the New Testament where this word is employed. The condition of Lazarus in whom the dissolving processes had already begun was correctly described by the word; that of the child, whether in coma or true death, because the state was so recent and corruption had not begun, was not so described. Hence Jesus, mindful also, perhaps, of the grief of the parents, could justly use the softer word *katheudo*, sleep, knowing that at once He was going to raise her from that sleep. So, in the combination of the two incidents He left a demonstration for after times that whether the physical body remained intact or not, whether the mortal frame had or had not "returned to its earth", Divine power is equal to the occasion and can bring about restoration. The basis of the Christian faith is that the future life, the life of the ages, can come only by means of a resurrection from the dead. In these stories is enshrined the guarantee that Divine power can and will achieve that resurrection.

AOH

CHRISTMAS TIME

Once more we approach that period of the year when so many celebrate in various ways the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. For the majority it will be an opportunity (the cynics will say 'an excuse') to imbibe a lot of food and drink, to have a jolly time. Many will think little of the baby whose birthday they celebrate. And the puritans will remind us again that Jesus wasn't born at this time of year anyway. I feel almost glad that my grandfather didn't celebrate the anniversary of his birth on the correct day until he reached 65 years. Some have a cake in honour of Jesus and sing 'Happy Birthday'. Perhaps they remember that He had a second, third and fourth birthday too. The Bible doesn't record everything about Jesus. Do we imagine He never laughed. Philips' translated Jesus once saying, "We

played at weddings for you but you wouldn't dance, and we played at funerals for you and you wouldn't cry". So can thoughtful Christians enjoy this festival? Are they being 'worldly' to indulge in such 'festivities'. As with so many questions in the Christian life, each must answer at the bar of his or her own conscience. As with other activities, it is really a matter of whether we can do this 'with the Lord' – are we comfortable in doing everything with Him? Does He share our carol singing and family reunions? Do we decorate our home for Him? Or do we forget Him and the starving millions around the world, as we rock in to our feasts? We wish you a very happy Christmas and a New Year spent with the Master.

"It is these who follow the Lamb wherever He goes." (Rev. 14.4 RSV). Christianity is not acting according to the letter of certain rules and regulations. It is following a living Christ; walking as He walked; doing as He did; imitating His

example in all things. This is Christian movement, Christian action. It is keeping the eye fixed upon Jesus and having the features, traits and lineaments of His character imprinted on our new nature and reproduced in our life and ways.

PRAYERS WITHOUT WORDS

*A meditation on
Romans 8.18-27*

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought."

It is as necessary for the Christian to pray as for a child to prattle to its parents. And it is as vitally important for the child of God to make known its wants as for the human child. In consequence of this need to communicate with his Father, the Christian is reminded that he may "pray without ceasing" and that while watching and working, he may take time off from service to go aside to pray. But just as an observant mother will know, at times, what the unspoken desire of her child is (or will be) so there are occasions when our moods are of more moment than our words. As there may be words without prayer, so contrariwise there may be prayer without words and it is to the Christian's advantage that the Father of love and compassion understands more perfectly than any man or woman, the unspoken (and sometimes unspeakable) desires of His child.

The devout Christian often prays most deeply when he does not speak at all. Occasions arise from time to time when he is far too full for words. Like the dull moving of deep waters "too full for sound or foam" the Christian's heart is deeply moved, and it is the very depths and fulness of these hidden tides which make his lips so hopelessly inadequate to utter all he feels. There is much truth and fitness in the poet's expressive words:-

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.

This inability to give utterance to the deep things of the spirit is not just the same thing as the handicap of a small vocabulary. It is not really the difficulty of the tongue-tied or those who find it difficult to express their thoughts through shyness. The lips of ordinary folk may find it difficult to formulate prayer. Practice may make perfect. The

human metal may not have been refined or be able to take literary polish. Quickness of thought and nervousness may make the framing of prayer impossible. Yet these inhibitions do not stop a soul praying in its own way. The downcast eyes, the upraised touching hands, the reverential posture may say more than a host of words. When personality is deep and emotional desire is strong and the lips are trained ordinarily to express the rising or falling mood, it will be the deep swell of some more acute crisis that seals the lips, and bars the outward expression of the worded prayer.

These deep-felt motions may come late or early in the Christian life. Indeed, it may be in such a storm that the spiritual life of a Christian begins. Words may be few – or absent because the issues are so great. There is a prayer where words are few, when penitence first stirs the sinful heart. Perhaps it needs the smiting hand upon the breast to emphasise the unuttered pathetic plea. Or if lips speak but seven words they may contain more prayer than reams of polished phrases. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is a prayer of fundamental depth. It comes from the deep places of an unregenerate but humbled heart and mounts up to the high courts of Heaven. The God of all love and grace, the God of heaven and earth, bends down to hear that prayer, while angels of light rejoice together as they hear the sinner's prayer. Ten thousand words could say no more at such a time than ten mere syllables have said. It is not the ample articulation of the lips, but the inward chastening of the heart which best expresses the deep inner need. A groan, a sigh, a tear, has greater worth than all the verbiage of a lexicon.

Provision has been made by God to meet that need. A Saviour and a sacrifice for sin stand ready to move at its call. No cry, however short, can escape the human heart for relief from sin that will go unheard, or unanswered. Thank God for the sinner's right to speed his penitential call right through to the courts of heaven, not because it is a galaxy of words, but because it is true prayer, and voices his intense needs. Most Christians may look back to that supreme moment at the penitential crisis of their lives and call to mind the great relief when contact with the Lamb of God was made. No spate of words, but precious blood, gave solace in

the deep distress. The wordless prayer of which we write lies further on the Christian's path. It is the token of maturity and rich growth in grace. It tells of days and years of God's creative work in tempering and refining the metal of the inner self. It speaks of yearnings and desires, fostered by God that reach up and out for holiness and truth. It shows developed sensitivity to the "absolutes" – to utter sinfulness and complete sinlessness. It has grown to hate the one and love the other. Loathsome sin is now more loathsome still; and holiness has become an increasing delight. What cause can seal the lips and tie the tongues of Christians so far grown in grace? Ought they not in weal or woe to find cause enough to pray and praise with heart and voice? Why should the lips of saints at any time fail to voice forth their prayer or praise? It is the strong flow of the deeper tides within the heart that seals the lips. At times when the good gifts of God have been profuse and ample store of grace has stirred the depths, the very volume of the gratitude may be too deep to find expression other than in the words "thank God, thank God, thank God". The repetition of the two short words may wing more praise to heaven than strings of loftier sounds and God will know how much of gratitude is meant.

More frequently the deep tides flow when other causes operate. More often it is sin and sorrow which stirs the depths. We may have listened to creation's groans; we may have felt our lack of strength to ease or aid when suffering called, and this, reacting back upon our own tense heart, has loosed wild notions and desires too deep for words.

This is the sphere the Apostle's words explore. Creation groans in travail to be set free. Creation is bound in chains of vanity – vain hopes, vain works and vain pursuits. The grace-grown Christian views the havoc of human sin where countless thousands mourn. He sees aggression down the years, ride roughshod and unchecked, leaving behind it trails of blood and broken hearts. He sees the profiteer take his filthy gains while starving children cry for bread. He sees the sanctity of wedlock and home dishonoured; he sees wealth squandered in gambling and drink; he sees the bloom of health fade as disease saps the strength. He sees the whole world treading its dead-end trails. He sees pompous little men rise to power only to fall again. He sees men barter life for some

small wealth, some little pedestal, some tawdry name, and as, for ages, fathers did, so children do today. The dictum of the ancient sage upon their pointless pursuits was that it was vanity through and through. "*Vanity of vanities, it is all vanity.*" And vanity it is and was from morn till night, for rich and poor, while ages come and go. No child of God can see the naked world and be unmoved. He knows the whole creation had been committed to this vain life, by Divine intent. He knows creation groans in pain and anguish day and night, but never finds relief. He witnesses the frustration and futility of universal life, and knows that no man can emancipate himself, much less his kin. He knows relief will come some day – some better day – but it is today that often weighs upon his heart! He knows that he and other sympathetic souls must stand idly by and only watch as wild humanity grows wilder still. He hears their deep universal groan, and as they groan, he does the same. "Oh if only something could be done! If only men could hear and turn away from sin" he groans within himself. Men, without hope, groan and groan again – he cannot help but do the same, though hope lives in his breast. "... *not only they but ourselves also ... groan within ourselves waiting for ... redemption*" (Rom. 8.23).

No man with the "Christ" spirit in his heart can hear this universal groan without groaning too. And when the spirit is of ample growth, the groaning will be ample too. His growth in Christ will be the measure of his sympathy for a world chain-bound in sin. The pity for Jerusalem that swept the Master's heart was a like pity that will often weep over a world, self-doomed to death. The Christian who is much grown like Jesus will be much touched, like him, with human woe. It thus befalls that every convulsive pang this sad world feels sends sympathetic pain into the Christ-like heart, and wrings from it both sigh and groan. But the Christian sufferer is helped by hope – that blessed hope – that deliverance one day will come. Hope salves the chafed spirit and helps him wait with more patience for that better day. Expectation relieves the acute tension of the strain, but expectation is not redemption nor release. What we long for has not come. It is, as yet, but a sure hope. At most this hope brings an easing to the aching heart but leaves it still to groan. But we have other help at hand. "*Likewise the spirit also helps*" us in

our lack of strength. It helps the Christian when his heart is, over-wrought with sympathy and pain, too full for words or speech. It helps him when some acute spasm of world distress wrings from him sigh or groan. And when that sigh or groan escapes, He who has trod this path before, accepts it as a prayer. The Eye that never sleeps will read the anguish of his soul and understands the language of these wordless sighs. He knows the sorrows of the world more deeply than His followers do. He tasted their sorrows to the point of death in order to become a sympathetic High Priest. He came to earth to cause men to know that God was sympathetic too. From the beginning of sin's awful reign God's sympathy for sinful men began to operate. The spirit of compassion was manifested to Mother Eve. This Spirit of compassion was the Spirit of the Oath bound Covenant. That same Spirit of the Covenant under-lay the gift, by God, of His dear Son. And it was the compassion expressed in that Covenant which took Jesus to His death. It is the same spirit of that Covenant, the desire to bless that throbs in every Christian heart. This is the Holy Spirit of the Living God – it is the Spirit of His Christ. It dwelt without measure in our blessed Lord. It dwells in varying degrees in every other child of God. It emanates from God and it enters into us. From this almighty fund of sympathy comes our help in time of need. It helps us when we hear the world's deep groans. It helps us when we see its sinful plight, it smoothes for us the difficulty of "desiring to bless". It "*helps our infirmities*" – our 'asthenia' – our lack of strength, our inability, when the skill of our hands is unequal to 'desire of our heart'. This weakness is what makes us groan, and say with warmth, beneath our breath "If only I knew what to do or how to help them in their sore distress." At such times, in such a state, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." We yearn to bless but we are too inexperienced to bless. We desire to bless, but we have no power with which to bless. The pent-up sigh, the unspoken groan tells what we would do, if hand and heart could work in step. And from its lofty throne above the eye that searches every heart takes note of what it sees, and He who has the power to bless looks down and says, "That child of mine desires to bless; he has in him the spirit of my purposes. He only needs to bide my time. I see at times the tension of his soul – I hear again the groaning of his heart. This spirit of

compassion is what I want to see. This anguish of soul endears him to my heart. It compensates for all his weaknesses."

Thus the falling tear, the aching heart, the stifled groan that sees the world's distress, becomes a prayer of greater worth than ten thousand ostentatious words. The spirit of compassion thus evinced wins the Divine acceptance for the child – it makes intercession for His saints in accordance with His Will. 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 heartstrings quiver? What "hopeful" saint can see the "hopeless" mass, and not yearn for its release.

This is a day, beloved in the Lord, when growth in Christ-likeness may go on apace. The 'Image of His Son' may be wrought within at speed. The circumstances are full ripe for the Spirit of God – the Spirit of His Covenant – to work deep and strong. Compassion for a sinful world can transform the wakeful heart. He who understands His purpose may co-operate with God. The compassion of every soul should be white hot then the hammer of discipline and anvil of sorrow will do the rest. May God speed this work of Grace, for the day of Redemption draws nigh.

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. 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.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech,
That infant lips can try;
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gate of death;
He enters heaven with prayer.

J. Montgomery

TH

THE COVENANTS

2. Covenant at Sinai

A Study of one of the most important Bible teachings

The teaching of 'The Covenants' is important because it is an integral part of Salvation. There are frequent references to it in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. Covenants are about relationships and the most important covenants in the Bible are about the relationship between God and His people. They are a key to understanding the Bible and God's purpose for mankind. Covenants are the vehicles of God's grace. The covenant that God made with Israel through Moses at Sinai was one of the most important. In a sense it was a revival of the relationship God had with His friends the Patriarchs of Israel but we have much more detail about it.

At sometime during the centuries after the Patriarchs fell asleep in Egypt their children multiplied extraordinarily. The host country became very apprehensive of Jacob's descendants because in war they might be disloyal to Egypt. So they made them slaves and Israel became subservient to Egyptian culture. The publication of laws was vital to restore the Patriarchal faith and were inevitable in view of Israel's numerical growth. Laws are needed for safety and security. They provide predictability between individuals and encourage the development of a national conscience. Laws taught Israel to do God's will and this pointed them in the direction of learning to express God's love. The Ten Commandments are, as Daniel Seagren wrote, 'Love Carved in Stone'. As the people of God, Israel's worship and service for Him would necessarily dominate their culture. But their God also demanded a right relationship between individuals. In this respect their laws were much in advance of anything known in human society before this. The Law Covenant made at the holy mount was a logical step in their flight to freedom. Paul simply says, *"the law was added because of transgression till the promised offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was ordained through angels by a mediator"* (Gal. 3.19 RSV). That offspring, our Lord Jesus Christ, was to demonstrate and teach that the underlying principle of any law must be love. Moses was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai, the 'go-between' betwixt God and Israel. He was one of the greatest men that has ever lived. He took

the Law from God to Israel and taught them how to obey it. He led the nation from Goshen in Egypt to the borders of the Land of the Promise. But more than anything else, he met with God on the Holy Mountain, spoke with God 'face to face,' and knew more of the Divine character than anyone else till Jesus arrived. This great man interceded before God on behalf of two million people – and on behalf of a lonely, sick sister.

The essence of the covenant that was to come was enshrined in God's words to Moses in Egypt before the Passover escape. *"I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgments. I will take you as my people and I will be your God"* (Exodus 6.6-7 RSV). This was Israel's salvation and the covenant language is incorporated into it. All through the ages basic Bible teaching has been Yahweh (Father to Jesus and His followers) teaching His redeemed people what it meant to have Him as their God and His people receiving that salvation through repentance from sin and their pursuit of holiness. Any kind of idolatry and schism is rebellion against God and is breaking the covenant. The consequences of idolatry have been seen in every century among all groups of God's people. To the extent that we turn our back on God's people we turn our back upon God.

The covenant was made at Sinai, wherever that was. Modern research tends to place it in Arabia south east of what is now called the Sinai peninsula. Its location makes little difference to believers now. Whether it will ever become a rallying point for the Israel of the future is another matter. What happened there is the important issue. The great act of worship in the making of the covenant begins in Exodus 19.5, 6 *"Now therefore if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* These words were to be echoed by Peter in his first letter (1 Peter 2.9). Israel as a nation were to be the kings in God's kingdom and the priests interceding on behalf of all mankind.

Then come the 'ten words' of the covenant in Exodus 20. The Law Covenant's ten commandments provide the basis of law in all the world and the principles of ethical judgment. Here too was the precursor of the altruism of Jesus in the Gospels and observance of these rules brings stability and adhesions in 'civilised' countries. Various laws of special significance to the covenant follow.

In chapter 24 the covenant ceremony is described in sufficient details to make it recognisable as the 'cutting of the covenant'. Half the blood of the sacrifice was thrown over the altar, symbolically representative of God (but not in the idolatrous sense) and half the blood was thrown over the people. The people again affirmed that they would be obedient to the words of the covenant that Moses read to them. It was a wonderfully awesome and solemn occasion. The writer to the Hebrews referred to it in 12.18-24. We may not have a Bible mandate for this kind of ceremony on Earth or expect to see spectacular material evidence of the presence of our God but in our worship we must recognise His presence, that is felt with a wonderful sense of awe. The LORD of Heaven and Earth is unchanged. All that went on at Sinai on that stupendous occasion described in Exodus is now translated into a 'heavenly' experience and is no less real.

In the chapters 25 -30 we read of how the approach to God through the work of the priesthood in Israel pictured the work of Christ and His Church in bringing salvation to mankind. Not everyone finds detailed and complex study of the tabernacle and the priesthood fascinating but it is well to remember that the process outlined there, pictures the reality of holiness that we find in Christ. That principle of holiness unto the LORD through Jesus Christ has often been forgotten in spite of the ceremonial trappings of a medieval Church which appeared to imitate the now obsolete ritual of Israel. More recently, concentration on understanding God's Word, which is very important, has obscured the objective of holiness. Do we forget that holiness is one of our objectives, just as it was God's work in the tabernacle. Israel received then but a token of God's cleansing power in Christ. Children of God experience now the reality of that cleansing. Our relationship with our holy God through the Covenant must dominate our

lives. Moses discovered that on the Mount as he climbed again to intercede on behalf of a rebellious people.

It seems incredible to us perhaps that after the wonderful ceremony in making the covenant, Israel should so readily and flagrantly disobey the first two commandments by making a golden calf. Even more shocking perhaps was that Aaron, the man who assisted Moses, and who was so soon to become High Priest in 'holiness unto the Lord', should be the perpetrator of this terrible crime. Yet was he really so different from us? How soon after a 'mountain top' experience in worship with God's people do we transgress by wrong thoughts, words and actions. Let us ponder our own lives as we read that account again in Exodus 34. The problem is that the Devil and his world quickly affect our sinful nature as they did Israel so soon after they had left the presence of God – but they had not left behind the memories of a pagan nation.

So wearily Moses climbed the mountain to plead on Israel's behalf, in willingness to be obliterated himself if it could save God's people. Like another Mediator, he carried the load of his people's sin. He pleaded not only that God would spare that sinful nation, but that His presence would go with them. And God heard and relented. But that was not all, for Moses wanted to see God's glory and that mighty privilege was given. Moses discovered God's real glory was His wonderful compassion and covenant love. God is unswerving in His infinite compassion. When Moses returned to the camp a second time his face shone because of the physical glory that he had seen. More importantly he had discovered the beauty of God's character and that too remained with that wonderful man for the rest of his life. Our Bible philosopher would tell us that Moses was not under the Law covenant because he was its mediator. That may be so, but what was important was that the spirit of the covenant, may be of that earlier version to Abraham, was the driving force of his life.

The most important aspect of this extraordinary story is that God was making a relationship with His people. That is the most important aspect of our own lives, and we can never be kings and priests for Him without our relationship with God.

DN

AFTER THE FLOOD

1. The Subsiding of the Waters

A little group stood on steeply rising ground, looking down at the wide plain below. From where they stood, a thousand feet above sea level, they could see the far horizon forty miles away; in between, there stretched a desolate expanse of mud. No trees, no grass, no movement and no living thing; just mud. Behind them, higher up the mountain-side, the trees still grew, clothing the rocky crags with green verdure. Up there, they knew, the birds still sang and flitted to and fro between the branches. A rushing stream, the one which today men call the Changulak, tumbled down the gorge leading from the mountains and flowed placidly across the plain to lose itself in the distant marshes. Right on the horizon they could just discern the sunlight glinting on the waters of a mighty river. Hiddekel it was called in the early days although now it is known by its modern name of Tigris, and they looked again across that wide expanse of mud and were silent.

The older man turned to his three younger companions. The four women, standing a little apart, listened. "My sons, the Most High God has delivered us from the evil world in which we were born and have lived our lives, He has broken the tyranny of those evil powers that have oppressed all men with so terrible an oppression and seduced them into sin so that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil, and that continually. Year in, year out, we told them that the judgment of God must surely come if they did not repent, but they heeded not. They went on with their eating and drinking, their planting and building, their marrying and giving in marriage, until the Flood came and took them all away, and we only are left". His gaze wandered over the distant horizon, "And now, my sons, it is our mission to build a new world in this earth which has been swept clean by that judgment. Never more will you be oppressed by the powers of evil. They lie, with all their cities and all their works, under the sand and silt that this great Flood has carried in its wake to cover the world we knew. We shall see that world no more. The Most High has given us a new earth, a clean earth, an earth freed from evil, that you and your children may serve Him in obedience and righteousness the days of your lives and become fathers of a race that will fulfil the wise

and gracious purposes of our God". He looked again at the three young men and their wives, intently following his every word. "See then that you keep His covenant and obey His laws, for He has promised that He will no more destroy the earth with a flood; neither will He again blot out all flesh as He has done. But if your children depart from His ways, then His judgments will come upon them by famine, and by pestilence, and by the beasts of the earth, for no man can escape His justice. Teach them therefore that they serve the Most High all their days, that they train their children likewise; so shall it be well with them and theirs".

One of the other men – the serious, thoughtful looking one, looked out again across the barren plain. "How shall we fare for food? Nothing will ever grow in this inhospitable waste? Our stores will last us a little longer, but after that ...?" His eyes sought his father's face. Noah looked at his eldest son affectionately. "The birds of the air and the winds of heaven will bring the seeds from the mountains. The green grass will spring forth and the trees will grow. It will not be this year and it will not be next; for many years to come we must find our homes in the mountains and eat that which the mountains bring forth. Here must your children be born and here grow to manhood. But the day will come when that wide plain will be golden with corn ready for harvest. There will your children's children build cities and learn the arts and crafts you knew in the world that has passed away. There will they worship God in spirit and in truth and serve him in sincerity." A shadow passed across his face. "Whether sin will invade again I do not know, for sin is subtle and the power of the Evil One is great". But the shadow passed and in his eyes there gleamed the vision of the prophet; he looked again at his eldest son. "But this I know, for this I have seen in the visions of the night." His gaze now was directed at the far horizon, beyond the distant shining river. "I see, beyond there, a city, and in that city a man of your seed, a man to whom God comes as He came to me, a man in whom the next great step in His mighty purpose is to be taken. As we, my sons" and now his gaze included them all "are called upon to step out in faith to a new world, knowing not whither we go, to carry forward the Divine purpose, so will he be called to leave behind

the land in which he will be born. He will go out in faith to a land that God will show him, that through his seed all nations of the earth may be blessed. I know not what the future holds of good or of evil", and again his eyes grew sombre, "but this I know, that it shall be well with them that fear God".

There was a long silence. At last the old man turned his back upon the plain below and faced the dark gorge leading up into the mountains. Up there, in the distance, lay a long, black shape, the great-enclosed vessel in which the eight had taken refuge to escape the flood-waters. It lay now, deserted, where the mountains had trapped it when the waters began to recede, mute witness to the faith of those who alone of all the world had heeded the signs of the times. They obeyed their Lord's injunction to flee the judgment that had to come upon the corrupt and fast dying race. He took a step towards it. "Come with me; we must renew our promise of loyalty to the Most High, with offerings for His acceptance, that this day of deliverance be a day to remember as long as we shall live." Silently, they followed, picking their way among the rugged rocks, climbing steadily upward until they reached the place where they would meet with God.

* * * * *

Some such scene as that must certainly have been enacted in the day that Noah and his family emerged from the Ark to face a world devastated. It must have been a harrowing experience. Everything they knew in life had been swept away; even the landscape had changed. They could not have known whether they were near their former haunts or in a different part of the world altogether. If the deductions to be outlined hereafter are anywhere near the truth they were probably not too far away from their former home; perhaps within five hundred miles or so. Even so the aftermath of the Flood would have presented so different a scene that they might as well have been on another planet. It is usually assumed that the antediluvian world was more or less in the vicinity of present-day Iraq simply because that is the scene of the earliest recognisable peoples, those of Abraham's day, in the Book of Genesis. There is however a logical basis for the conclusion. The early chapters of Genesis bear internal evidence of having been committed to writing in Sumer not later than the Early Dynastic period, about six centuries before Abraham. The geographical indications appertaining to the Garden of Eden story are those

appropriate to that period. The historian of those days visualised the site of Eden as an extension of their own plain of Shinar (Sumerian "Edinu") but lower down the river, halfway along what later became the Persian Gulf. On this basis the antediluvian world could be conceived as extending over all the low-lying eastern half of Arabia as well as into the later plain of Shinar (Iraq) all of which could have been overrun by the Flood. But the whole of this one-time fertile parkland was now covered with thirty to sixty feet of sand, clay and gravel, and all the works of man were buried beneath forever. Of all the theories which have been advanced to explain the cause of the Flood, the one which best fits the Bible account, the Sumerian legends which come from the same sources as the Bible, and the geological evidences on site which still remain, is that the whole area of the Persian Gulf, from southern Arabia to northern Iraq, was swept by a tsunami, (more commonly called a tidal wave), of colossal proportions, coming in from the Indian Ocean, its originating force continuing so long that the water banked up in Iraq for five months before it began to recede. The immediate cause of such a tidal wave could have been, and probably was, the sudden descent upon earth at the poles of stupendous masses of water vapour and minute ice crystals. This according to many geologists from Leibnitz (1690) until the present day, had been thrown up in prehistoric igneous ages, circulated at high altitudes with gradually decreasing momentum, until gravity at length overcame that centrifugal force and they crashed on to the earth. Modern orbiting satellites do so today when they have run their course. The result would be a massive tidal wave originating at the poles and travelling across the ocean in every, direction. The magnitude of a wave generated by such a happening cannot be estimated, but in the past two centuries waves started by submarine earthquakes or volcanic eruptions have travelled thousands of miles and flooded the land to depths of a hundred feet. The known record is one that devastated a section of north-eastern Siberia in the 18th century; the water was 210 feet high when it crashed over the coast. It can be calculated that waves of this nature, starting in the Antarctic regions and reinforced for the Biblical forty days by the continuing descent of the "waters above the firmament" to which the Bible itself refers, could have sent a 100 foot wave up the

Persian Gulf at 60 miles an hour, devastating the entire area over a terrain 600 miles wide, and bank up steadily in Iraq until the water was some 1000 to 1500 feet deep before it began to subside. Something like this might well have been the situation that faced Noah and his family in those stressful days. Just as there have been theories as to the cause of the Flood, so through the ages there have been many claims made as to the identity of the mountain at which the Ark came to rest. The most familiar one to western peoples is Ararat in north-eastern Turkey; this, legend had its rise about the 13th century AD and was originated by the Armenian church in that area, but it rests upon no other basis and Ararat is certainly not the mountain. From the First Advent until then, and to the present as far as the Eastern churches and the Moslem faith are concerned, the claim is for Mount Judi, in southern Turkey. This was almost certainly a legend started by the captive Israelites of the Ten Tribes settled there by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC. But both the Bible and Sumerian legend, which are both much nearer to the event, place it in or near the Sumerian plain in which the sons of Noah afterwards settled – a much more likely and logical location. Reasons have been given previously in the BSM for identifying the mountain of the Ark with Mount Anaran (Lat. 33N. Long. 47E), east of Babylon, on the edge of the Zagros mountains bordering the plain. This was the "Mount of the East," sacred mountain of Sumerians and Babylonians, described in their ceremonial hymns of praise. Its position indicated by the orientation of the temple-towers in their two sacred cities of Babylon and Nippur, both of which point directly to Anaran, and physically so situated as to be suited in every respect to be the place where the Ark was stranded by the subsiding waters. There is every probability, that this is the mountain described by Sumerian legend; it is within the ancient land of Urartu (Biblical Ararat) as demanded by Genesis. Now at this end of the 20th century comes another line of testimony which may well assist in confirming that it was indeed in this area that Noah and his family first set foot on their new domain. There was a flurry of archeological research commencing in 1978, connected with the Iraq Government's River Diyala irrigation project, which created a great lake where early remains are known to lie. This as revealed in the vicinity of Mount Anaran, hitherto unexplored

village sites so early that they could well be the first to be instituted after the Flood. Before this the earliest evidences of human habitation in the world have been conceded by the best authorities to be at Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahir in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan, discovered and excavated by Braidwood and Howe in 1948-51. Now here on the mountain slopes between Anaran and the River Diyala there are similar villages, some of which are as old or older than Jarmo. When all that can be ascertained about these ancient sites have been published it may well be a reasonable conclusion that this is where life started again after the Flood.

This series is intended to bring together in proper relation all that the Scriptures have to say – admittedly very little – about that obscure period between Noah and Abraham. Such historical records of the period the sands of Iraq have yielded up during the last century, so these present findings are of more than casual interest. Here, perhaps, are the remains of those first villages in which the sons of Noah and their children lived after the Flood. The subsidence of the waters must have seemed a slow process. If Chap. 8.14 is to be taken literally it means that the occupants of the Ark remained inside for seven months watching the waters subside to the level of the plain. From their position, say a thousand feet up on the mountainside, the water's edge in the vicinity of Mount Anaran would then be at least thirty miles away, almost out of sight. Perhaps, that is the meaning of the rather cryptic statement that on the first day of the first month the "face of the ground was dry" but that not until fifty-seven days later, on the twenty-seventh day of the second month, was the "earth dried" (Chap. 8.13-14). At a constant rate of fall the water's edge on the first day of the first month would have been about ten or eleven miles from the stranded Ark, only halfway to the visible horizon. "The face of the ground was dry" in v.13 is "panim adamuh charab" meaning that the surface of the fields was dried, which in such case could mean the immediate vicinity of the Ark. "The earth was dried" in v.14 is "erets yabesh", meaning that the earth or the land was destitute of water. Only when there was no visible sign of water over the land would Noah be sure that the Flood was gone; only then in obedience to the Lord's command did he come out. There remained the mud. The water had gone, back to the ocean, but it had left behind a blanket of clay, sand and gravel

had left behind a blanket of clay, sand and gravel much of which had been scooped up from the sea-bed – and salt! Not infrequently an extra high tide floods low lying farmland bordering the seas of this country; the water drains away in a week or so but the salt it leaves behind renders the land unusable sometimes for a year or more. This Flood lasted over twelve months and must have rendered the land completely sterile for decades or even centuries before rain and the annual river floods leached out the salt and agriculture became again possible. Some of the salt has not gone even yet. When the Iraq Government restored some of the ruined buildings of ancient Babylon to create a tourist attraction, one of the greatest handicaps that was encountered was the saline condition of the soil on which the city was built. This caused disintegration of the remaining ruins as soon as they were uncovered and exposed to the air. It was to be very many years before the children of Noah could descend into the plain and create their farms and pasture lands. In the meantime they must perforce remain in the mountains. Reading Genesis 8 to 11 consecutively it is easy to assume that events followed each other in quick succession, that almost immediately after leaving the Ark the people came "from the east" (Gen. 11.1) into the Plain of Shinar and commenced their building operations. This could not possibly have been. Several centuries must have elapsed before the story of the Tower of Babel was enacted. Even after the Flood was ended and everything had returned to normal the head of the Persian Gulf was

some three hundred miles north of its present position and formed an impassable barrier to Noah and his family up there in the mountains. Only in the course of time as the four great rivers, the Euphrates, Tigris, Kherkhah, and Batin (the Euphrates, Hiddekel, Pison and Gihon of the Eden story) brought down masses of silt to deposit every year over the plain did the land build up and drive the waters back to where they are now. By Abraham's day, a thousand years after the Flood, the head of the Gulf had receded a hundred and fifty miles and Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's home town, was a seaport. Today the sea has receded another hundred and fifty miles from Ur. In all this waste of water and marshland there could be no home for man. Noah had perforce to look elsewhere.

The signs are that he went north-westward along the fringe of the mountains. To this day their lower slopes are thickly forested, harbouring wide terraces rich in pasture, and in ancient times wild grain. Here are the remains of these ancient settlements which subsisted as centres of human life for at least four or five centuries and were only deserted when the plain was at last free of water and the cities known to us in the Bible story – Ur, Erech, Babylon, Nippur, Nineveh, Larsa, Sippar – began to be built. The story of those early years is not recorded in the Bible, but nowadays it is beginning to be possible to trace its outlines in what those early settlers left behind them, to be brought to light in this our day.

(To be continued)

AOH

NOTE ON JOHN 8.1-11

The incident of the woman taken in adultery is sometimes pointed out as of doubtful authority since it does not appear in the original texts. It is not found in any New Testament Greek manuscripts prior to the sixth century. At the same time, the story itself is so clear-cut and detailed that it almost gives its own testimony as being the work of an eye-witness, perhaps recorded by one of the Apostles. Many scholars have decided on its acceptance on this ground alone. Eusebius, the great Church historian of the Fourth Century, mentions the story and quotes it from the writings of Papias, who lived possibly during the old age of John but certainly not long after. Papias claims to have had much discourse with the four daughters of

Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21.9) among others of the second generation of Christians. It seems fairly evident therefore that the story was like a number of other fairly well-authenticated acts or sayings of Jesus, current among the early Christians but was either not incorporated in John's original Gospel or, if incorporated, was deleted at some subsequent early date. All the evidence therefore goes to show that although the passage is not to be found in any ancient manuscript now existing it is almost certainly a true record of an incident in the life of Jesus and may possibly have appeared in the originals of the Gospels.

AOH

KNOWING HIM

The essence of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was expressed by Paul in his letter to the church at Philippians (3.10), "*That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.*" It reveals the only way to attain the salvation of God and the steps by which we progress in the blessedness of friendship with Christ Jesus.

Firstly, "*that I may know him.*" How can we, confined to a human environment, get to know the Lord Jesus who inhabits eternity with His Father? The answer to this may well vary from one believer to another but are there any basic principles that underlie the relationship? Many will begin, possibly at an early age, to know about Him through the Bible and through His people but they must go on to a really personal friendship. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and devotion we talk to Him much like a child begins to converse with its parents. There are times, perhaps right from the beginning of our Christian life, when the Lord speaks clearly and directly to our hearts. This is supported by our familiarity with God's Word which must be allowed to challenge us and also our preconceived ideas about God and His purpose for us. Daily, hourly, moment by moment, we become aware of the Lord. Sometimes, He speaks to us through our brethren in Christ, sometimes through the experiences of life but in it all, His Word remains the 'touch stone' by which we can be sure that the communication is from Him.

Secondly there is "*the power of His resurrection*". It was God's mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead. The energising power of the Holy Spirit must transform our hearts and lives if our knowledge of Christ is to be fruitful in bringing us to God. At first this transformation may only be recognised by ourselves and those closest to us. But as the years pass, the very likeness of our heavenly Friend becomes apparent to others. There are definite changes in behaviour and our attitudes will affect every word and action. In the closeness of our relationship to the Lord we will want to be like Him so that others will want to share the friendship. This is where the Christian life is so different from 'religious philosophy'. World religions, maybe with high ethical standards, can only inform, they cannot bring real change because

they depend on personal effort to change oneself. Christ who is our life, changes for real – or He will do so if we allow Him into our hearts. This is done by mighty power, unique in the universe, which brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead.

Thirdly, the effect of knowing Christ and being changed from this world's standard to those of His, must make us begin to experience "*the fellowship of His sufferings*". In sharing the life of Jesus it is inevitable that the world will oppose us as it opposed Him. All who have sought to live godly lives, from the beginning of the world, have found that there are those who oppose them and will oppose them to the point of killing them. Friendship with Jesus, upon whom the world exuded its worst venom, is bound to bring upon them the enmity of some who would wish to destroy our Master. When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He left them no doubt about what they must suffer, and as He came to the end of His earthly life He further assured them that as the world had hated Him so it would hate them. But then, friends share experiences and have a common goal. Just as Jesus' experiences were part of His preparation to make Him a sympathetic High Priest, so those things through which we pass will prepare us to share His work of transforming the world. But our Father has not left us to bear life's trials alone. The power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts enables us to take whatever the world tries to "throw at us". It is that same Spirit that binds us to Christ and enables us to go wherever He leads.

Finally, "*being made conformable to his death*" takes us through the experience that Paul described as being 'crucified with Christ'. Right at the beginning of our Christian walk with Christ, we are baptised into His death. But conforming to His death also means sharing His life – His resurrection life – that new life which He entered upon when He went to His Father's throne. It is that putting to death of the human life and that move forward into the new life with Him, that makes us ready to enter the throne room of Heaven, ourselves. "*If we suffer with him we shall live with him*" wrote Paul to Timothy. Further to the Philippians, Paul writes that conforming to God's dear Son is effective in us and through which we enter His death. So, continues Paul "*if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*"

Paul's longing desire was to know Christ Jesus in the truest sense and to the utmost degree. Knowing Christ meant more to him than anything else in the world and in his quest for it he was prepared to sacrifice every other valued treasure. He declares in verse 7 *"what things were gain to me these I counted loss."* His material gains, humanly speaking, were weighty; he was "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, full of zeal, *"in righteousness blameless according to the Law."* He had increasing ambition, innumerable friends, exceptional talent and great treasures, yet *"I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowing Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may win Christ and be found in him."* Paul's wholehearted effort has been an outstanding example to every follower of the Lord and reveals the secret of success in the Christian life and walk. When we consider Paul's gifts and social advantages, his ambition as a scholar and reputation as a citizen it is not surprising that he had a wrong view of Jesus of Nazareth and His followers. The false accusations made against its members incited Saul of Tarsus to persecute the Church. But neither is it surprising that when he met the Lord on the Damascus road and was rightfully informed, with eyes opened to the truth, the same energies helped to change his life. In his defence before King Agrippa he said *"I myself was convinced that I ought to oppose Jesus of Nazareth."* After relating his conversion he added, *"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."* What a wonderful confession to make; from that point onwards he expressed obedience to the Divine Will in every detail of his life. His devotion to God and service to others became the chief characteristic of his life; he was poured out as an oblation on behalf of the Church. It is evident that it was the hungering and thirsting to know Him and

his prompt obedience that opened the windows of Heaven and brought abundant blessings throughout his ministry. It was also filled with trials and difficulties to the end and he was able to say *"for our light affliction that is for a moment works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."*

Such a life is like the priest's two hands, full of sweet incense, crumbled upon the golden altar with the smoke of sweet perfume ascending beyond the veil into the Divine Presence. To know Him is very different from knowing about Him. So many can say that they know of Jesus, but not many are able to bear testimony to knowing Him with close personal contact and in deep friendship. To really know a person we must understand them and instinctively know their wishes and their will. We shall recognise their trend of thought and be well acquainted with their ways. We shall be conversant with their purposes and accustomed to their tastes and choices and recognise their judgment. To do this we must enjoy close acquaintance, spend time in their company and share their joys, trials, activities and experiences. By these same means we can enjoy close relationship and sweet knowledge of Christ. To know Him we need to be influenced and built up by His word, and walk in His way. Jesus said *"The words that I speak to you, they are Spirit and they are life."* These enable us to increase in the knowledge of God. In this we can rejoice and give praise and honour and glory to Him. *"Thus says the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight."* (Jer. 9.23-24 RSV). *"This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."* (John 17.3).

TIMNATH DISCOVERED

An archaeological expedition discovered in the 1970s the site and remains of Timnath, where Samson went to take the Philistine woman as his wife. This is one of the Old Testament places whose location had, until then been doubted. The excavators found that a Canaanite town stood here until soon after the entry of Israel into the land and was then destroyed by fire. That could have been

an incident in the conquest of the land under Joshua. Above this are the remains of a Philistine town with various Philistine remains. Later on, in about the time of Solomon, a fortified city stood here. Situated on the border between Judea and the area of Philistine settlement, the town was of importance. The discovery confirmed the accuracy of the narrative in the Book of Judges.

SO BE IT, O LORD

We use these words, "So be it," or "Amen," at the end of our prayers. They imply a willing acquiescence in whatever the Father has revealed to be His will, combining *"Thy will be done"* with *"I delight to do thy will, O my God,"* and show not only acceptance of the Divine will, but a genuine desire for its accomplishment. To the child of God this expression must represent the theme of the entire life: it must be the opening bar of life's symphony as well as the end. The meaning of the words is beautifully expressed by the life of the prophet who uttered them (Jer. 8.6). He was called upon to perform a task that was distasteful from the natural point of view. He was only a boy when first called upon to speak, *"Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child"* (Jer. 1.6), yet this gentle boy had to rebuke a nation and pronounce God's judgment and what was worse, tell the nation to submit to Babylon. Jer. 20.9 shows that he shrank from the storm of bitterness this message aroused. *"Then said I, I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."* In spite of his own inclinations, however, he yielded to the Divine will, although it caused him great grief (Jer. 8.18 and Jer. 9.1-2). He had no alternative but to announce the coming judgment, but there was a sob in his voice as he uttered it. Nothing was further from his heart than to desire the evil day, yet he was so filled with the sense of Divine rectitude, so convinced of God's judgment that he rose above his own inclinations and said, *"So be it, O Lord."* This is the attitude that the child of God must bring to every circumstance of life. Although there may be times when the flesh shrinks, we must accept the Lord's will as inevitable, as did Eli when he said, *"it is the Lord, let him do what seems to him good."*

We must learn to say "Amen" with cheerful, willing acquiescence to all experiences in life, to every revelation of the truth, to every aspect of Divine judgment. In the words of his Leader (Heb. 10.7), each child of God presents himself at baptism and is counted dead to his own will and alive to the will of God. It is here that accepting the Divine will as revealed in the volume of the book, he says, *"So be it, O Lord, may thy will be done in me."* It is one thing to make this covenant of sacrifice, another thing to carry it out, but day by day the Lord is

teaching us His will, and day by day He expects us to say "Amen". Jeremiah went to Anathoth and in chapter 12 we read how, overwhelmed on account of a plot against his life, he poured out his complaint to God. The Divine reply is given in v.5 *"If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land and you fall down how will you do in the jungle of Jordan?"* Thus, the people of God turn to their Father in times of bitterness and trial, saying, "Why must we always be misunderstood and even hated?" The Divine reply is full of gentle rebuke, "Have you not covenanted to do my will; are you already tired?" The writer to the Hebrews says *"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted"* (12.3). God allows us to be tested in a small way at first and faith is gradually strengthened for the more severe tests. Eventually we are enabled to say, "So be it, O Lord" at every step. The blessed result of character development can only be realised by these experiences if we can say, "Amen, O Lord".

Jeremiah was sent to the house of the Potter (Jer. 18.1-6). Israel had not responded to the will of the great Potter and they lost the high honour that might have been theirs but they will be made a vessel of less honour. If the design of the Heavenly Potter is to be outworked in our lives, every particle of the clay must say "Amen." It is true that if we mar God's gracious design for us He can, He may, make us again, but it will be a vessel of less honour than it would have been. Let us, then, say "Amen" to every moulding and shaping influence He brings into our lives.

Not only must we acquiesce in the experiences of life, but we must say "Amen" to each unfolding of truth. Even the sincere Nathanael questioned God's method saying, *"Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* Naaman asked *"Are there not better rivers in Damascus than all the waters of Israel? Can I not wash in them and be clean?"* He nearly missed the blessing because he did not like the method used.

If the judgment of God seems to us to be harsh, let us make quite sure that we have not misunderstood; then turn to our Father and dare to trust Him and in the strength of that trust say, "Amen, O Lord." As we look up into our Father's

face let us realise that He will do nothing, He can do nothing, but what is, in perfect accord with a love which far exceeds our most tender, deepest conception of what love is. Then there will be a new and confident tone in the voice of him who has come to trust God implicitly and say "Amen – so be it" to all His dealings.

BJD

INDEX 2004

After the Flood	Light of the World The		POEMS	
1. The Subsiding of the Waters	137	3. I've Found a Friend	21	Brighter than the Noonday 14
Anger	91	4. God Resisteth the Proud	38	Lord of the Universe 72
Asking Questions	107	5. Shepherd of the Sheep	63	"What Shall I Wish Thee?" 14
Autobiography of the Bible	34	6. Greater Love Hath No Man	85	
Baptism in the New Testament	99	Luke the Evangelist	115	MAIN BIBLICAL REFERENCES
Christmas Time	131	Message of the Kingdom The	67	
Covenants The		Moses' Ethiopian Wife	111	Genesis 38 44
1. Patriarchal Days	109	Nothing New Under the Sun	103	Exodus 19-34 135
2. Covenant at Sinai	135	Note on the Decree of Cyrus	112	Numbers 12.1 111
Feeding of the Five Thousand The	89	Our Heavenly Brothers		Psalms 46.1, 2 95
Full Grown – Mature – Perfect	116	Part 2	15	Proverbs 20.27 2
"God so Loved the World"	118	Part 3	35	Joel 2.1-11 51, 82, 104, 124
Heavenly source of Everlasting Waters		Prayers Without Words	132	Mark 5.22-43 129
Part 1	54	Simon Peter Fisher of Men		Luke 13 46
Part 2	79	13. Into the Unknown	3	Luke 14 70
Hymn 'Lord of the Universe'	72	'So Be It Lord'	143	Luke 15 93
Intercession	94	Study in the Gospel of Luke		Luke 16 113
In the Beauty of Holiness	92	16. Chapter 13	46	Luke 17 127
In the Land of Beginning Again		17. Chapter 14	70	John 8.1-6 140
3. Resurrection by Judgment	71	18. Chapter 15	93	John 10.1 63
Jairus' Daughter	129	19. Chapter 16	113	John 10.1 63
Just a Thought		20. Chapter 17	127	Galatians 3.26-29 7
2 Corinthians 3.18	98	Tamar of Judah	44	Romans 8.18-27 132
Matthew 2.1	123	Thought for the Month		Romans 12.1, 2 31
Kept by the Power of God		Proverbs 20.27	2	1 Corinthians 3.16, 17 92
2. Jacob, Father of the Family	18	Remember Me	26	2 Corinthians 3.18 98
3. Jacob the Patriarch	42	Psalms 103.20-22	103	5.11 96
4. Moses the Man who Changed		'As One Having Authority'	123	Philippians 3.10 141
The Ancient World	61	Tower of Strength The	95	Colossians 3.8-10 41
King David of Israel		Unity Part 1	7	Hebrews 5.14 116
12. High Treason	10	Part 2	31	
13. Declining Days	27	Vision of Joel The		
14. Reconciliation	57	1. The Coming of the Locusts	51	Expository, Devotional and short articles have not been separated out this year because it is felt these are unnecessary artificial divisions.
15. Sunset	75	2. The Call to Repentance	82	Readers' comments are always welcomed.
Knowing Him	141	3. The Lord's Army	104	
		4. The Cry of Faith	124	
		Valuing the Word of God	78	