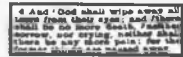
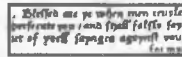
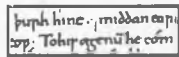




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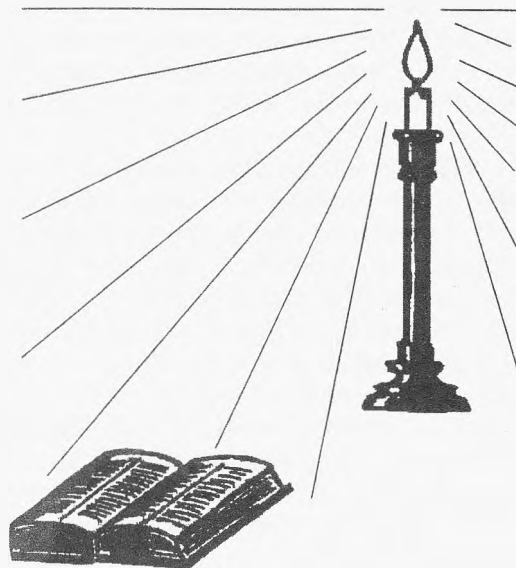
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NOTICES

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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 is a Christian Retirement Centre on the border of Somerset and Dorset. This Victorian villa has a dining room, two lounges and a meeting room. There is also a remarkable collection of books in the library. Friends who are visiting may use the guest-room or a vacant flat and all the facilities of the centre. Permanent residents have their own self-contained flats, single or double, arranged around a central garden area to the rear of the main house. A mid-day hot meal is cooked and served by our very dedicated and caring resident housekeeper, Mrs. Corinne Vaughan. Fees include council tax, water rate, light, fuel, contents insurance and TV licence. Residents enjoy formal and informal fellowship and worship. Gainsborough has a pleasant walled garden. It is in lovely countryside that contains many places of interest. The seaside is reached in an hour or so. Sherborne and Yeovil are very accessible. The centre is run by a registered charity, Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust, which has slowly developed the facilities over twenty two years. Bookings for temporary residence may be made through the housekeeper at Gainsborough House, 48 Gainsborough Milborne Port, Sherborne Dorset DT9 5BB.

Gone from us

Sister Dorothy Murray (Wirral Cheshire formerly Peterborough)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away

WALKING WITH GOD

*A Sermon at Conference
Morning Devotions*

"The text for today is "Walk worthy of God who has called you into His kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12). The New Living Translation renders this; "Live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you into his Kingdom to share his glory."

It's in the light of this translation that we're going to look at it this morning. Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatian church, *"But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, it will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Gal 5.22, 23)

These fruits are the manifestation of the love that our Heavenly Father shows toward us and are the characteristics by which we, through the Holy Spirit's indwelling in us, should be recognised. Fruit is produced to be eaten not to be displayed or admired. People around us are starving for love, joy, peace and all the other fruits of the Spirit and when they find them in our lives and see them in our behaviour, they realise that we have something which they would like to have. We don't bear fruit for our own use, we bear it so that others may be fed and helped and so that our Heavenly Father may be glorified. As Paul wrote to the church in Colossae *"We must clothe ourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends us. Remember, the Lord forgave us, so we must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing we must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony"* (Colossians 3.12-14)

The Christian who behaves like this becomes the light that shines on the earth with a ray of the Glory of Heaven; the Salt brings flavour to people's lives. Jesus told us that *"You can't get grapes from a thorn bush,"* and He also said that *"If someone wants good fruit they must go to a good tree."* This means that it's not much good telling someone what Jesus said we must do, or how He said we should behave, if we don't give an example to others by our own behaviour all the time. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words when you want to describe something to anyone.

There's a word picture that demonstrates this and it's been adapted from something that actually happened many years ago in Exeter. The curate of

a city centre parish, noticed that an old man came into the church at about noon every day and sat in a pew. He only sat there about a minute or so, looking at the altar, then he went out again. By the condition of his clothes that were old and mended, and his general down at heel appearance, although he was always scrupulously clean, it was obvious that he was very poor. The curate began to be concerned that the man might be tempted into stealing one of the valuable altar pieces, so he spoke to the man and asked him why he came to the church.

When the old man said, "Oh I come to talk to my friend." The curate was rather taken aback. "But you always come alone. You never speak to anyone while you're here. You only stay about a minute and then go. What do you mean by saying you come to talk to your friend? What's going on? What are you up to?"

The old man smiled and said, "Oh I just come in and pray "Hello Jesus this is Gobi, how are you today? Then I go, because I don't need to say anymore. It's my friend. He knows all about me, all I need and what's best for me."

This went on for some time and then one day Gobi didn't come to church. The curate, who by now thought of him as someone special and not just someone who visited the church, thought that Gobi must have the flu or something. But as time went on and there was still no sign of Gobi, he began to be concerned and made some inquiries. Eventually he discovered that Gobi was in hospital and he went to see him. It appeared that Gobi was on his way home after visiting the church when he was involved in a bad accident and had been taken to the hospital where he was expected to have to stay bed-ridden for some time. He'd been put in a ward with a lot of other old men, some of whom were grumpy and depressed, while others were shouting for a nurse or complaining from morning till night, and at times their language was colourful to say the least. Yet in spite of all this Gobi always smiled, whatever was said, or whatever commotion the others were making. Gobi's corner was the one bright spot in an otherwise gloomy ward.

The nurses said that at first they were sorry for him and admired him because he never complained about his condition, his surroundings or about having to listen to language he quite obviously

never used himself. They'd even tried to have him moved to a quieter ward. But now they were glad he was still with them because after he'd been there for a week or so, the other men began to be less noisy and more light-hearted. They complained a lot less and most of all their language began to change until there was hardly a word said out of place.

Curious about what had caused this change for the better, one of the nurses asked what had happened, and the men said "It's because of Gobi, he never complains and he's always smiling." But when the nurse asked Gobi how he'd brought about this miracle he said "Oh, it's not me, it's my friend who visits me every day?" "What friend?" the nurse asked, because she knew that Gobi had had no visitors since he'd been admitted to hospital.

"Oh, every day about noon my Friend comes and stands at the end of the bed and says, 'Hello Gobi, this is Jesus how are you today? That makes me happy.' Gobi's cheerful, uncomplaining manner, his patient smile and the lack of adjectives in his speech, was the channel by which our Lord had brought peace and goodness into that small world in the hospital.

Would our normal behaviour be like Gobi's and influence worldly, non-believers to change their way of life or even to modify any colourful language they might use? Can we honestly say that God would consider our behaviour worthy of Him? If we were the judges, instead of God, could we honestly say that the way we're living our lives is really what should be expected of someone who wants to share God's glory? Gobi trod a different path than that used by the world: he marched to a different drumbeat but he was guided, by his Friend, Jesus, as he made his way along that pathway.

Now our Lord is asking us to walk a different road, it's a strange and narrow way, but He never sends us on ahead along a strange pathway alone. He has already blazed a clear way through every thicket and wood, and then calls softly, "Follow Me. Let's go on together, you and I. He has been everywhere that we're called upon to go. His feet have trodden down a smooth path through every experience that comes to us. He knows each road, and knows it well. The valley road of disappointment, with its dark shadows is so

intimidating; and yet He who the apostle John called the 'Light of the World' is forever with us, always near at hand, to still our fears and show a guiding light for our next step.

The steep pathway of temptation, down through rocky ravines and slippery gullies is where we only need to let our eyes stray from our goal, just to take one false step, and we could fall. But, if we trust in Him, He will protect us from any dangers. The narrow pathway of pain and sorrow has thorny bramble bushes on each side that cut, sting and leave wounds that seem as though they will never heal. He's travelled this way and understands but His healing hands will soothe away our anguish.

The high path along the dizzying heights of our successes that bring the praise of men can so easily make us forget to whom we owe those triumphs and persuade us that we don't need anyone else's help but our own. That path is very narrow and without His support it's a long way down to reality.

Even on the old, dusty, beaten track of dull and commonplace daily routine we feel that we should be used for better and higher things. Every one of these paths He has trodden and glorified and He'll walk them again with each one of us. The only safe way to travel is with Him at our side and in control, so let's follow His call too;

Come, share the road with me, My own,
Through good and evil weather;
Two better speed than one alone,
So let's go on together.

Come, share the road with me, My own,
You know I'll never fail you,
And doubts and fears of the unknown
Shall never more assail you.

Come, share the road with me, My own,
I'll share your joys and sorrows,
And hand in hand we'll seek the throne
And God's great glad tomorrows.

Come, share the road with me, My own,
And where the black clouds gather,
I'll share thy load with thee, My son
And we'll pass on together.

And as we go we'll share also
With all who travel on it.
For all who share the road with Me
Must share with all upon it.

So make we - all one company,
Love's golden cord out tether,

And come what may, we'll climb the way
Together - aye together.

"Roadmates" by John Oxenham

Lord you have called us into your kingdom so
help us we pray, as we walk the narrow way to live
our lives in the way that You will consider worthy
of those who are to share Your glory. Amen.

THE VISION OF JOEL

5. Deliverance in Zion

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel – ch. 2.1-11*

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel. 2.28-29).

"Afterward" after what? Plainly this pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh follows the deliverance of Israel and their wholehearted acceptance of God; it is, therefore, the Millennial outpouring that is referred to. Then why did Peter, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, claim the fulfilment of this prophecy in his own day? *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel"* he said (Acts 2.16-21). The answer is that Peter believed the time of the Kingdom to be immediately at hand; and, what is of importance, none could justly say it was *not* at hand at that moment. If Israel had accepted the message of the High Calling as a nation, and so entered into that for which their two thousand years of training had been preparing them, the work of the Gospel would have been ended in one generation and Christ's Kingdom would have begun. God in His foreknowledge knew that Israel would reject the Gospel but it was necessary for them to have an opportunity. Only a remnant would believe and the call therefore would go to the Gentiles, with all the long extension of time that entailed. So Peter was right in applying the prophecy to his own day – until Israel had rejected the call. From then on, the prophecy was deferred, and is still waiting for the full end of this Age to come.

Does any part of this passage refer to the Gospel Age? It would hardly seem so. It used to be thought that the "servants and hand-maidens" upon whom the spirit is to be poured *"in those days"* represented the Church of this Age. There is a difficulty in referring to the Church as 'servants' in the same breath in which others are spoken of as 'sons'. Peter's quotation from Joel is not word perfect. He says *"it shall come to pass in the last*

days" whereas the Hebrew of Joel has *"it shall come to pass afterward"* and the Septuagint has *meta tauta "after these things"*. The promise is two-fold. The Spirit is to be poured out upon *"all flesh"*; that is a universal outpouring that can only be true in the Millennial Kingdom. As an additional glory the *"sons and daughters"* shall prophesy; the young men shall dream dreams, the old men see visions, and the servants and handmaidens, lower in status than the free born people of the land, are to share in the out-pouring, even to the extent of prophesying also, according to Peter in Acts 2.18. The reference is undoubtedly to the regathered "Holy Nation", restored Israel, converted and purified, taking their place in the work of the Kingdom. It may be that the *"sons and daughters"* are the lineal children of Jacob in that nation, and the *"servants and handmaidens"*, the Gentile *"strangers"* who have joined them in that day. Isaiah 44.5 speaks of these. They are men and women from other nations, who after the completion of the Church have joined themselves to the earthly nation. They become by adoption, members of the earthly descendants of Abraham. Their faith and devotion will be rewarded with a part in the work of those earthly descendants under the direction of the glorified Church. Isaiah 56 and Ezekiel 47.22-23 probably refer to the same thing.

Isaiah 32 is helpful here. Verses 9-14 describe Israel's period of disfavour, cast off from the purposes of God, until (v.15) *"the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and ..., the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"* Zechariah 12.10 also speaks of the spirit of grace and supplication being poured upon the house of David at the time of the End. There are quite a number of such references, all showing that this universal outpouring takes place at and after the time of Israel's conversion and not before. The prophecy therefore must find its fulfilment after the Time of Trouble and after the Kingdom has been established.

"Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." This is a glowing picture of a nation completely and unreservedly devoted to the service of God. It is free at last to take up that service in its fulness. That nation is the newly constituted people in the Holy Land and will have fulfilled all the prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel. Their God has come forth out of His place to defend them. Their enemies have been turned back and will never again have power to afflict or distress them. The time for world-wide proclamation of the Gospel has come and the Holy Spirit, coming in the ministrations of the glorified Church, is through that regathered nation, to be poured out upon all flesh. This association between the work of the Church and the giving of the Holy Spirit is shown in the words of Revelation 22.17, "*And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come ... and whosoever will may come and take of the fountain of the water of life freely*". In the joy and exultation of this knowledge, and the zeal of this service, the whole of that "holy nation" will respond and manifest all the characteristics of God-given revival and evangelical fervour. The sons and daughters will prophesy of the future; the old men will dream dreams of the future; the young men will see visions of the future. All those prophecies, dreams and visions will be conveyed to the ears of all men the world over that they might know what are the laws and standards of the new Kingdom. They will learn of the glories that await the willing and obedient, both during the Millennial Age and at its end. Prophecies, dreams and visions are all associated in the Bible with the emotional stress and the more than usually sharpened spiritual insight that accompanies the end of an Age and the beginning of the next. This verse refers to the tremendous wave of evangelical fervour that will possess the delivered nation when the Kingdom is established in power. Then they commence, at long last, to fulfil their historic destiny of being a people to give light to the Gentiles, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

The next two verses (30-31) are retrospective. Joel has gone back a little to look at the signs that will herald this long-awaited day of the Spirit's outpouring. "*I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible*

Day of the Lord come." These words take on new significance when we find that our Lord used the same symbols to describe the signs of his Second Advent. Evidently the same events are referred to and the signs of Christ's imminent reign are the same as the signs of our Lord's return. "*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.*"

This verse touches some important truths. There are at least three momentous words in it – 'whosoever', 'deliverance', and 'remnant'. But to understand their significance we must take them backwards. Before asking the identity of the 'whosoever' who are to be delivered it is necessary to know what is the deliverance promised. Before understanding the nature of the deliverance we must enquire into the identity of the 'remnant' through whom that deliverance is to come. And so we are brought face to face with one of the most intriguing doctrines of the Old Testament, the doctrine of the 'remnant'.

It was Joel who first introduced this theme. In later years the Holy Spirit used Isaiah to dwell upon it and show how God would preserve a 'remnant' to keep alive His work and carry it on as one world merged into the next; and others of the prophets, notably Micah, caught something of the same idea. But the seed of it all is here in this word of the earlier prophet. 'Deliverance' for "*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord*" is to be in, and come by means of, the "*remnant whom the Lord shall call*". And this remnant is closely associated with Mount Zion and Jerusalem.

Isaiah and Micah, both living later than Joel, between them can explain this word. "*It shall come to pass in that day*" says Isaiah "*that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob ... shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return ... unto the Mighty God ... the consumption (consummation) decreed shall overflow with righteousness*" (Isa. 10.20-22). This is the first point to observe. The 'remnant', those that escape, both from the corrupting influence of the Gentile world and the evil hosts of Gog and Magog, will be a purified people, trusting wholly in the Lord. This is therefore a converted people, dwelling in the land and ready to God's hand as an instrument for His

purposes. This is confirmed by Micah, who says (4.6-7) *"In that day, says the Lord, will I assemble her that halts and I will gather her that is driven out and I will make her that halts a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation, and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion even for ever"*. The glorious destiny of the purified nation is clearly shown in these words, and their beneficent mission to all the people of the earth is equally clearly shown in the next chapter. *"The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass."* (Micah 5.7). It is true that in the next verse the same remnant is said also to be among the nations as a lion among the beasts of the forest, an evident reference both to the position of leadership assigned to that nation in that day, and also to the fact that it will be a nation that tears down and destroys all opposition to its rule.

It is interesting to notice that quite a number of reputable translators give a personal meaning to the deliverance that is said in this verse to reside in Zion and Jerusalem. Thus Rotherham says *"In Mount Zion and Jerusalem shall be a delivered remnant"* and Leeser, Revised Version and Variorum *"in Mount Zion and Jerusalem there shall be those that escape"*. Here again there is

clear evidence of a wonderful deliverance of God's ancient people taking place at the time when God is about to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Isaiah crowns this particular theme by declaring *"I will send those that escape of them unto the nations ... and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles"* (Isa. 66.19). This is the great mission of regathered Israel, and this is the work to which they are called when the Millennial Age has begun. In a literal sense they will be Divine missionaries to all the earth, and their rulers, the resurrected "Ancient Worthies", princes, in all the earth, requiring and receiving the obedience of all men.

So the vision of Israel's triumph closes, and gives place in Chapter 3 to another and parallel vision of the Time of the End. This time the prophet is looking, not on his own people and the effect of the Time of Trouble upon them, but upon the Gentile nations and the manner in which the Time of Trouble affects them. Instead of seeing a restored and renovated homeland in which the sons of Jacob praise and serve the God who has delivered them, he sees the marshalling of angry hosts determined to fight God. But the end is the same, and chapter 3 closes, as does chapter 2, in the "afterward of peace" of the Millennial Kingdom.

(To be continued)

AOH

JUST A THOUGHT

"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their way" (Psalm 37.7, RSV) We sat still eating our lunch. It was a beautiful spot a mile from the busy little village of Herriott TV fame. All around us tiny creatures, from ants to thrushes were going about their business. It was a botanist's paradise with all kinds of plant life from liverworts to oak trees. Apart from the buzz of the insects and the sound of gentle moving water it was quiet - some might say 'boring'. Stillness, but full of life, of peace and harmony. A few hundred yards away there was an old mill with its pond. Once it would have been the scene of much human industry but now it too was still and apparently lifeless except for the algae that covered it - stagnation.

Life's music has its 'rests' and they are important as Ruskin once wrote. Still, yet much is going on silently. God is exercising our patience. If we would know His will we too must wait; rushing the job will spoil it.

"Have you ever prayed and prayed and waited

and waited, and still there is no manifestation? Are you tired of seeing nothing move? Are you just at the point of giving it all up? Perhaps you have not waited in the right way. This would take you out of the right place - the place where He can meet you."

— CHP

"When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives ... don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become ... of mature character with the right sort of independence." James 1.2-4 Phillips

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CHRISTIAN ZEAL

Zeal is a wonderful quality of passionate enthusiasm, and when manifest in the service of Christ it brings great blessing to the zealot and at the same time redounds in praise to God. Zeal implies wholeheartedness and determination to do with one's might what the hands find to do. As we look back upon the gigantic efforts of the Christian era, so we cannot fail to recognise the presence of Christian zeal in large and overcoming measure, begotten of love for the Lord and for His Word. It is comparatively easy to be zealous in any cause for a time, but the race in which we are running cannot be won by fits and starts, but by patient continuance in well-doing. It is only they who endure to the end who will be saved. Zeal may be harnessed for either good or bad ends and, in consequence, it may easily be misdirected.

The outstanding example is that of Saul of Tarsus, who in later life as the Apostle Paul, wrote of himself, "*concerning zeal, persecuting the church*" (Phil. 3.5). In early adult life he had no faith in Christ, and his zealous disposition was manifest in relentless persecution of the early Christians. In due time, the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road with his arresting message: "*I am Jesus whom you persecute*" (Acts 9.5), and then followed his conversion, whereupon his zeal was turned in the opposite direction, as he thenceforth espoused the cause of Christ.

Another outstanding example is that of the ancient people of God. Paul wrote of them: "*I bear them record that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge*" (Rom. 10.2), and in consequence their zeal was inevitably misdirected. In this, as in other matters, they are an example to us that we should not fail in the same way. This demonstrates the importance of doctrine to the end that we may know the Father's will and then direct our zeal along right lines in the performance of that will. Doctrine is good so long as we use it aright and truth has its sanctifying effect upon the heart and mind (John 17.17). In our day much light has been shed upon the pathway of the surrendered mind and it should direct and increase our zeal.

Our service for the Lord should know no limits and we should be ever on the alert to perform His bidding using every opportunity that comes our way, in harmony with His revealed will. Christian zeal should be manifest in various ways. The message to the Church at Laodicea is marked by its

lukewarm attitude. The Lord cannot approve the Church hence He says: "*I know your works, you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth*" (Rev. 3.15-16 RSV). We must not for one moment think that this cannot apply to us because it refers to Laodicea, for the same conditions can and even may develop in our own midst. In v19 there are words which apply not to enemies of the Gospel but 'true wheat' - true Christians. The Lord never loved tare-like people but said "*those whom I love, I reprove and chasten: so be zealous therefore and repent.*" Discipline is an evidence of being sons (Heb. 12.7).

It may seem strange that zeal always flourishes amid persecution. This is shown in the early Church during the time of Pagan persecution. When Constantine professed to embrace the Christian faith and the persecution ceased, the salutary influence of piety and self-abnegation was removed and the Church became slack and worldly-minded.

Think of the zeal in the early days of the reformation when there were not the Bible study helps that we enjoy today. With earnest zeal did the reformers search after the light; how such light as it appeared was hailed with joy and enthusiasm: and how they showed their gratitude to the Lord in serving Him. Today we are in danger of taking those blessings for granted and of becoming slack in our service for the Lord and fail to fully appreciate our tremendous privileges in His vineyard.

It is helpful to review the past and to take stock of the present in order to assess whether we are putting forth our maximum zeal in the Lord's cause. Service for the Lord is one of the great aims in life as an expression of our love for Him and we must see to it that we do not become weary in well doing, knowing that we shall reap in due season if we faint not in the meantime. Zeal, moreover is infectious and encourages others who may tend to become tired in the race, and that is one of the main reasons why fellowship is so important to the Christian and a vital means of grace.

Zeal for the Lord will manifest itself in a consuming desire to meet in fellowship with those of like faith. We must all recognise duty towards the other members of the Body; we do not attend meetings simply to receive a blessing but to give

others a blessing too. This is a privilege that all can enjoy, not only those who are public teachers in the Church. It was for this reason that the man with one talent was chosen to illustrate talent burials; to show the responsibility of those who have least.

The spirit of enquiry is most pleasing to the Heavenly Father, as seen in His commendation of the beloved Daniel. Reverent enquiry into His Word arises out of zeal, and this should be apparent in all of us. If we are really zealous to know, we shall not be satisfied with superficial reading of the Word but will desire to search the Scriptures by means of the Spirit, which enables us to understand the 'deep things' of God. God will honour our zeal by giving necessary light to those who wait on Him.

Peter gives some conception of this aspect of the matter when he says that even the angels desired to look into the things now made known to us. Once again, do we sufficiently realise our privileges? Zeal will seek ways and means to prosecute further study of the Word. God has promised the Holy Spirit to all who ask, and we know that even frail intellect is no real barrier because the Lord can make up our lack, provided we have the desire to know, so long as we have zeal.

Today, many of the Lord's people are in difficulties of one kind or another, in material as well as

spiritual crises. If we are zealous we shall seek opportunities to assist those who are travelling the same way. Noble are those whose patterns of zeal tend the sick, minister a word of comfort, and relieve one or other of the burdens that rest heavily upon others who are in Christ. The solemn question comes to each one: "Am I doing all I can to assist my brethren? There are many opportunities if we look, yet some will say that there is so little to do these days. Let us use our opportunities and pray to God for more. True love is compelled by a consuming zeal (2 Cor. 5.14). Does not the Psalmist say, *"The zeal of your house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached you are fallen on me"* (Psa. 69.9). The Scriptures invariably speak in this fashion and we couldn't conceive of anything more entire than the expression that zeal *"hath eaten me up"* (Psa. 119.139). Our consecration must be full; our sacrifice offered even unto the end; we must do with our might what our hands find to do; and we must never be weary in such well-doing. There are many zealous efforts of the saints during the Gospel Age, especially those who were martyred and who translated the Scriptures at their peril because of zealous love for Him. Above all there is the perfect example of the Lord Himself. (Titus 2.14; 2 Cor. 9.2)

OWNERSHIP

1. Rules

"You are not your own for you are bought with a price." (1 Cor. 6.19-20). These words, written to an early Christian community, were a reminder that those who professed to follow Christ were no longer free to indulge in the ways of the world and the natural man. They belonged to a new owner whose laws or commandments they were in honour bound to obey. *"If you love me, keep my commandments"*. There can be no community without law. Whether it be a church or a nation, rules and the observance of them are essential to hold a society together. It is a common assumption that the human being belongs to himself. Any form of bondage is irksome, resented and in some cases intolerable. For freedom, liberty, self-possession and self-expression men have fought and died rather than suffer the restriction and suppression of the natural right of man to be free. To be captain of his own life and master of his own fate is, in the philosophy of the progressive, not only possible but proper.

The tendency of human nature is to go from one extreme to another. Between the galling shackles of tyranny and the law of every man for himself, neither of which has brought any relief to the struggle for freedom, lies an acknowledgement of a higher authority. It is a submission to a nobler law, a wiser set of rules, a servitude that is not galling, an allegiance that is wholesome and life preserving. It does not lie in party system, sect, religious or political formulae, nor does it demand loyalty to human leadership. The real liberty and life of man lies in fidelity to his Maker. This first claim upon all that is finest and best in his nature is the only certain way to that freedom which is the desire of all people. When met willingly it is the surest way to peace and happiness. The tendency of the times is to set aside or ignore what has become known as the old theology, that God created the earth and made man to inhabit the planet as a responsible tenant. If the Christian is not his own, but bound to

his Saviour in the bonds of love and service, neither is man in general his own nor does he own the earth he inhabits. The wordy reasoning, the vain babbling and the idle speculations which keep this world in perpetual confusion form a singular contrast to the simple, straight-forward declaration, *"the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein"*.

It is a statement of ownership. Man does not belong to himself. He belongs to God his Creator. He is God's creature, bearing some likeness to his Maker. As such he owes, without any loss of dignity, not only allegiance and respect but obedience to a higher, superior power. For the globe he inhabits, the air he breathes, the food he eats, his power of thought, his many abilities and pleasures, he is indebted to One whose invisible presence is overwhelmingly visible in all that concerns man. Without God and without hope the world is a dark place, one in which man must inevitably admit himself lost in its twisted, entangling mazes, its insoluble mysteries and its bewildering confusions. That the creative Being exists, that He is the Maker of the globe and its inhabitants, the Author of universal dominion, is the only basic belief, the one sure foundation upon which the fabric of an ideal society or a successful personal life can be reared or continue to exist. Knowledge of that existence is not enough, nor a formal lip service. Power and energy alone did not produce a planet fitted to sustain a race of living creatures; wisdom and love went into the production of both. Gratitude for the blessings of life, a ready response to the will and wish of the Life-giver, are the first essentials of growth of both a new world and a new creature. Respect for God means respect for men and women. Neither are demanded, for God leaves his creature freedom of choice, yet past and present prove man's dependence upon a supreme Will, a universal law of good for peace and complete happiness.

A self-willed world with its own selfish plans for living produces little of lasting benefit. The demolition of ancient restraints opens the door to new destroying evils. Whether men or women are saints or sinners, the reminder that *"You are not your own"* is always salutary and timely. Intelligently to admit the right of God to rule His own, to bow the heart as well as bend the knee before Omnipotence, is to gain the two-fold benefit of delight in His law and liberty, which is perfect freedom. "You shall know the truth and the truth

shall make you free" declared Jesus and the first great truth is that God created, and what He made are His and His alone. As the Apostle Paul, that notable student of the law emphasised, *"The law has dominion over a man so long as he lives"* (Rom. 7.1). Law is the rule of established authority. With this legal science and common sense agree. It is a body of rules drawn up by nations and communities for the smooth running of an orderly society. From birth to death, the life of civilised man is regulated by laws formed to meet every exigency that can befall either his personal or national life. From being a few simple rules these laws have grown to mammoth proportions, needing the expensive and ponderous machinery of the law courts with all their official procedure for the administration of some form of justice. Churches and society make their own laws and regulations for general conduct. This formidable array of do's and don'ts is to the rebel a thorny barrier against which he kicks, but not without injury or loss. To the daring a challenge, to the mischievous a source of derision, the law yet remains the law, the rule of authority which all classes must observe if they wish to live with a degree of peace and security. Kicking over the traces, putting oneself above and beyond the law, may produce a short lived satisfaction but in the long run the end is futility and misery. A lawless society, abandoning order for the wild frenzies of revolt, is heading for catastrophe.

Obedience to rule is not the easiest thing in the world. A multitude of restrictions becomes both tiresome and irksome. Few, if any, get through life without breaking rules or conveniently overlooking some of the less weighty matters of the law. Such is human nature and the observation that *"all we like sheep have gone astray"* and *"there is none righteous, no not one"* cannot be denied. To the verdict of Holy Writ, Shakespeare adds tersely, "Conscience doth make cowards of us all". The ten laws of Israel in their short and simple clarity, though not beyond the mental ability of that new nation, were beyond their moral capacity. Laws great and small, bye-laws, books of rules and strings of regulations, dominate human existence. There are also unwritten laws governing man's whole nature which have their own system of retribution and reward according to how well or ill they are observed. Above all are those universal laws which keep the earth on its axis, which govern day and night, which keep the heavens in their place,

which man with all his vaunted skill and knowledge cannot outwit. Law is essential to life, and man is subject to law. There are man-made codes which cause resentment, yet the testimony of experience down the ages is that the law of God is loveable, liveable, easy to understand and well worth keeping. It is an eternal principle to which a materialistic, disillusioned world will someday readily submit when the wisdom of this world has perished. Men, nations, civilisations come and go, but the law of God is the deathless word by which life will be sustained in all worlds without end, for there is a law written in the inner being of man, *"the work of the law written in their hearts"* (Rom. 2.14-15), which makes itself heard and felt in all but the most hardened of evil doers. It is a fragment of original man which the temptations and failures of successive generations have not entirely eradicated. This still, small voice of conscience continues to play a part in the regulation of conduct despite the somewhat cynical conclusion of certain scientists that man is merely a machine. Whether a remarkable machine or cleverly put together by a master-craftsman is not openly admitted. Machines are made by someone and no self-respecting manufacturer will send out a good one without instructions for its maintenance. To keep a machine in good order and efficient use, the book of rules must be studied and carried out by the owner. When God created man in the earth and of the earth, his book of rules was issued with him, written into him, so that he did not need to seek high or low or far and wide for information. He knew what was right and wrong for himself and for others because the rules were woven into his being. Failure to follow that law written into the heart and mind of man brought about those disruptions, discords and disasters that must inevitably come to any piece of intricate machinery where the instructions for its preservation are ignored or neglected. As a notable public figure observed, "Whenever there is trouble of a public or private nature you can be sure that some one has broken one of the Ten Commandments". In the first instance when the one rule of obedience snapped with dire consequences it might be said that an ambitious outsider with malevolent intentions disturbed the free harmony by throwing a false element into the works, so creating a state of imperfection which has not yet been fully repaired. When later ten definite rules were issued as a code

of law to assist the diminished power of man's moral nature, these also failed to correct the faulty human creature. In spite of promises, the race which received them was either unable or unwilling to bear the discipline of rules. Down the centuries law-makers have been so busy adding to the instructions that even the lawyers are lost in the mazes of their own legislation. The sensitive and sincere still hear and feel within them the sound and touch of the true regulator. To them the book of rules is still a salutary reminder of the frailty of human nature, something to be read, studied, learned and practised through all life's changing scenes and chequered experiences. Time has condensed the 'thou shalt nots' into 'thou shalt love' through the mouth of Him who came to fulfil the law that man was unable or unwilling to apply. It remains the standard for all, the yardstick of conduct, the measure of a man's ability to love and obey God, to love and cherish his neighbour. The law written into man by his Maker is love, and love is the fulfilling of the law.

(To be continued) BJD

LORD, THINK THROUGH ME!

Lord, think through me! My thoughts, like slaves,
Are trapped in treadmills of unrest;
Your thoughts rise freely heavenwards
As homing pigeons to their nest.

Lord, speak through me! My words, like barbs,
Destroy and wound with spikes of thorn;
Your words with penetrating power
Alone can soften hearts of stone,

Lord, pray through me! My prayers, like moles,
Go burrowing blindly in the dark;
Your prayers fly straight and target-true
And swift as arrows to their mark.

Lord, love through me! This feeble flame
Now brightly flickers, then it dies;
Your burning love must melt my heart
To incandescent sacrifice.

Lord, live through me! For I have died,
Died with my Saviour on the Tree;
And now the only life I know
Is Your new life lived out in me.

Margot King-Smith from 'The Quest'

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

*The story of a
great failure*

1. Nazarite unto God

The valley lay drowsily under the hot summer sun. The fields of Eshtaol stretched out, quietly beautiful, leading the eye to the white houses of the village of Zorah in the distance. The road winding through the valley was no more than a mule track, travellers were few and far between, and the inhabitants went on with their farming and stock rearing unmolested except for periodic raids of Philistine marauders from the south, scouring the quiet valley for plunder.

The Philistines were already there when the tribe of Dan entered the land, many generations ago. At first they had not anticipated trouble, for the Philistines were down in the flat lands bordering the sea, thirty miles or more away, and there was plenty of room in the land for both. But now with both peoples multiplying fast and wanting ever more and more land on which to settle, there was bound to be a collision, and for many years now, ever since the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, the two races were constantly clashing. For thirty or forty years past the children of Dan had been held in subjection to the hated Philistines.

These Philistine soldiers were tall, muscular men, clad in coats of mail, wearing polished bronze helmets, armed with swords and spears and other weapons such as Israel had never seen before. They had come from the island of Crete in the days of Abraham, dispossessing the Canaanites who dwelt on the sea coast and settling there to grow corn for their native land. Crete was a civilised and progressive country, peculiarly like eighteenth century Britain in a good many respects, and having a lively power of mechanical invention, so that the primitive Israelites stood no chance at all against them. Not until the days of David, still a century or so in the future, was the power of the Philistines finally to be broken by Israel.

So it came about that Manoah and his wife, quiet God-fearing Israelites of the tribe of Dan, pursued their uneventful lives in Zorah in humble faith that God would protect them from all enemies and give them prosperity all the time they honoured Him and obeyed His covenant. They had one great sorrow; no son crowned their union, no one to carry on their line and inherit their lot in the land. It seemed hard to understand, almost as though God

had not kept his part of the covenant, for the covenant promised the blessing of children among other gifts. Strange to understand and hard to accept, until the day that Manoah's wife met the angel in the fields.

The matter of fact manner in which visitations of angelic beings to men is related in the Old Testament reads strangely to modern minds, and of course a good many, even among Christians, dismiss the whole thing as incredible – based on nothing more than fanciful embellishments to the story. But there is no doubt that these things did happen, that emissaries from the celestial world did assume forms of flesh and appear to men as men, to carry out some element of the outworking of the purposes of God. The fact that so far as we know such instances do not occur today is no argument that they did not occur then; the whole basis of God's dealing with men since Christ is changed. We walk by faith, not by sight. God is selecting out from among the nations a church, a people for his Name; He speaks to them through His indwelling Holy Spirit and there is no need of external agents appealing through the physical senses. In the next Age, when God turns again to deal with all mankind under the beneficent arrangements of the Messianic Kingdom, it is at least possible that the direct and personal ministry of angels will be restored. At any rate, there is no evidence that Manoah and his wife saw anything unusual in the proceedings. It is true that Manoah's expressed fear was the superstitious one common to that day that having seen a manifestation of God face to face, they must die. His wife, more practical, pointed out that if the Lord intended to kill them He would not have accepted a sacrificial offering at their hands, and with that Manoah was content. They were left then with the angel's message, to wit, that a son was to be born to her who heretofore had been barren. He was to be devoted to God, a Nazarite, under the ritual that distinguished the Nazarite fraternity from the day of his birth and that when grown to manhood's estate he would begin to deliver Israel from the power of the Philistines.

That last promise must have brought joy to the hearts of this pious couple. Deliverance was what every true Israelite desired. It is a safe deduction that the immediate past had been a time of national

apostasy. The fact that they were now subject to the Philistines instead of vice versa is a direct indication that they had failed to keep the covenant that if kept, promised them immunity from such things. The barrenness of Manoah's wife is another evidence pointing to the same thing, for this also, on a national scale, was another result of failure to keep the covenant. The promise of a child, therefore, one who would only so much as begin to deliver Israel, was a Divine intimation that in some way Israel had shown signs of repentance, so that God, as ever, was quick to respond with the promised deliverance.

There are four cases of a child being born to a hitherto barren woman in the Scriptures, and in each case the child was destined to fulfil some specific Divine commission. Isaac, Jacob and John the Baptist in addition to this son of Manoah, were thus born, and each birth was heralded by a Divine intimation of future destiny. It almost seems as if God took special measures to indicate a providential interference with the normal course of Nature in order to draw attention to the significance of what He was about to do.

In this case the child was to be a Nazarite. The vow of a Nazarite was a custom ordained in the Mosaic Law to mark the dedication of a man to God's service, either for a stipulated time or for life. The man thus setting himself apart from his brethren was required to fulfil two obligations which made that separation a very real thing. He was to abstain from the fruit of the grape-vine in all its forms, whether as plucked from the vine, or as wine or drink, and he was not to pass any razor over his head – his hair and beard were to be suffered to grow unchecked. In addition he was not to allow himself to become defiled by death or a dead carcase. Such a man was peculiarly "God's Man" in a sense which was not true even of the Levites. They too, were set apart and dedicated to Divine service, but in the things of every-day life and among their fellows. The Nazarite was set completely apart for the performance of such direct duties as might be laid upon him by God. The intimation to Manoah and his wife that their son was to be a Nazarite implied therefore that he was separated from his birth for some very definite

purpose of God; they were told too what that purpose was. *"He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines"*.

So began a life full of promise. Born of devoted, God-fearing parents, trained up in the strict self-discipline which strengthened character, sobriety and tenacity of purpose whilst at the same time it built physical strength and stamina of the highest possible order; conscious all the time of a Divine destiny and calling. What better inheritance for a young man on the threshold of life? What brighter hope for the future, as the inhabitants of Zorah watched his growth through boyhood into early manhood and recalled the promise made at his birth *"He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines"*.

So, we are told, the Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson at times at the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol. The camp of Dan was evidently a tribal meeting place, where perhaps the elders of the villages and families gathered in conclave, and the youth of the tribe met to engage in sports and contests of skill. The superior strength and prowess of the youthful Samson would at such times mark him out among his fellows and give rise to much nodding of heads and earnest consultation among the older men. Surely, they would say to one another, God was about to fulfil His promise and raise up for them the deliverer for which their souls longed. Here was the man whose giant strength could prove equal to that of their armour-clad enemies. Surely God was about to deliver His people! Hopes must have run high in the villages and hills of Eshtaol and Zorah, and men began to lift up their heads a little and talk, perhaps, of those far off glorious days when Joshua and his hosts had won them this land by his own armed might. Here was another Joshua, to lead them into battle with the high praises of God on their lips and the two-edged sword in their hands – to put to flight the armies of the aliens and bring peace and prosperity to Israel.

And none, in those golden days of hope suspected the canker which lay in the heart of their hero and robbed him, and them at the last, of the triumph they sought.

(To be continued) AOH

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpeh and Jeshanah and called its name Ebenezer for he said Hitherto the Lord has helped

us." (1 Samuel 7.12.RSV) In these words we greet you for the New Year and wish you well in the Lord.

AFTER THE FLOOD

2. The family grows and spreads

"And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them 'Be fruitful, and multiply and fill the earth ... bring forth abundantly on the earth, and multiply in it'" (Gen. 9.1,7 RSV). The implication of Gen. 9 is that the present human race is descended from the sons of Noah; all others on the whole of the planet were blotted out by the Flood. It has been argued that the expression in v19. *"These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled"* need only refer to that part of the earth with which the Bible historians were acquainted, and that other nations in other regions escaped the disaster. It is true that the Hebrew *'erets'* 'the earth', can and does in its various occurrences refer sometimes to the planet as such and sometimes to the particular part of the earth under discussion without necessarily involving the whole. A similar assertion is made in Gen. 7.21 that all animal life died that moved upon the earth, but this can certainly not be taken to refer to the entire earth for there are still many species, of animals and birds peculiar to lands remote from south-western Asia, such as Australia, South America and certain tropical islands. All the evidence is that they have not migrated there from that centre. A more definite fact, one that is implicit in the Scripture account, is that, contrary to popular belief, no carnivorous animals ("beasts of the earth" in Bible language) went into the Ark at all. The herbivorous and the domestic animals were those gathered in by Noah; the lions and tigers and similar wild animals were left to roam the mountains and in many cases to survive the Flood and perpetuate their own kind when it was all over (compare Gen. 7.14, 8.17 & 9.10). One thing is certain; the plains of south western Asia were devastated by the Flood and no life there could have survived. If the Valian hypothesis as to the cause of the Flood is the correct explanation, the same must have been true of many other parts of the earth's surface. There is also another consideration so far as the human race is concerned, alluded to by the geologist Hugh Miller in his "Testimony of the Rocks" (1857). Miller refers to the evidences of progressive physical degeneration in peoples migrating outward to wild inhospitable habitats from an initially civilised centre. Bereft of cultural, religious or spiritual stimulus, such peoples eventually die out and

become extinct. He points out that these were the conditions obtaining before the Flood and that in all probability the human race, after first spreading over the earth, had almost died out again by the time the Flood came. Jewish tradition, as exemplified in the "Book of Jubilees" (150 BC), certainly gives this same picture. It could well be, therefore, that God had intervened to preserve alive this small party out of what was, by now a fast disappearing world population with which to make a fresh start in populating the earth. The unbridled sin of the antediluvians had all but brought the actual suicide of the human race. On this basis, this treatise is intended to demonstrate the practicability of the Genesis thesis, that all the present nations of the world owe their origin to the three sons of Noah. It relates the process of population growth to the span of time which appears to have elapsed from the day the little family emerged from the Ark to the beginning of recorded history so far as it can be deduced from the inscriptions and relics that have been recovered by archaeologists from the vanished settlements of the oldest civilisation at present known. So, Sumer carries that story onward until Abraham left the Sumerian city of Ur to find the land to which God had called him, and Bible history really begins.

So the story returns to that moment when the little group of eight people stood on the slopes of that mountain in southern Iraq looking over the wide expanse of mud-covered plain a thousand feet below them. They knew that they must now find themselves a place where they could live, build their homes, tend their flocks and, grow their crops. Most important of all they needed a place to raise children who would follow them in the ways of the Lord and create a new society upon earth in which the evil of the past bad old days would find no place. What kind of a life did these early pioneers experience in reality?

First, what were the physical conditions? What is known, in this 21st century, of the nature of the world in general, five thousand years ago, and of southern Iraq and northwestern Iran, where they found themselves? It would appear that they were living at a time of much more favourable climatic conditions than the world has known since. The leading authority on ancient climatic conditions is

C.E.P. Brooks, who, in his "Climate through the Ages" (1970) says that between 5500 and 3000 BC the earth experienced what he calls a warm post-glacial optimum. In this period the seas and land were much warmer than now and there was no polar ice; the land was fertile and forest-clad up to the poles. At about 3000 BC there was a sudden and catastrophic change for the worse with abnormal volcanic activity over the next four centuries. This led to increasing cold and the onset of Arctic ice. The interest in all this lies in the fact that the Biblical indicated date of about 3300 BC for the Flood would imply that for three centuries the Sons of Noah enjoyed unusually favourable conditions for human life. S.F. Markham, in "Climate and the energy of nations" (1942), had already pointed out that the most virile civilisations have always flourished in those parts of the world where the normal temperature at the time encompassed the 70°F (approx 21°C) mark. Brooks' work shows that this in fact was the case world wide at the time in question. The implication of this is that by Divine overruling in the processes of Nature, the world was in the best possible condition to facilitate the rapid increase of the human race.

In this connection there is an interesting point in Gen. 9.7. God told the sons of Noah to "be fruitful, and multiply". *"Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein"*. There is an emphasis here which is lacking in the similar injunction given to the first human pair in the story of Eden. The Lord merely told them (Gen. 1.28) to *"be fruitful and multiply"*. It is almost as if, in this later stage of history, there was an urge to a more than usual rapid increase in the growth of world population, to subsist at least until the emergent race had become sufficiently numerous to gain a good start, so to speak, in repopulating the earth. There is some correspondence here with the position of Israel in Egypt fifteen centuries later, when they also settled in the most fertile area in the land and increased so rapidly as to excite the alarm and resentment of the Egyptians (Exodus 1.7,12). Strangely enough, the same expression is used there. They *"were fruitful, and increased abundantly and multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty, and the land was filled with them"*. In both cases it would seem there was an above normal and unprecedented rate of increase greatly assisted by the nature of the environment.

Nevertheless, it must have been a long time before there was any sizeable human community. Gen. 10 records the names of sixteen sons, leaving it to be inferred that there were as many daughters. It is most unlikely though, that there were no other children born to these three. Accepting the Scriptural statements that men at that time lived in the region of five or six hundred years it would seem that the period of fatherhood and motherhood must have been considerably in excess of the normal equivalent today and that families therefore were correspondingly larger. (It has already been shown in these pages that these apparently inordinately long lives recorded in Genesis are perfectly reasonable considered against relevant matters, one of which is the effect of the climatic conditions then obtaining.) It can well be, that the compiler of chapter 10 of Genesis, (the famous "Table of Nations"), recorded only those names who were the ancestors of nations then known to exist. On this basis it could be two centuries before the community numbered as much as ten thousand men, women and children. The children of Noah's sons would be born over the same period (out of the five or six centuries of the mother's life) with the parents taking longer to reach maturity than now. After that, matters would accelerate and in another century population could have reached a quarter of a million. In modern times parents who die at about a century have left as many as 250 descendants of five generations. The inference of data gleaned from Genesis is that successive generations then must have been in the region of at least fifty years apart. Modern parallels are probably of little use in forming an opinion. At any rate it is probable that the human population of the earth at the end of the first century did not exceed a few hundreds.

This implies a handful of village settlements. In all the excavations of primitive sites in the Iraq mountains the same general pattern is observed. As the community grows, sections 'hive off' and start new ones a distance away. In certain isolated areas people do exactly the same thing today. There is need to secure more land for food crops and farming stock, to find new sources of foodstuffs and an impulse to explore. These must have been important to Noah and his family. Such food stocks as remained in the Ark after twelve months afloat would have been quickly exhausted, and until a food-growing regime was established they must have relied on what Nature provided.

Providentially, they were in the right locality for this. The Zagros mountains, that border the eastern side of Iraq, rise suddenly from the plain to twelve thousand feet or more, but at about a thousand feet there are wide terraces comprising grasslands and forest in which to this day there are abundant wild fruit trees such as figs, pomegranates, walnuts, almonds and grapes. Ghirshman in "Iran", 1954, is one authority for this and the same is noted by Braidwood and Howe in "Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan" (1966). The latter asserts that the Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world.

This is an area which has received much attention in recent years. Some of the earliest sites show that the inhabitants lived exclusively on wild fruits and grains, wild sheep, goats, pigs and so on. Agriculture and stock-breeding had not yet

developed. The evidence for this is in the types of implements discovered. Then came the first signs of cultivation and sheep and cattle rearing. Applying this to the present subject, by the time Noah's grandsons had children of their own, the increasing number of mouths to feed must have necessitated something more systematic than a sporadic wandering from one place to another gathering the bounty of Nature. So the nomadic style of life gave place to the settled agricultural one and villages began to be more permanent with houses built of sun-dried mud-brick and roofed with reeds and tree-trunks.

All this could have occupied a couple of centuries by which time some of the varied families and communities would have pushed many miles from the original landing place.

(To be continued) AOH

WALK WITH GOD

A conference discourse

"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3.8). Let us cast our minds back to the time of Creation and the Garden of Eden. Stop for a moment and imagine our Heavenly Father walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the evening taking in the sights and the fragrances as the evening descended. We can only imagine that this was a daily occurrence. We can imagine that He often spoke with Adam and Eve and we can imagine His disappointment and sorrow when they transgressed His words and He had to banish them from the Garden.

The thought of walking with the Heavenly Father is a theme that is brought into many books of the Bible, but David, the Psalmist brings out some of the most beautiful thoughts.

– *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me". (Psa. 23.4 NAS)*

– *"For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, indeed my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living". (Psa. 56.13 NAS)*

– *"Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, for I delight in it". (Psa. 119.35 NAS)*

– *"Teach me Thy way, O LORD: I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name." (Psa. 86.11 NAS)*

However the one that I like to concentrate on is found in Psalm 143.8 *"Let me hear Thy loving kindness in the morning; for I trust in Thee; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to Thee I lift up my soul".*

Should not this be the heartfelt prayer of each of us here? What a great privilege we have in being able to come close to our Heavenly Father. Paul told the Ephesians *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2.8-10 NAS)*

At the time that our Heavenly Father called us and accepted us in Christ, He had the power to give us perfect human bodies and minds for our walk ahead. However in His infinite wisdom He saw it was better for us, and for the outworking of His purpose, that we have to contend with the sinful tendencies and imperfections of our fleshly mind and body. We are told in Romans 12.2 *"... be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God".* This renewing of the mind should also result in the transforming of our character. These changes however are not instant, but gradual and are accomplished in proportion to the faith we manifest and the effort we put forth in the doing the will of

God.

If we are to be faithful disciples of Christ we need to take time to consider the significance of the office as a minister of Christ and as a steward of the mysteries of God. The words of Paul stand out boldly, *"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, that we should walk in them."* We are pointedly reminded that the main feature of God's purpose during this Gospel Age is the calling and development of the new creature, the Church. The Church members are destined in the counsels of God to be His instruments in the deliverance of the whole groaning creation in the coming age. During this age we are told *"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us."* (2 Cor 5.18-20 NAS)

The divine foreknowledge and prior 'marking-out' of the Christian path is well stated in Ephesians 2.10: *"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* The Christian's first conscious approach to God is, as the Bible teaches, through faith and even this is a divine gift bestowed by our Heavenly Father. This coming to God is plainly expressed in Hebrews 11.6 *"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* How encouraging are these words. They are not words of warning but of hope as long as we come in the right heart condition. We read in Hebrews 10.22 *"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water"*.

Paul sets a good example of drawing near with a true heart. He had realized his great error in persecuting the Church before his conversion and his love since for the brethren set the example for our love for one another. His brotherly love extended to all brethren but especially for the churches he had been instrumental in bringing to Christ. They were his children, and no self-sacrifice was too much in his care for them. The precepts he had given them were good but his example was far more effective. One of the things for which Jesus

found fault with the Pharisees was that they told others what to do but did not practice what they preached. So we read *"Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them'."* (Matt 23.1-3 NAS)

Jesus however left us an example that we should follow in His footsteps. This example was the most effective, the most lasting lesson Our Lord could give, for he shows us how to follow the precepts of His Father's Word. Peter tells us in his first epistle *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps"* (1 Pet 2.21 NAS). "Following in Christ's footsteps" is the true secret of Scriptural living for those who have consecrated their lives to Christ and wish to please their Heavenly Father. He shows us the degree to which we must yield our wills unto God. We must devote our whole heart and lives to Him, and in so doing we please and give honor to Him. All that is of worth in our Christian life comes to us as the result of a union with Christ by faith and as a gift from God.

Let us return to the thought in Psalm 143.8 *"teach me the way in which I should walk."* How are we to know how we are to walk in the ways of our Heavenly Father. The thought of "Walking with God" is that our life as a new creature is one where we are constantly dependent upon Him. We cannot take a step alone without the fear that we would stumble. The figure of "walking" used in the text suggests something very practical. It presents to our minds the thought of plodding along the pathways of our daily life. Our Christian faith means that we must be close to our Heavenly Father and in so doing have His help in our everyday duties – family, work, or in the schoolroom. It is in these places that we are called to be His witnesses. We especially need our Heavenly Father at our side in the hard and difficult times when we are faced with trials or fierce temptation.

Again, the thought of "walking with God," suggests that we have been reconciled to Him, by the operation of His grace, without which, no one could live in His presence. It suggests the thought of friendship and of close acquaintance. One of the interesting examples of walking with God was the

case of Enoch as we read "*Enoch, walked with God*" (Gen 5.22). We are not informed just how God made known to Enoch His way. We may be assured, however, that sufficient knowledge was given him to enable him to lay hold by faith of the fact that God was pleased with him and that he had the privilege of His fellowship. We may be sure that he must have desired the friendship and companionship of God, and therefore his desire was towards God as we are told in Amos 3.3 "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

What do we mean by the Christian's 'walk'? It is our journey on the Narrow Way, and how our thoughts, words and actions on the journey, as others look on, reflect on how they see our Heavenly Father. The Apostle Paul indicates very clearly what this work or "course" of the Christian should be. He provides us with a sevenfold description in his letter to the church at Ephesus. The new creature should: 1. not walk according to the course of this world; 2. walk in good works. 3. walk worthy of our calling; 4. should not walk like other Gentiles; 5. walk in love; 6. walk as children of light; 7. walk circumspectly.

Let us expand on each of these descriptions.

1. The new creature should not walk according to the course of this world. "*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience*" (Eph. 2.1-2 NAS). We see here that one of the first things required of us to walk with God is to change our direction, that is, we are not to walk according to or under the direction of the prince of the power of the air.

2. The new creature should walk in good works – "*For we are (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2.10). Although we are not saved by good works they are a necessary part of our Christian development and as our Lord tells us they do have a purpose, "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt 5.16 NAS). The purpose of the works is not to bring glory or benefit to us but to our Heavenly Father.

3. The new creation should walk worthy of the vocation with which they are called (Eph. 4.1). This calling is the highest of all, for we are called

to represent the Lord and Master who redeemed us. We should seek to glorify and honor Him in all of our activities and try never to dishonor Him. We are told that God ... "*has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity*" (2 Tim. 1.9 NAS). Our vocation (or calling) is to be servants of God and our earthly vocation should not hinder our service to Him. If we are sincere in our desire to be joint-heirs with Christ and to be prospective members of His bride, then we need to study to improve our vocational skills.

4. "*That you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind*", (Eph. 4.17 NAS). We are not to be satisfied with mere avoidance of gross sin and immorality. We are to nurture the spirit of the Lord and of a sound mind so that they may direct our joys and sorrows. Whether we are attending a wedding or a funeral or social occasion we should always act to the glory of God and to put aside the influences of the world. The world teaches nothing of gentleness, kindness, patience, and faithfulness to the Lord which is our duty. He tells us to "*Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it*". (Matt. 7.13-14 NAS). We have to have our minds set on things above, not on futile earthly matters.

5. The new creature is to walk in love – "*and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma*" (Eph. 5.2 NAS). Love must become the controlling influence in our lives: our words, our actions, that is in everything that we do or think. Paul tells us "*Love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13.10). Our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us. "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you*" (John 13.34). It is the Apostle's point that we so love one another, in obedience to the Master's command and example, that we would be willing to surrender everything, even our lives, for one another. We should be ready to sacrifice choices, assets or our preferences for a few days or a few months or for a few years if this is what is needed to help our brethren on the narrow way. Although these sacrifices should be mainly along the lines of their spiritual interests, in some cases it may also be

of their material needs.

This spirit of love controls us and we should extend our love also to our neighbours. To love them means to seek ways to serve them. *"Love works no ill to his neighbour"* (Rom. 13.10). Love means not taking advantage of a neighbour, love will not cheat them; love will not injure them in any manner. Love would not prompt us to tell stories about our neighbour showing them in an unpleasant light. Love reminds us to *"speak evil of no man."*

6. The new creation is instructed to walk as enlightened children. In Eph. 5.8 we are told *"you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light"*. We become children of light when we take into account all that is just, pure, noble and kind; that is, all that is in harmony with our Heavenly Father's character and Word. These are the things that will be the greatest benefit to the neighbours and friends of the new creature. As children of the light, we should see development in our character, and this light will shine more and more clearly upon the paths of those with whom we associate; our neighbours, our friends as well as the brethren. As children of the light, we should not hide our light, but rather allow it to be displayed: enlightening and enriching all those with whom we come in contact.

7. The new creature should walk circumspectly (Eph. 5.15). Circumspect has the meaning "to look carefully all around at every step." As Christians we cannot live carelessly, we look around and recognize the various pitfalls that may be put on our pathway to catch us unawares. We have to seek God's wisdom and counsel so as to make firm and sure our progress on our walk. *"... conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel"* (Phil. 1.27 NAS). This circumspect style of life is essential because of the unceasing activity of Satan against the followers of the Master. His snares are both gross and subtle as suits his purposes but they are permitted by God to come upon the new creation to test and bring about growth. As one nears the goal of Christ likeness in His character, the tests seem to become more constant and the more vigorous as the Adversary grows more

diligent in his efforts to discourage and stumble the true wheat of this Gospel Age. Our circumspection is demanded because we claim to be the offspring of God, a new creature, begotten of the Holy Spirit, and as a result our lives should shine as a reproof to the evil in this world.

Let us reflect on what we have covered:

We thought of God walking in the Garden. We saw the example of Enoch.

We looked into the Psalms and David's thoughts on his Walk with God.

We looked at the purpose of the walk, being taught of the ways of God

At Christ's first advent we saw that the Pharisees were not walking with God. We looked at seven instructions for our Walk with God. We can see that effort, planning and prayer have to go into our walk with God each waking hour if we are to achieve our goal of following our Master's footsteps. It will be well worth the effort if at the end of our earthly walk we hear our Master's voice *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."* (Matt. 25.23 NAS)

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

I am weak, but thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to thee.

Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee:
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Through this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee.

When my feeble life is o'er,
Time for me will be no more;
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To thy shore, dear Lord, to thy shore.

RC

"By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our

captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion'."
Psalm 137.1-4 Revised Standard Version

THE COVENANTS

3. The Messianic Vision

Israel was a covenanted people. The relationship with God began with the Patriarchs. The Law with its covenant was a means of regulating that relationship as Israel's population grew. Moses explained carefully how Israel would receive blessings if they kept their covenant with God and how they would suffer reverses if they did not (Deut. 29.9-15). Moses had also told them of the one, like himself, that God would raise up from among the people in whom He would put His word in a very special way (Deut 18.18). This was the early whisper to Israel of a Coming One, a Messiah to whom Peter referred when he spoke to the people in the Temple just after Pentecost (Acts 3.22, 23). The people of Israel shouted excitedly at Sinai *"All these things we will do"* but it was different when their children arrived in the land forty years later. The nomadic life since Abraham left Ur, was about to change in a way that is hard for us to understand. Their diet changed and they began to live in houses instead of tents. The pagan tribes that surrounded them were enemies although later they deeply influenced Israel with their culture and idolatrous worship. God had not left them without witness of their promises as a covenanted people. The centre of their worship was the Ark of the Covenant and presence of God was in their midst. Another witness of the covenant was circumcision and that was re-established in Israel when they entered the land under Joshua (Jos. 5). Towards the end of his life and leadership Joshua again made a covenant at Shechem described in Joshua 24.19-28. This was another phase of that earlier relationship. Each one of these covenants was but a restoration, a renewal of that earlier relationship. During their exploits in taking Canaan, Israel were tricked into making a covenant with the Gibeonites (Jos. 9.15) because they failed to discover God's will. As a just God, He insisted that His covenanted people should be honourable in their relationships with other people.

For the first few centuries in Canaan, Israel were ruled by special leaders, called Judges. From an ethical and religious point of view their history was a series of peaks and troughs; of repentance and reform followed by apostasy and defeat by their enemies. When they kept the covenant they prospered but when they broke it they suffered

reverses of all kinds. The rains didn't come, the crops failed and their enemies pillaged what little they grew and owned. Why then did they break the covenant? We could ask a similar question about any time in human history, including today. The nations of the world continue to take the illogical course – utterly sinful – and so do God's people. Who is he (or she) who is so arrogant that they protest that they always do and say what God wants? The pattern does not change and as in those far off days, there were some in Israel who were totally surrendered to God's will. One of these was Samuel. He more than most restored God's Covenant with Israel and led them forward in that relationship. It was the realization of the importance of the Covenant that made him resist the people's desire for a king. In fact the problem was not in wanting a king but their reasons for wanting one. They wanted to keep up with their neighbours – they wanted the pomp and ceremony of royalty that would lead them to victory in battle. They may have become more united as a nation but that did not end tribal conflict. They just changed its outer forms and their relationships were based on envy and pride; barriers were erected and tribalism thrived in social classes and groups. It is still as rife today in party spirit and entrenched unions and sects just as it was in the 1st Century among Pharisees and silversmiths. Each regards his or her own camp or faction as absolutely right and everything is said and done to devalue an opponent. All this because relationships do not have the right basis, that is love for God and love for fellow human beings. Among God's people, if the relationship to Him is right, there will be love for one another without fear or favour. A great deal of sectarianism in the 1st and 21st centuries is a form of tribalism based on fear and envy. Our King has already shown that He has other ideas.

Israel's first king did little to encourage the principles of loving trust. All that Samuel said would happen under royalty did occur during Saul's reign. The man who succeeded him was good at heart but too often he gave way to human weakness. His violence prevented him doing all that his piety would like to have done. He was a good man who longed to make Israel truly God's own people. Something of the spirit of the

Covenant is to be discovered in David's dealing with Mephibosheth recounted in 2 Sam. 9.1, 7. David, the future king had made a covenant with his great friend Jonathan, the heir to the throne, (1 Sam. 18.3, 4). After Jonathan's death David took care of a weak and disabled son and thus kept his promise to his old friend, instead of murdering all possible rivals in customary fashion. He partially succeeded in establishing a righteous monarchy and God made a special covenant with him that looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Nathan, prophet of God, took a message to David that said He would *"raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me ... your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."* (2 Sam 7.11-16). This is sometimes called the Davidic Covenant but there is no record of the covenant ceremony, 'cutting the covenant'. It established a principle that was to have a shadow fulfilment in the life of David's son, Solomon.

God spoke through his prophets and they were wonderful men. As Frank Cooke points out in his book 'Living in the Covenant' "long before Plato was born, the Hebrew prophets were declaring the foundations of the just society." More than that they came to know God and what His character was like. There is no doubt that something of the words of these prophets was taken eastwards and formed the basis of the teaching of the religious philosophers who have been acclaimed world wide. They however never knew the great Creator of the universe or carried His Word as those prophets of Israel. The prophets tended to communicate God's Word to the king. This was certainly true in the days of David and Solomon and the young king led the worship of the people when the Temple was dedicated. *"O Lord God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him ..."* It is a wonderful record in 1 Kings 8 and the true spirit of piety is to be found in those words to God before His people. It was not to last, even in Solomon's own lifetime, but we catch glimpses of the same spirit when king

stood between God and His people in the lives of Josiah and Hezekiel. For the most part kings, priests and prophets became corrupted and served pagan gods. But the pattern had been laid down and one day an anointed Prophet, Priest and King, Son of God, Messiah would stand between God and all creation and put it right.

David caught the spirit of God's covenant with Israel in some of the Psalms. In the Messianic Psalm 22 we have the covenant promise to Abraham in vv. 27 and 28. In Psalm 23.6 the word 'mercy' is *chesed*, the Hebrew word for 'covenant love'. It is translated in most texts in the Old Testament Revised Standard Version as 'steadfast love' and a concordance of that translation can make an interesting study of one of the most important words in Scripture. God's love towards His covenanted people is a 'faithful love' – a love which must reward and judge – a love that is unswervingly just and is not affected by human emotion. Glimpses of this wonderful characteristic of our Father is revealed in the Psalms as in Psalm 25.10 *"All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies"* and again in Psalm 136.1 *"O give thanks to the Lord for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever"* and so on through the whole of the Psalms.

The vision of the covenanted people that some day an anointed king would come who would lead God's people to victory, never died. So often the epitaph of the Kings of Israel and Judah was 'He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord'. As soon as they returned after exile, they anointed a king that hopefully things would be better. Later the Maccabees raised their hopes again but it was not to be. When at last their Messiah came they failed to recognise Him. That was in spite of the great work of the prophets who had pointed not to 'pageantry and wisdom of men' but to the ethics of a holy God. He could anoint with His Spirit only one who eschewed the violence and prejudice of humanity and truly reflected His patience and gentleness in faithful service. The ethics of the prophets makes another study. From Elijah through Hosea to Jeremiah the character of the God they served is truly reflected. Only by discovering that moral character and applying its principles to our lives can the predictive prophecy of the Kingdom of God make sense.

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal Bible study*

21. Chapters 17 and 18

Luke 17.20-27 When will God's kingdom come? Did they expect a specific time? Jesus did not give one but replied that the Kingdom of God was in the midst of them (RSV) or as some other translations give it "*is within you*". Did He mean that He was the king therefore the kingdom was among them? Or did He mean that the Kingdom was within their hearts? The Pharisees, like a lot of other people, would have liked a more specific answer but Jesus never gave one and for an excellent reason. The word "*observed*" (v.20) is from a Greek word that would have been used by a medical practitioner *observing* symptoms. The next thing He said was equally puzzling (v.22). Were the days that some would wish to see, the days of Jesus' first advent or the days of the second advent? What follows in v.23 might give the impression that He was referring to the latter. And that verse gives a warning not to follow false trails. There will always be those who get excited about the wrong thing. Lightning is unmistakable. (Matt 24.27)

What is it about the days of Noah and the days of Lot that give us warning? Would the natural disasters have occurred if ordinary people had repented? That is not a speculative question but intended to help us discover what Jesus was really teaching here. Did He mention these two historical events to explain what the days of the Son of Man would be like? Was he contrasting godly with the ungodly? If those killed in the disasters ignored warnings, what kind of warning was given? Was it 'Repent or you will die' or was it 'Repent and accept the way of God?' Do we repent because we are afraid of consequences or because we want to behave in God's way?

The final puzzling section speaks of some being 'taken' and others 'left'. Much has been written (and sung) about these verses. Jesus was by no means trying to make things more difficult to understand. Nor was His gospel of love compatible with frightening people into the Kingdom of Heaven. This passage should challenge God's people and teach us that we cannot please God by proxy. Close association with a child of God doesn't automatically give us a place in His family. Each of us must make our own calling sure by reason of the kind of life we lead with the Lord. What can we learn from birds

of prey gathering to a carcass? (Matt. 24.28) This was in answer to the question "*Where Lord?*" Firstly, this is more likely to be a reference to vultures rather than eagles that do not take carrion and probably it is a quotation of an ancient proverb. E. H. Plumptre says that this tells us that God's judgments are wherever they are needed. Barclay's dry comment is "Where the spiritual dead are found there will be judgment."

The Master never intended these verses to cause disputes among God's people. As with all such passages of Scripture there is here the strong message that the believer must be alert and ready and this is achieved by walking with the Lord, thinking, speaking and behaving like Him. Nothing else will prepare for sharing His Kingdom. Fascinating though the study of prophecy may be, alone it will not transform us into His likeness. Whatever the future may hold, as we watch prophecy unfold, we shall be best ready for the trials and temptations of a critical period of world history by being close to the Lord. Intellectual knowledge will be of little use in the 'fire'. Whatever may come if we are with Him, we shall have His peace.

Luke 18.1-14 Jesus' teaching about prayer. Luke gives us more teaching about the prayer life of Jesus than the other three Gospel writers. These two stories contrast. The first, vv1-8, is a recognition that human nature soon becomes tired of an activity if immediate results are not obtained. We lack the patience that God has shown in the outworking of His purpose. Jesus infers that His Father does not always answer prayer immediately. Why doesn't He do so? Sometimes He does respond immediately and sometimes the answer is 'wait'. Unless the answer is a clear well-defined 'no' then we should continue to ask, developing not only patience, but the valuable quality of tenacity – 'hanging on' – a willingness to believe and therefore develop faith also.

In this parable God is being contrasted with and not compared to an unrighteous judge. This was not a Jewish judge but one appointed by Herod or Rome – Barclay. It reflects the state of disorganization and corruption in Galilee and Peraea at the time – Plumptre. Jesus stretches our minds. Even an unjust person will act to get peace. God is just and

loving and has the highest welfare of all creation at helm especially His children. He acts for the best, waiting for the moment when action will obtain the greatest blessing. Is this parable linked to the previous chapter and the coming of the Kingdom and the King? Perseverance is needed in the age old prayer "Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven". The signs and signals of chap. 17 take time – they don't happen all at once but God wants us to pray because prayer helps us to live in the spirit of that Kingdom and by its laws. Commentators point out that Jews limited their prayer to three times a day but Jesus urged His people to live in an atmosphere of prayer, continuous prayer, patiently longing for what is asked. What guided this judge in his judgment? He feared neither God nor man but was tired (*hupopiazō*) of the widow's incessant pleading. Paul uses the verb in 1 Cor 9.27 "*to beat or buffet*" and literally means to give a black eye – Morris, Barclay. The widow for her part knew that she was right and was absolutely determined to get what she wanted. She had no one to help or money to bribe. God's people cry, unceasingly and He will show that they are right. By delay He gives their tormentors opportunity to repent. Jesus speaks of the certainty of God's actions. 'Speedily' is within God's time scale of a 'thousand years as one day'.

Jesus' next question about the Son of Man finding faith when He comes has been assumed to be rhetorical. In contrast we might ask, will there ever be a time when the Earth will not have some witness to the true faith?

Is the next parable teaching the breadth of salvation as well as illustrating attitudes in prayer. The story was about a Pharisee but does it apply to us? We all have the same tendency to believe that we are better than we really are. Progress in one aspect of Christian living does not exclude us from failure in another. We may pray regularly, even often, but does this not demand deep repentance that requests revival in our own life? This is why the Pharisee failed and worse, he looked upon the tax collector as if he were 'holier than thou'. Are we guilty of such uncharitable contempt? The outwardly pious want all to see and hear that they are good, righteous people. Inwardly, the man was a sinner, who hadn't learned the first lesson in God's school of prayer. The tax collector was ahead of the 'religious' leader in learning about God – *'the Lord*

looks on the heart'. The Pharisee "glances at God but contemplates himself" (Plummer). Did he go to the Temple to talk to God or himself and those around him? Are we likely to switch the characters round so that the non-churchgoing supporter of charity thanks God that he is not like those chanting hypocrites in church. Should not our prayer attitude be one in which life will be determined not by what we have done in the past but by what God will make of us in the future? This parable teaches that good deeds cannot buy spiritual credit. Jesus said elsewhere, that however much we think we do for God we are always indebted to Him. If we haven't felt the conviction of sin as did the tax collector we haven't begun real spiritual growth. God can only acquit us of sin if we own up to it (1 John 1.9). None may boast before God but he who is humble will be exalted (14.11 Morris). Justified here means 'acceptable' to God.

vv 15-30 The younger ones: "It is one of the loveliest things in all the Gospel story that Jesus had time for the children when He was on the way to Jerusalem to die" – Barclay says that it was the custom for mothers to take their children to a distinguished rabbi to be blessed on their first birthday. Were the disciples unkind to the children or were they shielding Jesus from stress and unnecessary attention? What did Jesus think? What is the childlike spirit that is a passport to the Kingdom of God? Barclay says it is "to keep alive the sense of wonder, to live in unquestioning trust, instinctively to obey, to forgive and to forget". Many movements, churches and groups fail to follow the Master's example. They do not involve the younger generation in their work and worship. There is a price for disobedience. It is a terrible thing to place obstacles in the way of children coming to Christ. It is just as terrible to ignore those children; even worse to set before them a wrong example.

A young man asked a question. It is useful to compare parallel accounts in the various Gospels. He was a rich ruler and in Jewish eyes he lacked nothing. He had all that could be wished for. He wanted to be on his way to the Kingdom of Heaven but he was aware of something missing in his life. Was it 'self fulfilment'? Why go to Jesus? What had he got that the great religious rabbis of the Temple lacked? He was evidently a likable young man, yet he was pious and strict otherwise he would not be a ruler of the synagogue. So he comes to Jesus with

a rather unusual if not patronizing form of address - 'Good Master'. That is not how rabbis were normally addressed. Plummer says that there was no such address in the whole of the Talmud. Jesus naturally focused the young man's attention on God. Commentators suggest that Jesus was inviting the young man to reflect on what he was asking and that would certainly be so concerning his desire to 'earn salvation' by doing something. Did the questioner understand that eternal life must mean appearing in the presence of a holy God? Entering the Kingdom meant coming to God with nothing but repentance and the desire to do God's will. Was he in fact breaking the Law towards God and man? Was he prepared to express his love for God by giving Him everything? Where now was his love for his neighbour who was in need of a coin or two? Why were these commandments listed in this way here? Is the Greek translation of the OT – Septuagint, anything to do with it? Is not the rich young ruler's question, a prayer? Is not the cry of the blind man in the next story also a prayer? Certainly he needed persistence. But before we look at that incident there is the conversation that Jesus had with the disciples.

Wealth among the Jews, as in other cultures, was a mark of God's special favour. Was there support for this in the Old Testament? Even the apostles were astonished that Jesus should speak of the extreme difficulty of a rich person getting into the Kingdom. But did Jesus say here or elsewhere that it was impossible for a rich person to enter the Kingdom? Affluence is dangerous. The problem with this man was the power of wealth to distract a believer from the service of God. Wealth was competing with God for the rich man's time and energy. It corrupts because collecting it becomes addictive hence the traditional miser. Many have sought to interpret the camel climbing through the eye of a needle. Some refer to a postern gate (small door) in a city gate but Morris believes they miss the point that Jesus is using a humorous illustration. Barclay has further suggestions – *kamelos* (camel) is similar to *kamilos* (ship's hawser). Is Jesus saying that it's easier to thread a needle with a ship's wire cable than for rich people to enter the Kingdom? Or is He just comparing something fantastically impossible? Either we are absorbed with material things such as money or our focus is upon God with a desire to be like Him and to do the work He plans for us. Like the young man, we have to make a

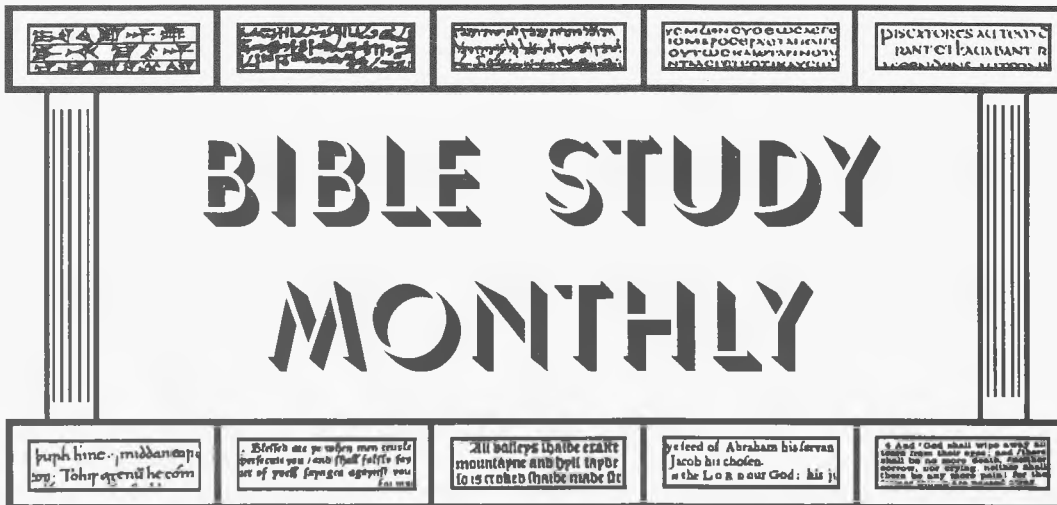
choice. The disciples confessed that they had already done that and were keen to know about the rewards attached to their decision. Jesus was quite clear; they would share His life and Kingdom. But more than that, they would receive **now** much more than they gave. Was that the experience in the Acts of the Apostles or those who came afterwards in the last 2000 years. What are the 'sacrifices' that a follower of Jesus has to make? Is it to be compared to the peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away? – Barclay.

Jesus now contrasts those rewards with His immediate future. This is usually referred to as the **third** of such warnings but was it? (5.35; 9.22. 43-45; 12.50; 13.32; 17.25 - Morris). He was deliberately going to Jerusalem knowing that the Jews would hand Him over to the Romans who would treat Him badly before killing Him. For Him it was the fulfilment of prophecy; for His twelve closest followers it was confusion but did they still not understand why He had come to Earth? In retrospect they would understand, but at that moment the 'twelve' could not share their Master's experience.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem takes Him through Jericho and a glance at the map will show that he was now entering the last phase of His ministry with the long hard climb up to Jerusalem. Before that could happen he was faced with two delightful incidents and healing of the blind man is the first. As always it is interesting to compare the various gospel accounts – they do not contradict each other but each adds details that gives it a character of its own. What made this man address Jesus as 'the son of David'? He seems to have had a companion and one of the two was called Bartimaeus and they sat near the city gate. Nothing was going to prevent them from pleading with Jesus for the gift they most desired – and Jesus ignored the crowd who would have kept them away from Him and they were able to see again. Barclay suggests that the crowd were lining the streets to see the pilgrims on their way to the feast (Passover). He also points out that the words in the Greek for 'shout' in vv 38 and 39 are different – the first is to attract attention, the second is the emotional despairing call for help. The story has much to tell us about the man and about Jesus.

(In preparing this study Geldenhuys, Morris, Plummer and Barclay commentaries of the Gospel of Luke have been used)

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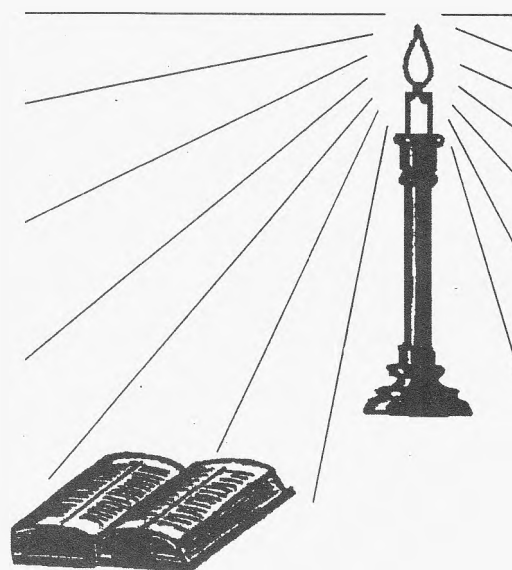
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JUST A THOUGHT - Domination or Stewardship

"Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge and by him actions are weighed." (1 Sam 2.3 RSV)

Characters that cross the stage of human history have woven into its stories qualities which betray those whom they serve. In the Bible such men as Nimrod, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar and Herod the Great tell us by their actions that they do not belong to God even though they serve His purpose. People have striven to dominate each other; to rule and exert authority. They have embodied this world's values of cruelty, oppression and selfishness and regarded compassion and mercy as weaknesses. They have promoted slave ownership, national and racial tyranny and brought untold misery and suffering to families, communities and nations.

The song of Hannah reflects something of the tyranny of the rich and powerful over their fellows. Similar thoughts are expressed in Mary's song (Luke 2) and that was the atmosphere in which Jesus grew up.

He rebuked the 'twelve' for their ambition to be 'the greatest' (Matt 20; Mark 10 and Luke 22) telling them that they must not imitate worldly masters who dominate those 'beneath' them. He said that there must be no 'domineering' or bullying among His people. This was how this world's leaders exercised their authority but He warned *"It must not be so among you"* (Matt. 20.24-28). Many Christian communities have disobeyed His command. The failure of Israel's leaders has been repeated to an even worse degree in the Christian church. Nor do we need to look 'over the garden wall' at other people, churches or fellowships. Strangely, there are those who happily submit to the 'lordship' of leaders and they prefer to depend on human security. Wrong use of leadership power

encourages worldly values and the fruit of the Spirit cannot grow (Galatians 5.19-26). *"Love is not possessive, it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance"* (1 Cor. 13.4 Phillips). The two human qualities that Jesus warned against most are hypocrisy and arrogance.

The truly godly leaders in the Old and New Testament were those who tenderly cared for God's flock. Those who spend much time in His presence are humbled and become like Him. Leadership has great temptations but real love for those who are led removes greed for power. Whether in the natural world of plants and animals or in serving God's people or indeed any section of society, the secret lies in working with people or nature and not dominating them to serve our personal interests. Leadership is a great privilege and carries with it the joy of sharing and teaching, of sacrifice and generosity, – and above all – walking with Jesus every day, He who was the greatest example of true leadership, He who was the good shepherd.

When the 'twelve' were bickering among themselves because James and John had asked for the most important place with Him 'in glory', He told them that the Son of Man came to Earth to serve others to give His life as a ransom. (Mark 10.45 RSV). Later in the Upper Room Jesus washed the disciples' feet as a slave of the family. He told them that He had set an example that they should wash each other's feet and do as He had done (John 13.3-11 RSV). Oh that we might approach all things as Jesus did! He was always patient, gentle and totally motivated by love.

DN

Gone from Us

Sister Madge Bartley (Co. Fermanagh)

'Till the day break and the shadows flee away.'

SHADOW OF THE CROSS

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12.32).

The shadow of the Cross has lain across the history of mankind since that mysterious forecast made in Eden of the bruising of the serpent. The stage was there set for the fight between the opposing forces of good and evil. Enmity, rivalry, animosity, antagonism, intolerance, deception, persecution, betrayal and suffering have dogged the footsteps of man from that day to this. However great the effort to stem the stream, the vulnerable heel of man has been stabbed with the fiery darts of wickedness. The verdict of the past has been that all have gone astray at some time, like lost sheep in need of rescue. The present gives no reason to change that verdict. When to be good is considered dull - to do good, officious busy-bodding, when virtue is despised and sin extolled as sensational and exciting, it is plain that humanity has strayed from a safe road into the dangers of the wilderness. It was in the wilderness that Moses lifted up a serpent of brass for the benefit of those who had been bitten by serpents, many of them fatally. Those who could and would look upon the brazen image set upon a pole, recovered from the effects of the poisonous bite. Jesus referred to this incident as a picture of his own lifting up on the cross for the same purpose, to heal those suffering from the fiery bite of sin. *"Look to Jesus, look and live. There is life in a look at the crucified one"* is no fantasy of the hymn writer but a basic fact of man's condition and need of salvation.

The drawing power of the Cross from the day of Calvary until the twentieth first century has been strong; a magnetic pulling of men and women toward the ideals of the Christian life as exemplified by the man who was its chief victim. By its means people have been gathered out of every nation, kindred and tongue to become the first fruits of love, of life given, that through its generosity the straying and the smitten might be "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven", inspired with high hope of better things to come, of life abundant, flowing to all who believe in Him. *"For God so loved the world that He gave."* The gifts of God are everywhere apparent in the earth He created to be the home of man, but His greatest gift is that of a Saviour. The Cross has become the outward symbol of faith. It stands on mountain slopes,

on the pinnacles of churches, adorns the vestments of priests and is worn by some adherents of the various factions of the Christian religion as the badge of their belief. Gatherers of relics claim to be custodians of pieces of the true Cross, but there is no merit in the Cross even if the original is still in existence. It is the man upon the Cross who holds the power to draw all men to him.

"Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45.22). The human race, increasing in size, scattered abroad in every corner of the earth, needed then and still needs the offices of a just God. It needs also a Saviour, a bruiser of the monstrous head of evil by which they have been kept in various stages of subjection to cruelty, poverty, ignorance and death. In Jesus, God mounted a gigantic rescue operation. He came declaring Himself *"the way, the truth and the life"*, no healing, restoration or harmony with God except through Him; no other name known under heaven by which men may be saved from the perils of sin.

Much theological ink has been spilt over Christian doctrine, causing divisions, and rifts, the splintering of the faith into a thousand fragments, but theories fade before the facts. The world without God is a dark place. Knowledge of a more scientific sort has tended to eclipse salvation, to cloud the once bright vision of the Saviour's face, to dim assurance in the life-giving words that *"whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life"*. The Cross has lost its drawing power. All men have a tendency to look in other directions, seeking satisfaction in the treasures and pleasures of this world, amazed not by grace but by the wonders produced by a skilful, materialistic age which presents itself like the Laodicean church, rich, increased with goods and in need of nothing. Even where there is not a cold indifference to spiritual things and higher needs than bread and supermarkets, there is a lukewarm support, an outward lip service, a superficial knowledge, a greater concern for the crumbling places of worship than for the One to whom all worship is due. When Jesus hung upon the Cross it is recorded that darkness lay over the whole land from the sixth to the ninth hour, prefiguring the darkness of the latter days of this age of which He spoke. The clouded sun, the failing moon, set for signs and symbols of life rejected, of law flouted and defied, of a reeling

earth and a bewildered people are not too strong figures of speech when applied to the twenty-first century. Joel saw it as a time when *"darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people"*. The Cross can scarcely be discerned and the figure of Christ grows dim before the oncoming clouds of worldwide strife, of the struggle for power and supremacy, of the last throw for possession of the mind of man.

In such an extremity the prophets saw the rescuing hand of God in operation, inflicting the devastating blow to the kingdoms of this world, setting in the midst of His enemies His king. Crowned, not with thorns, but with glory and honour, reigning not from a Cross but from a throne of judgment and justice, He takes up His great power and authority, to conquer sin and opposition, to bring light and life to a desperate situation, to save to the uttermost all who will come to His side. So startling will be the benefits of His reign in contrast to the fears, the falsity and the deprivations which have for so long existed, that men will weep for joy and relief as those snatched from shipwreck and death. Heads

will be turned and hearts drawn toward their great Deliverer.

To those who count time by days and hours and seconds, the time from the Cross to the Crown has been long. From the place of sacrifice to the place of power, where He will put down all evils which separate man from his Maker, has been a long period of strife, doubt and scepticism. Yet to Him who sees the end from the beginning, from whom nothing is hid, it has been but a little while, an interval. The whole history of man has been written and enacted in less than the travelling time of light from some far-flung sun of less importance than the planet designed to be the meeting place of God and man formed in His own image.

The drawing of all men by all-conquering love will be a spectacular work, but it will be done. *"For God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Phil. 2.9-11). FAS

"NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR YOU." (JER. 32.17)

God is omniscient, so does He know everything about our future? It is difficult to discuss or reflect upon matters that concern Divine omnipotence because our human minds are finite and there are things outside our range of understanding. We can no more understand the nature and scope of Divine foreknowledge than visualise how the universe can be infinite in extent. No matter how far it extends there must be something beyond that. We cannot understand how time can be endless; or that God never had a beginning and was "always there". God says He knows *"the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done"* (Isa. 46.10). Whether this refers to the general outcome of His creative plan or is to be extended to the individual fates of every creature to which He has given life we really have no means of knowing. Some thinkers have defined the eternity in which God dwells as an eternal 'NOW' in which past, present and future all exist together and God can see them all, but that is human speculation and we have no mandate to say that God is really like that.

There is progression, development and free will in God's creation. It may be that in some manner, incomprehensible to us, God is able to take into account all the causes and effects and all the influences which impinge upon our lives and deduce from them all, how we are going to react. From that He may be able to perceive what the ultimate outcome will be. Yet it remains true that we ourselves are unconscious of all this and are still able to exercise our own free-will and choose our own course without any kind of ordained future to which we are compelled willy-nilly to conform. It is an undisputed fact that God has given us, as He gave Adam at the first, the free and unfettered choice of good or evil, and we are the masters of our destiny. Whether or not the infinite mind of God is such that He already knows which we shall choose does not in any degree affect our own freedom of choice. Nor does it affect any further development of our mind and will, in the ages of eternity which are to be ours beyond this life.

AOH

"Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and

outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." (Jer. 32.17 NIV)

THE VISION OF JOEL

6 - Down into the Valley

*Exposition of the
Book of Joel 3*

The third chapter of Joel's prophecy is so well known a passage, and so often read and quoted in studies relating to the end of the Age, that it seems almost superfluous to engage upon a detailed exposition of its verses. It is without doubt the "key-chapter" to all that the Scriptures have to say concerning Armageddon. The short, terse, but vivid description of the nations feverishly arming themselves and coming together to the final conflict, only to meet the might of the Lord rising up out of Zion to destroy them, has no parallel in any other Biblical book. It is a summary of the more detailed explanations given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and John in the Book of Revelation. It definitely asserts final and conclusive victory for the powers of righteousness and it closes the prophecy on a note of finality. After all the troubles and disasters Joel has seen, he declares triumphantly that, at last, "the Lord dwells in Zion". The chapter has four sections. First of all, in verses 1-2, God asserts His intention of bringing to a head all the smouldering opposition to His ways on the part of the Gentile nations. In that day He sets His hand the second time (Isa. 11.11) to recover the remnant of His people from the four corners of the earth. "I will also gather all nations," He says, "and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land" (v 2). That word 'plead' does not bear the meaning we usually attach to it in these modern days, that of imploring or beseeching. It means literally "to enter into judgment with" and is used to describe the Lord's calling the peoples to account before him.

Thus, we have Isa. 66.16 "By fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh", and Jer. 25.31 "the Lord has a controversy with the nations; He will plead with all flesh; He will give them that are wicked to the sword", and Ezek. 38. 22, "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone". This latter Scripture is referring to the fate of "Gog's host", another prophetic view of the same event that Joel is now describing, and is the effect of the "pleading" to which the Lord refers in Joel 3. It is a

judgment that comes ~upon the peoples whose deeds merit judgment and according to the inexorable laws of Divine creation that judgment must surely come.

The scattering of Israel among the nations, and the "parting" (or dividing) of their land, are perfectly well known and understood by students already. The land has been repeatedly divided and re-divided, as one great Gentile empire has succeeded another. The people have been repeatedly driven into captivity and scattered into far countries at the will of every great military conqueror who may have brought them under his dominion. First were the Assyrians, who took the northern kingdom, the "Ten Tribes" captive, and settled aliens in Samaria and Galilee. Then came the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, driving Judah and Jerusalem away and leaving the land desolate. The partial restoration under the Persians was never a real restoration: the people were in subjection to a Gentile power and the land was politically divided into provinces ruled by rival governors. The Greeks drew fresh lines of demarcation and the Romans altered these in their turn, kings of the north and kings of the south marching and counter marching across the hills and valleys, bringing distress and disruption continually upon the unhappy people. Even after the great dispersion during the half century following the capture of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70, and the ending of the national existence of the chosen nation, Persians, and Arabs and Crusaders and Turks made havoc in the Holy Land. They created and destroyed petty provinces and kingdoms ruling for a space from fortresses and cities until the sword of a stronger compelled the weaker to loose his hold. The twentieth century has seen no interruption of the process; today, the land promised to Jacob and to his seed forever, is divided between half-a-dozen Arab states amidst which the tiny portion conceded to the sons of the patriarch maintains a precarious existence. The land has been divided by the enemies of Israel, and to the time of writing remains divided.

It is against this background that the prophet goes on to declare the sins for which the Gentile nations are being called to account. This is the second section of the chapter (vv 3-8). The whole

picture is that of a people taken captive and sold into slavery at the whim of its captors. They have done so carelessly, never dreaming of retribution. But God has not been indifferent. He has taken note of all that has been done, and now through his prophet He says: *"Because you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things... behold, I will return your recompense upon your own head; and I will sell your sons and daughters..."* (vv 5-8). This is, of course, a symbolic statement. The, re could be no literal selling of Gentile slaves to the Sabians, for that people no longer exists; they passed out of existence many centuries ago. And it would be difficult to find any place in the Divine Plan and its outworking for such an excursion into petty slave trading on the part of the Most High. The picture is that of retribution, the operation of the Divine law *"what a man sows that shall he reap"*. These Gentiles have ruled over the seed of Jacob, spoiled their goods, and occupied their land, for many centuries unrighteously.

During all that time God has been planning for an earthly Servant Nation that is to rule on earth at the end. Just so has He during this present Gospel Age been developing for Himself a heavenly Servant Nation, chosen from amongst men that shall rule them from the heavens at the end. And when the time comes for the law of the Lord to go forth out of Zion, it shall be that all men will find themselves brought under the righteous rule that is to be administered by the once despised slaves who were sold and scattered over the earth. *"The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls"* said Isaiah, *"and their kings shall minister to you, for the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish."* (Isa. 60.10-11). *"In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you'."* (Zech. 8.23). It is a familiar story; the Scriptures are full of it from Isaiah onwards. Perhaps the Gentiles to whom the message has been witnessed for so many long years have grown so accustomed to it that they do not believe that God will really rise up to judgment and break their power over this long-suffering people. They have been able to spoil them and harry them and destroy them unchecked for so many generations. If God cared at all He would have

done something about it long ago; it is not likely that anything so drastic as these prophetic enthusiasts are talking about will happen now *"Proclaim this among the Gentiles! Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say 'I am strong'. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye nations come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the nations round about"*. (vv. 9-12).

Like a thunderclap the prophet's declaration bursts upon the ears of the heedless

ones. God is not unmindful; God is not mocked; and now He has suddenly risen up to judgment and the time of retribution is come. The nations are to gather together and it is to be for the last time. When this Day of Assembly has passed there will no longer be any nations, for the kingdoms of this world will have become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. *"At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations."*

This is Joel's final vision and the most glorious. It seems almost as if it has burst suddenly upon his consciousness, as though at verse 9 all the glimpses and partial views of the coming Day of Trouble, all the pictures of devouring locusts and marching soldiers, ruthless invaders and terror-stricken defenders, weeping husbandmen and praying priests, have suddenly fused together into a clear and vivid picture and Joel sees, resplendent in the fight of the glory of God, a regathered and repentant Israel, standing confident in the power of God, waiting the last great conflict of this present evil world, waiting the rising up of God to their defence, anticipating the overthrow and dispersal of their enemies. As they thus wait, the evil powers of earth begin to gather for the assault. It is an assault that according to Ezekiel 38 is expected by them to be one committed upon a helpless people. *"To take a spoil and to take a prey"*. Then voice of the Lord rings out, loud and clear, commanding the angry hosts to come to the valley of their judgment and the valley of their doom. The Valley of Jehoshaphat! What is the mystic meaning of those words? Why is it that the mighty hosts of the Gentiles are to be gathered into the Valley of Jehoshaphat and that Valley becomes then the

scene of their defeat and judgment? The Kidron Valley, between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, is sometimes - but not in the Scriptures - called the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat' and both Jewish and Moslem tradition has it that here is to take place the Last Judgment. But Joel was not thinking of the Kidron Valley. He was thinking rather of the Wilderness of Tekoa in Judea, down toward the Dead Sea where there had been a memorable deliverance of Israel in the days of King Jehoshaphat fifty years before Joel's own time. The

armies of Moab and Ammon had invaded Israel; it seemed as though all were lost, but under the leadership of their God-fearing king the people placed their trust and faith in God for their defence and went out to meet the invaders, unarmed, with their priests leading the way, and singing the high praises of God. And God delivered them!

The story is related in 2 Chron. 20, and it is one of the rare instances in which Israel did rise to the height of faith and reaped the reward of faith.

(To be concluded) AOH

CART Christian African Relief Trust

The work of this remarkable relief organisation continues to expand and their Newsletter reveals something of what the charity is doing. On a separate list received recently the containers sent last year totalled 27, most of which were 40ft long. Such huge containers each cost about £4,000 to send and much of the cost of transporting to Africa is derived from sales in CART Charity Shop. This mammoth task of collecting, sorting and packing clothes, household goods, food, aqua boxes, educational and medical supplies is accomplished entirely by the voluntary service of its many helpers spearheaded by trustees who pay all administrative expenses.

Supporters have also sent sewing machines, computers and many similar items that need checking and sometimes repairing. Again volunteer experts put these pieces of apparatus into

working order so that the recipients in Africa can gain maximum benefit.

The work has not stopped at the vast continent of Africa. CART also stands for **Christian Asian Relief Trust**. There are many Christian brethren in India who need help. It is particularly interesting to BFU that letters printed in the CART Newsletter have been sent by overseas readers of the BSM.

Since the shop project began 5 years ago it has done a wonderful job of 'recycling' clothes, furniture and all kinds of goods. This permanent shop is now being extended and a building fund has been established. We ask your prayers that our Heavenly Father will continue to bless this wonderful outreach to needy brethren overseas.

If you wish to contact CART please write to Guildford Tompkins, 'Whitegates', Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorks HD8 0LR.

It is well worth while to spend time in cultivating quietness of spirit. It is not until the peace of God garrisons our hearts and thoughts that the world and all belonging to it can be seen in their right proportions, and energy needed for co-operation with God in the working out of His plans is set free. Many mysteries remain and problems

are unsolved. We cannot see how all things will be made to work together for good but we feel that God sees, and we have faith instilled into us to leave all things restfully with Him and let Him unfold His plans little by little and show us our share in them. We know that "*He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.*"

"*A fire of coals*" (John 18.18). The 'coal' of Scripture is charcoal, made chiefly from the root and trunk of a tree found in the desert. Amongst the well-to-do a brazier of copper about two feet high, bearing a chafing dish for the glowing mass, was usual. The charcoal was lighted outside the house in the chafing dish and burnt to a white heat until

the worst of its fumes were give off and was then brought indoors and used both for cooking and heating purposes. It was such a fire that the servants had lighted in the court of the High Priest's house and where Peter stood and warmed himself on that memorable night when the Lord was betrayed.

Utter surrender to God's will is both the root and the fruit of peace. Serenity is harmony with the will of God. To be content with God's disposition of our lives, that is nothing less than peace of

Christ, who never waged war with the Father's will and never uttered a word of doubt or protest.

Dr John MacBeath

OWNERSHIP

2. Life more abundant

"Hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. 55.3) cried the preacher to those hungering and thirsting for life.

It is all too obvious that human kind do not live. For a few short years there is a troubled existence beset by all sorts of perils, pains and accidents. Discontent marks the lot of all classes, for few are satisfied with their lot. The apparently wealthy and outwardly successful, envied by lesser mortals admit to longings for a more complete life. Happiness is an elusive quality for which there is no sound recipe or any lasting guarantee, for death cuts off rich and poor, young and old, eager and satiated, with total impartiality. How then can man live fully, completely, satisfyingly and usefully in the midst of so much turmoil, weakness, disappointment and futility? Having gone wrong in the quest for life, how can he be put right? It is a problem that has set the best of his doctors and teachers a conundrum, that is more puzzling than the riddle of the Sphinx. Answers are numerous, remedies are many. The age-old strife of man goes on. From the four corners of the earth the restless masses of mankind struggle, endure, fight, strive, wrestle, groan, hunger and thirst for life. To throw off the many yokes imposed upon them, to go unshackled by fear, by poverty, by disease; to discover the way of peace and plenty, to breathe new vigour from a clean atmosphere, would be to many millions, heaven on earth.

Life more abundant can only come from one source, the original fountain of immortal vigour. The leaky cisterns of man's making hardly wet the desert of vast human needs. The voice of God calls above the rowdy hubbub of twenty-first century life as it has called in every century of human existence. Throughout the discord, the disruption, the social and mental strife, the inviting word, "Come! Turn you to Me!" falls on heedless ears. They have a strange, foreign sound in the world of pop-culture, speed and lotteries. The voice that offers life without money and without price finds few buyers in the busy markets of the world where mammon reigns and merchandise that can be seen and handled is the chief attraction. Much that is shoddy, sordid and mean is offered for sale to the gullible. Glittering baubles and flashy toys, the prizes and playthings of a few years or days, find offered ready purchasers. Here today and gone

tomorrow, eat, drink and be merry, is the spirit and song of the current social order. A sound of revelry by night succeeds the chattering babel of the day. In the murky cup of the pleasures and treasures of this world lie some sour dregs. In the mists drift many grey shadows who have passed by the milk and honey, the priceless free wine of abundant life. Deaf or indifferent, they have not heard the voice of God and they do not live.

The unchanging Word of a changeless God still calls through His prophet. *"Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will you die! For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn yourselves and live!"* (Ezek. 18.31). Christ later carried on the same theme in His teaching. He looked about Him on the multitudes who listened eagerly to what He had to tell them about life. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, bewildered, frightened, sick and poor, with none to lead them or provide for them, to give them the security and pasture which sheep so much need. He had compassion upon them, taking upon Himself the role of the Good Shepherd. He saw them at their hard, ill-paid toil and called the weary and heavy-laden to His side. He invited them to learn from Him, to take His yoke upon them, for His yoke was easy and His burden was light. The yoke which chafed their tired shoulders and the burdens which almost bent them double were not only those of literal toil and hardship but the pressure of the Law which by now had become a cumbersome load of ritual and trivialities. What had begun as a simple set of Divine rules, intelligible to all, had snowballed under the hands of priestly scholars into massive books of religious rules and observances demanding a variety of penalties and sacrifices which filled the coffers of the Temple and enriched the merchants. As all were prone to sin and to stray in spite of the penalties imposed, the people could see no way out of their weakness and difficulties. Often they were hungry and thirsty in a dry land. When Jesus supplied them with bread and offered them the water of life they followed Him in the hope of more loaves. It was then He advised them to *"labour not for the meat which perishes but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life"*.

Jesus' words were a restatement of the prophet

(Isa. 55.2-3) whose voice was the voice of God to His people. Why spend labour and money on that which does not satisfy? For what is the advantage if someone gain the whole world and lose himself or be cast away? As Jesus walked among men He saw them as buyers making bad bargains, working or scheming for money which they spent on trifles or treasures which brought them trouble and anxiety. Again and again He rebuked the acquisitive desires of men for gain, their desire to be rich in this world's goods rather than being rich toward God. Mammon offered pleasures, excitements, goods for which they were eager bidders. God offered life more abundant, peace, tranquility, contentment, a blessed assurance of life to come, a continuation of being in a richer and nobler environment. Then as now there were few takers. Many who had walked with Jesus turned away. Only a few in any period of man's existence have had the courage and foresight to take God at His word, to provide for themselves the good, full life which even death cannot destroy.

The Bible claims to be the word of God, His written advice to man on how to live. Sceptics may dismiss it and critics peck peevishly at what their vanity considers to be flaws in the great Book but its crystalline substance is harder than the everlasting hills. They may pass away but the Word of God lives forever. Life is its theme. It offers, it promises, it invites, it pleads, it guides, it teaches and demonstrates by example, parable and picture. All its paths are toward life. The gift of God is life. The Bible may be pulverized and analysed by its detractors, its enemies or its friends but Life is still the vital essence that drips from its sacred pages. The great philosophers of the world have offered their medicines to restore a jaded mind but their effects are fleeting. Nothing so quickens the spirit of man as a draught from that water of life that Jesus claimed sustained everlasting life. Nothing so puts a man on his feet and keeps him going like the bread and water of God. Under these metaphors of man's daily, physical need are included the needs of his heart, his mind, his spirit. His body with his natural needs takes second place to the moral and spiritual part of his nature that draws its nourishment from a freer source than that of the material world.

"Man does not live by bread alone." There is an energising power, a word that enables him to

discern between true values and false, to weigh the advantages of one against the disadvantages of the other. The world with its gods of gold may be gained; the world with its alluring voice may win, or be won. Money and all that money can buy may give a few thrills, a little excitement, a short pleasure in which the spender may be lost in strange mazes, or cast away from all that money cannot buy, for the gifts of God are beyond price and without price. Peace, wisdom, kindness, compassion, gentleness, contentment, humility, justice and joy are the rich qualities of life that make the human creature God-like. They are summed up in the one word – love. Love for God and love for people. Had the whole race this love within themselves they would have life. The whole world would be gained, without its love of money, its armaments and evils. Without God the world is lost. Without love man is lost, whatever else he may have gained. Law, love and life are powerful agencies that cannot be separated one from the other, and of the three the writer to the Corinthian church would have added *"the greatest of these is love"*.

Love is not merely a natural passion between men and women, or the filial affection of parents and children, or the affinity of friend with friend. *"Love is the fulfilling of the law."* (Rom. 13.10). It is a quality, a gracious principle, a golden thread wrought into the tapestry of man's being. It is that which leads the mind of man to appreciate and esteem beauty and goodness, to desire to do some good to others; to be on the whole, kind, honest and likeable. Godliness or God's likeness, about which the cynical often bitterly sneer, is more than a commendable urge to like people and to be liked in return. If this were a universally established principle then as a poet has written, "There were no need for arsenals nor for forts".

The good neighbour is not merely a figure of speech or a picturesque custom. It is the duty of man. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The brotherhood of man, the great fraternity of mankind is an ideal that has never yet been realised. When man failed in his duty to God, he also failed in his duty to his brother. *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* is a question which has received a negative reply by the ruthless, ambitious, tyrannical sections of the human race who have thirsted and striven for wealth and power over the souls of men.

Apart from those enslaved by tyranny and greed, other forms of bondage and excess have caused men to kill, hate, rob and generally ill treat each other. "Man's inhumanity to man" has made "countless thousands mourn" Grief, fear and oppression have been the lot of millions of the displaced, cheated, disinherited people, whose rights have been ignored, whose lives and labour have been sold cheaply. The annals of the family of man make wretched reading, all because the law of God on the duty of man has been ignored or is not recognised by the selfish who seek their own ends. Human nature as a rule looks after its own best interests, provides for, cherishes and cares for self.

To love one's neighbour with the same degree of interest would ensure peace, safety and happiness. The lover of God can neither hate himself nor his fellow man. He respects the sanctity of human life as made in the image of God, with certain rights and privileges that he must respect and honour. The second great commandment of God is the protector of human welfare and the passport to happiness. If it were observed, love would be welling up in every heart for every other heart. The whole atmosphere of the world would be changed to a healthy, joyous unison.

Disregarded, disaster has written and is writing history, as failure fills the prisons and the daily newspapers. The cry of governments is not for more brotherly love but for more prisons, more police and more laws. Nations increase their military might with the most deadly weapons ready to destroy each other at the press of a button. This is not love but its opposite. Animosity, distrust and suspicion preside over the counsels of rulers. Godliness and brotherly kindness ebbs from a world going its own way. As evil increases love grows cold. None have ever yet succeeded in serving both God and mammon. In times of crisis it is easier to cast faith to the winds of war than to cast all care upon God. The voice of God has been drowned in the fearful uproar. To seek help from such an unseen source has been called "a counsel of despair" by those without God and without hope, yet there have been examples of faith working miracles, of love subduing evils, on the part of those who have made the Eternal God their refuge and tower of strength. The quality of life depends upon personal choice, whether we choose to walk the narrow way that leads to life or the broad road of the world which leads to a dead end.

*"Once to every man and nation comes
the moment to decide*

*In the strife of truth with falsehood for
the good or evil side."*

David, the famous king of Israel made his choice "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Psa. 84.10).

Men and women can rarely choose their own circumstances, but choice of camp is an exclusive personal right. Many have dared to be poor rather than abandon their principles for wealth or high office. They have given up certainties for uncertainties, rather than mix with doubtful or suspicious business. Some have elected to walk in the wilderness, choosing a solitary way rather than be involved in a weak compromise or keep company with the shallow, thoughtless crowd. Among the truly great, renunciation has contributed largely to their success. For everyone written into history whose choice has influenced or shaped national events, there are thousands more unknown and obscure who have chosen to walk with God rather than live in an atmosphere of aimless pleasure. David became King of Israel but his heart remained as humble and loyal to God as in the days when he kept the sheep and silenced the giant who menaced his people. Moses forsook the treasures of Egypt for the obscurity of the wilderness, but his decision fitted him to be the deliverer and leader of his people. Of the two daughters-in-law of Naomi, Orpah chose to return to the pagan ease of her own people, never to be heard of again, while Ruth went on with her mother-in-law, leaving a certainty for an uncertainty. The result of her choice was love, happiness and a place in history as the ancestress of the house of David. Mary of Bethany chose to sit at the feet of Jesus listening to His wonderful words of life rather than join in the bustle of domestic tasks. He commended her for having chosen the better part. Words failed Paul to tell of all those who had chosen the Lord's side. He himself chose a hard road rather than continue as an honoured councillor in a dying system. So space and time would fail after so many centuries to speak of all those who, like David, would rather live lowly and obscure lives serving God, than occupy greater positions in the world. Their faith and obedience to high principles and ideals are forfeited through unbelief, indecision or lack of moral courage to

uphold them among a hard-bargaining, hard-headed crowd to whom such refinements are neither practical nor welcome.

Choosing the right side, the side of God and goodness, may mean a splendid throwing away of self and natural ambition. It may not lead to worldly success but it leads to peace. Worldly-wise spectators may regard that as a foolish choice, which in this world wins no reward other than that

of an untroubled conscience, a heart at rest, a mind at ease. Faith looks for its recompense when faith becomes lost in sight. It would not exchange its lowly rest with God for all the pomp of kings and princes: rather would it rather have the peace of God than all the fleeting vanities this present world can offer.

(To be continued)

BJD

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

2. Daughter of the Philistines

*The Story of a
great failure*

"And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and told his father and his mother, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me to wife." (Judges 14.1-2).

Easy-going, casual words, but in one moment they destroyed a father's pride and a mother's hopes. Their son, dedicated to the Lord from his birth, marked out for Divine service and Divine honours, was preordained to deliver Israel from the Philistines. That he should deny all the high ideals inculcated in him from childhood, by choosing for his wife a woman of the godless aliens, must have caused heartbreak to his parents and consternation throughout Zorah. Where now were all the golden expectations of freedom from servitude and restoration of racial pride and dignity? Their champion had failed them; their idol had feet of clay. *"Is there not a woman of the families of Israel, that you take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?"* exclaimed his father bitterly. Samson only replied indifferently, *"Get her for me, for she pleases me well."* There is all the arrogance and self-confidence of inexperienced youth in that remark.

It need not be thought that Samson was either repudiating his Divine calling or even consciously violating his obligations as a Nazarite. The trouble ran much deeper than that. All the evidence goes to show that Samson interpreted his commission in terms of his own physical strength bestowed by God. He believed that his personal relationship to God was of no consequence provided he made use of his physical powers to inflict as much damage upon the Philistines as he could. Samson is the perfect example of the natural man who perceives not the things of the Spirit of God even though he

pay God lip service and believe himself to be a favoured one of God. The obligations of the Mosaic Law and of the Nazarites' vow meant nothing to Samson the while he could go out and kill Philistines for God. It was only when the natural strength failed him and he was brought low in suffering that his mind became ennobled to better things. But at this time in his life that sequel lay far in the distant future.

Timnath was a village some six or seven miles from Zorah, lying just inside the boundaries of the tribe of Judah and only a mile or so from the Philistine frontier. It evidently had a joint Hebrew-Philistine population and mixed marriages were probably not at all uncommon, despite the prohibitions of the Law Covenant against such unions. Samson must have known the village well and some of his boyhood friends would have been Timnathites. The athletic figure of the Hebrew youth, his flowing locks and keen, clear eyes, would make him attractive in the eyes of all the village maidens and even a Philistine father would not object to a match with a man of such known prowess. So the marriage was arranged. With heavy heart, assuredly, Manoah performed the distasteful task demanded by the custom of the day of consulting with the Philistine father of the girl and agreeing upon the details of her dowry, the guarantees and assurances necessary on behalf of his son. All the arrangements were made before the union could become effective. This to the Hebrews was the real marriage, after which the bride remained at her father's house for a period of months before her husband came to take her to her new home. This part of the arrangement did not conform to Philistine custom and probably that fact was partly responsible for the sequel.

So it came about that within a little while

Samson was striding along the narrow track which led from Zorah to Timnath, on the way to finalise the contract with the woman who had taken his fancy. Canaan was a fertile and tree-clad country in those days, and the wilder parts between centres of habitation harboured many wild animals, some of them dangerous to man, so that Samson may not have been altogether surprised at the sudden appearance, on the pathway before him, of a lion. The beast was probably the more frightened. The narrative says, "*A young lion roared against him*" – the prelude to its crouching for a spring. Samson, confident in his strength and agility, waited for the leap. As it came, he adroitly side-stepped and in a lightning flash got behind and above the animal, his hands round its throat, taking care to keep out of the way of its flailing limbs, bending its neck backwards until he had throttled its life out of existence. With, perhaps, a gesture of contempt, he flung the lifeless body by the wayside and strode on his way, revelling afresh in his strength and probably praising God for his victory. The account says that the Spirit of God came upon him to do this thing. We must remember that there were no eyewitnesses so the account of the incident had in the first place to come from Samson himself. He must have accredited his power and deliverance to the Spirit of God and this would be in all sincerity. He did believe that God was giving him this physical strength in every time of need and the chronicler of the story would repeat Samson's assertion in all good faith. Reading the entire story and viewing the life of Samson in relation to the onward development of God's purposes the Holy Spirit did indeed give him strength above that of most men that he might work out the destiny planned for him. In the end he failed to make of it all that could have been had he been less a slave to his own fleshly passions.

The period of waiting ended, Samson again took the path to Timnath to claim his bride. It seems to have been an unusually casual proceeding for a son of Israel. As a rule this was the festive occasion on which the bride waited with her maidens on the coming of the bridegroom. That fortunate man set out accompanied by all his men friends and with every manifestation of rejoicing and merriment, to bring his bride back to her new home. On this occasion it is evident that Samson set out alone and that his parents must have preceded him. Perhaps the marriage was not too popular in

Zorah and his friends wanted nothing to do with it. When the feast finally was held it was at the bride's home and not the bridegroom's and the companions of the bridegroom turned out to be Philistine men friends of the bride, facts that are significant. The casual nature of the whole proceeding is heightened by the fact, that Samson, on his way to his bride, found time to turn aside to look for the carcase of the lion he had slain some months previously when last he had passed this way. He found the skeleton and inside a colony of bees. The flesh would have been completely consumed by vultures within a very few hours of death. Without ado he scooped out the honey with his hands, "*and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave to them, and they did eat; but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.*"

They would not have eaten had he told them. Staunch supporters of the Law, they knew better than to eat that which was defiled by association with the remains of the dead. Samson committed two further breaches of his Nazarite vows in this incident. He defiled himself by touching the dead carcase and he partook of that which was defined in the Law as 'strong drink' liable to fermentation. The ancients used honey as a means of producing fermented liquors. For so paltry an immediate attraction as a mouthful of honey he ignored his obligation to God. There is a strong likeness between Samson and Esau. Esau also insisted on marrying alien women and sold his birthright for the present satisfaction of a mess of pottage.

The wedding feast proceeded, but the outcome was disastrous. Thirty full-blooded Philistine youths drinking Samson's wine almost certainly spelt trouble, and trouble was not long in coming. Samson, probably himself flushed with wine, challenged the thirty to a tussle of wits. He would propound a conundrum, a "riddle" as the Authorised Version has it, the loser paying to the winner thirty mantles ("sheets" in the Authorised Version), and thirty sets of inner garments. The youths accepted the challenge, and Samson, remembering his finding the honey in the lion's carcase, said to them "*out of the eater came forth food*" ("meat" in the Authorised Version) *and out of the strong came forth sweetness.*" It would seem to us a particularly difficult conundrum for anyone completely unfamiliar with the circumstances to solve; probably, however, the solution was arrived at by a series of eliminating questions, after the

fashion of a modern party game. This was no party game. These Philistine youths had no intention of being on the losing side, and when after three days they were still as far off the solution as ever they determined on more drastic steps.

This feast was a most elaborate affair. It was apparently designed to continue for seven days. The impropriety of such a period of conviviality with the people he had been commissioned from birth to oppose, fight and if necessary destroy in order to deliver Israel, apparently had not entered Samson's mind. These men, Philistines or not, had come to celebrate his wedding and he intended to see that it was well and truly celebrated. And so he awaited in genial equanimity the thirty mantles and sets of inner garments, the price of their failure to guess his riddle.

Samson's newly married wife, however, was in a predicament. Her erstwhile friends had threatened her with burning down of her father's house with her inside it unless she obtained the answer to the riddle and told it to them. It does not appear that she had sufficient confidence in Samson's ability to handle the matter to tell him of the threat. Rather she used her woman's wiles, accompanied by floods of tears, until the hero's patience gave out and he told her the secret. After that, of course, it was all plain sailing. On the seventh day the Philistine youths triumphantly returned the answer to Samson. *"What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion?"* Samson knew how they had obtained the solution but there was nothing he could do about it. He contented himself with the contemptuous retort, *"If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle"* (RSV).

There remained the matter of the thirty mantles and sets of inner garments. It is sad to relate of a man professedly dedicated to God that this presented no problem. Samson went down to the Philistine town of Ashkelon, some thirty miles away on the sea coast and deep in Philistine territory. There, by means not recorded, he surprised and murdered thirty Philistine men, stole their garments and came back to Timnath to pay his debt.

Cold with anger, Samson returned to Zorah with his parents, leaving his Philistine wife in her father's house. At that moment he had finished with her; he never wanted to see her again. This was not the triumphant home coming he had planned. It is

not likely that his feelings were those of a man betrayed by one he loved; more likely they were those of wounded pride. His insulting reference to his newly married wife as 'my heifer' shows that he had little genuine respect or love for the girl. It is more likely her appeal was purely to animal passions and now the fever had passed, he was morose and resentful. Accustomed as he was to admiration and hero-worship from the circle in which he had grown up, he now had been slighted in the very quarter from which he least expected it, and he was coldly furious.

What could have been the feelings of the older couple, trudging along wearily behind him? What had become of all the golden dreams which had coloured their up-bringing of this child of promise? How could they now expect this son of theirs to become a saviour in Israel, a champion of the people of God, going out in the power of the Holy Spirit to overthrow the enemies of the chosen people. How could he restore the safety and prosperity of a covenant-keeping nation and so enable its God-given destiny to be fulfilled. Rioting, gluttony, drunkenness, theft and murder; these were the fruits of Samson's wedding feast. These were embedded in the character of the man of whom it had been predicted before his birth, *"... the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth and He shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines"* (Judges 13.5 RSV). When the two arrived home and the full story of the week's disastrous happenings had been made known in Zorah, many there must have been who mourned for their fallen idol; many who uttered in their hearts, as long cherished hopes faded, the oft-repeated plaint, *"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"*

Manoah and his wife were not the only saintly couple whose devoted training of a loved child in the things of God seems in later days to have been wholly fruitless, when that child, grown to maturity has turned to lawless or godless ways. So many have asked, in all sincerity, "How can such things be?" What was wrong with the early training that it proved unable to hold the one so instructed throughout life? Many disappointed parents have been plunged into the depths of despair because of some such outcome to their efforts. The fault does not usually lie in the inadequacy of training. The root cause goes much deeper. It lies in the well nigh overwhelming power of Adamic sin. There is no

answer to these problems unless the doctrine of the Fall is accepted with all its implications. *"As by one man sin entered and death by sin: so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* The accumulated effect of all mankind's sin from the beginning lies inherent in everyone born into the world. Every child starts life under this handicap. Our Adversary the Devil remains vigilant and active, ever seeking to maintain and increase the content of the world's sin. Is it to be wondered at that in many cases the earnest endeavours of the best parents just fail entirely to offset that inherited poison and eventually some external chain of circumstances tips the balance sufficiently to set the unhappy individual upon the downward track. In Samson's case it was a pretty face which started him on the road to ruin; in countless other instances it has been one or another of the varied aspects of those three cardinal influences, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Behind it all has been the dread influence of the god of this world blinding the minds of those who believe not.

But just as the seed of evil, sown in past generations, comes to its fruitage, so must the seed of righteousness, sown in prayer and faith by godly parents, bear fruit one day. God is not mocked, and God is all-powerful. We do not understand all God's secrets and our knowledge of His purposes is at the best immature. We do know that God desires not the death of the sinner, but rather that he may turn from his evil ways, and live. There is much in the prophetic Scriptures which speaks of a Day of righteousness in which, under the righteous rule of Christ, returned to earth in power and glory, the Devil will be bound that he might deceive the nations no more. All men will walk in the light of Christ's Kingdom to learn of righteousness and hear the call to become reconciled to God. Is it too much to expect that in some wonderful manner, God will extend to all the Samsons of every age the opportunity to turn again from their evil? He knows the secrets of all in whose hearts resides the slightest possibility of repentance. They will accept in sincerity the Christ whom once they knew and from whom in ignorance and under the handicap of Adamic taint they turned away. Let every parent who mourns a son or daughter at present thus lost, take comfort from the Scriptural truth that God is not less merciful than our own hearts. His love for the erring one is not less than is ours, and He will by no means loose His hold until in His own

infinite wisdom He sees that all hope and possibility of repentance is dead. It was Dr Paterson Smyth many years ago who suggested that it may take the supreme crisis of physical death eventually to awaken some wayward ones to the evil of sin. It is the goodness of God that accepts repentance in such circumstances, as in the story of the prodigal son the Father was ready to come out and meet the lost one returning.

But here in the story, Samson is farther away from God than ever. Of what use to say that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him when the only result was to nerve and strengthen him to great physical feats but never to reach his heart. Until then he could in no sense of the word be God's man. So he returned to Zorah, a disappointed, frustrated, vengeful man, consumed only with the desire to execute further retaliation upon the authors of his wounded feelings.

(To be continued) AOH

DAWN

"For as the bright shining, that comes out of the east and shines even unto the west, so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be." (Matt. 24.17)

Yonder, friend, behold the darkness
Lightly tinged with streaks of grey;
Far beyond the Mount of Olives
Comes the glorious radiant day.
See how pink and rosy fingers
Clamber up the lightening sky;
Heralds of the sun's own glory,
Soon to reign supreme on high.
Now the light has reached to Hebron;
Priests and watchmen cry aloud;
Men are rousing from their slumbers,
Heads in prayer and praise are bowed.
Lo! the sun itself, in splendour
Rises high o'er Zion's hill,
Pouring down its life and blessing
Free for men to take their fill.
Come thou thus, O blessed Jesus
To this darksome world of sin,
Bringing rich Millennial blessings,
Calling men to enter in.
Thus the glory of thy presence
Manifest to all will be,
Glory that enshrouds creation,
As the waters shroud the sea.

AOH

THE COVENANTS

4. The Prophets

The message of the early prophets was about the holiness and righteousness of God with whom Israel was in covenant relationship. Although Moses had discovered something of the breadth of the Divine character, particularly when he met with Yahweh on Sinai, his task was to convey the need for Israel to obey laws that provided justice for all. Samuel took up this theme, which he administered with total integrity. David was well taught by the old prophet but within his kingdom there was violence and nepotism that belied the leadership of his mentor Samuel, Nathan and Gad each in turn withstood the prejudice and partiality of royalty and by so doing reflected the terms of the covenant and the One with whom Israel had made it. In the century or so that followed Solomon's fall from Divine grace, there was in the divided kingdom a progressive deterioration in the administration of justice and fair play and these were replaced by pagan violence and royal dictatorship.

Elijah pleaded with God to exercise His prerogative to withhold the blessings of the covenant and he prayed that rain would not fall on the land of Israel (Deut 28.23, 1 Kings 17.1). When He challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and called upon God to fire the sacrifice from Heaven, he was struggling to bring his countrymen back to their covenant with Yahweh (1 Kings 19.10, 14). Later he challenged Ahab and Jezebel when they murdered Naboth and stole his vineyard and in doing so he was telling Israel that the land belonged to God and by the covenant was leased to families within the commonwealth. No king or noble lord in Israel could take that inheritance away from the poorest person in the land. All in Israel were equal before God and all were in covenant relationship with Him. Elisha continued the revelation of Israel's God in all kinds of practical blessings. A few of the God's people learned about God's character and a 'remnant' discovered that He was not just their possession but the Creator of all the Earth who loved all that He had made. (Isa. 37.4; 49.6; 60.3)

How far did the early prophets perceive the relationship of God to His people? Hosea, a prophet from the Northern Kingdom was directed by God to marry a prostitute (Hos. 1.2). He obeyed and Gomer bore him a son. Soon she was off plying

her trade until at last she had sunk to the level of a slave. Hosea searched for and found her. He forgave and redeemed her. He took her home, re-established his marriage with her and disciplined her. It was a startling message, understood only by those who experience a relationship with God such as that of Gomer to Hosea. The prophet's life was a parable of how God loved Israel with a faithfulness and depth of affection that human nature can hardly believe. From Abraham, through Moses, Samuel and Elijah, God had revealed Himself in a way that was not comparable to anything that the human mind had conceived and created. But this was something else for here was the ultimate compassion and faithfulness shown in the life of a simple peasant baker in Israel. God's people had, by their imitation of pagan religions and worship of man-made gods, prostituted their piety and obedience that should have been for the eternal Creator. They exchanged their loyalty to God for a worthless and utterly sinful way of life. The modern media demonstrates that nothing has changed. Man's Adversary has a strange hold over human nature that God has permitted. Man has worshipped the artefacts he has made and conceitedly is wooed by his own creations. The ingenuity that was given by the Creator produces affluence and the lowest moral code. The wealthier man becomes the more readily he moves to his own destruction. Will they ever learn? Yet we have the promise that humanity will yet discover that the Lord they forsook is the source of love, goodness and justice. The passionate love that God has shown Israel will be demonstrated to all people.

One of the greatest figures in the covenant saga was Jeremiah. His story is particularly poignant because there are points of similarity with the experience of our Lord. From his earliest days Jeremiah took the Word of the Lord to Israel. He was associated with the young King Josiah whose servants found the Book of the Covenant in the Temple and who instituted a tremendous revival of the true faith in Israel (2 Kings 23). The Josiah reform was one of the great moments in Israel's history yet its effect, like other revivals, did not last and Israel rapidly forgot its Law and its God. Jeremiah supported the reform and in so doing raised the enmity of his own people in Anathoth

(Jer. 11.1-8; 12.6). The leaders of the land and the kings who succeeded Josiah caused a rapid deterioration of the national 'religion'. Jeremiah was one of the few who remained true to the principles of the Josiah reform and referred to it in a moving observation to a later king concerning his father, recorded in Jer. 22.15, 16.

Earlier in his prophecies Jeremiah had made another vivid comment about knowing God (9.23, 24) to which Paul referred in 1 Cor 1.31. It was this knowledge of God that made Jeremiah's orations so important in the message of the covenant.

In Jeremiah 23 the prophet used the picture of the sheep and shepherd concerning Israel's relationship with God. The under shepherds of God's people have a tremendous responsibility and it is vital that pastoral leaders understand what their role is and what God expects of them. Throughout Israel's history up to the time of Jesus they failed badly. Jeremiah singled out prophets and priests who by their corruption allowed the sheep to be destroyed and scattered. Ezekiel similarly condemned leaders (34.1-6). In a different way teachers and priests of Jesus' day led the Jews into false religion and to their destruction in AD70.

In Isaiah 5.1-2 there is yet a third great parable of the covenant. Through the words of this prophet, Yahweh spoke of His vineyard and His longing for a good vintage. This remarkable natural picture was a reminder of the reconnoitring under Joshua. The representatives of the tribes brought back to Moses the bunch of grapes from Eshcol that needed two men to carry it. It was the symbol of Israel in later years.

Ezekiel also spoke of the plucked up vine, transplanted to the wilderness. She had the greatest privilege of all the ancient nations yet she had done something which none of them had done. She turned her back on the God that loved her far better than any human lover could do. But worse was to come before the wound of impiety was healed.

The cry of the prophets was not just one of religious worship. As Jeremiah showed in his

reference to Josiah, knowing God was an ethical matter. One could not claim to know God and ignore the needs of the poor and underprivileged. Most of the prophets who left us a record brought to the attention of God's people that they must be concerned about the wellbeing of others. We cannot claim to love God and ignore those who He loves and wants us to serve. The prophets repeatedly warned Israel that their treatment of the poor would bring a response from God. Amos had warned the rich of the dangers of affluence. Micah had also warned and struck at the heart of his people's problems when he asked *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God"*. Oppression, selfishness, arrogance and pride were part of the Gentiles' way of life. Israel adopted them as her way of life until in deep bitterness they sacrificed their own children. That appears to be Israel's lowest point in breaking the covenant. How could the Lord God of Heaven who was later to be described as 'Love', walk with such people? How circumspect ought we to be, in this our day, who claim to be in covenant relationship with God. Justice and truth are part of God's character and they must be part of ours too.

Yet with all that the prophets said against the evils of Israel over centuries they all looked forward to a day when the things they condemned would be gone and Israel would once more be united to her God in holy covenant. This is the story of Hosea – God buys back that which is already truly His own. The lesson would at last be learned but only after severe trials and long centuries of being parted from their God. These projections into the future are outlined in Jeremiah 31. The prophet of disaster and triumph, the prophet who came in his trials and suffering so near the heart of God, was the one who outlined the covenant of the New Testament and began to see how God could and would change the hearts of men.

DN

A ship's compass points true to the magnetic pole, but there are certain influences in the environment of the ship that may upset the compass, so there are smaller instruments made to deal with them. These local forces do no harm if they all pull in the direction of the pole. So, if the influence that we exert on each other is towards our

Lord we shall draw each other up to Him. We must centre our minds on things above and in due time we shall appear with Him in glory. We have a fellowship that is nearer, dearer, truer and closer than a brother, our fellowship is with the Father and His Son. Can we wish for anything better?

AFTER THE FLOOD

3. Noah's Vineyard

"Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard."

The transition from food-gathering to agriculture seems to be referred to in the rather strange narrative in Gen. 9.18-27. Vines grow plentifully in the Zagros mountains up to about three thousand feet (1000 metres) altitude, and the gathering of wild grapes had probably been going on since the beginning. But now they were producing the cultivated variety and probably appreciably improving the strain in consequence. Noah drank of the resultant wine, and was found by his youngest son Ham intoxicated and in a state of nudity in his tent. In consequence Noah uttered a curse against, not Ham, but Ham's son Canaan. One might quite reasonably enquire why so apparently trivial an incident should share with the story of the Tower of Babel the distinction of being the only two important happenings in the twelve hundred years that elapsed between the Flood and Abraham. And why should Canaan, the son of Ham, be the recipient of Noah's curse when his father was the offending party? Read literally, as it stands in the Authorised Version, the story seems pointless and tasteless, having no conceivably useful purpose, and one is perhaps justified in wondering why it was there at all.

Commentators usually content themselves by suggesting that fermentation was unknown before the Flood and Noah did not know that the wine he had made would have an intoxicating effect. It is also suggested that in the East it is considered a serious misdemeanour to see one's father or ancestor in the nude. Canaan was cursed instead of Ham since the latter was one whom the Lord had saved in the Ark and thus to such extent had the Lord's favour, which seems a little hard on Canaan. All these are guesses without foundation and the commentators normally finish up with a little homily on the evils of strong drink which thus overcame even so godly a man as Noah and pass on quickly to the next subject. Nevertheless the story is there and from the historian's point of view at least, was recorded for a purpose. Something more fundamental than the apparent nature of the incident must lie beneath the surface and this needs to be elucidated. For this reason it must be

examined in detail. The expression "Noah began to be an husbandman" (*ish adamah* – man of the land) means that the time of subsisting on the wild products of the mountains was giving place to the arts of agriculture – the planned growing of food. It is absurd to suppose that Noah was ignorant of the art; he must have been familiar with it in pre-Flood days and in fact Gen. 5.29 implies that fact. The position was that Noah and his sons now applied themselves to work on the land, and probably stock-breeding as well, to provide for their rapidly growing families. The time might have been any time during the first century after leaving the Ark.

The vineyard had been planted and the vines yielded their first crop. What more natural than that there should be a family celebration to mark the event? This was, after all, a major step forward in the programme of re-settlement. A number of children had probably already been born and the prospects were looking distinctly rosy for this new world of theirs. So the celebratory feast was planned. As so often happens, things got a little out of hand. *"Look not on the wine when it is red"* said the Wise Man in Proverbs; *"at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder"* (Prov. 23.31-32). That is what it did on this occasion. Noah, we are told, was "drunken". The word is *sachar*, which means literally "to be drunken to hilarity", and is used in Gen. 43.34 where Joseph's brothers *"drank and were merry"*. It is in the highest degree unlikely that Noah was the only one in this condition, but being more than five hundred years older than the others, he may have been more seriously affected, to the extent that he was no longer conscious of what was going on. The next step was that Ham walked into Noah's "tent" (probably his house - *'ohel'* means either tent or house) *"and saw the nakedness of his father"* (v 22). The key to the story lies in this expression. The Hebrew word for physical nudity is *'erom'* as in the Garden of Eden story, with some twenty-four occurrences in the O.T. The word used here in Gen. 9 however, is not *'erom'*, it is *'ervah'*, which has a very different connotation. *'Ervah'* in its fifty-nine occurrences, always implies sexual relations with a woman. When, as in this case, the expression is "the nakedness of his father", the reference is to that

father's wife, as in Lev. 18.8 "*the nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness*", and in v 16 "*you shall not uncover the nakedness of your brothers wife; it is your brother's nakedness*". The verb rendered 'saw' in this verse is 'raah' which has a wide range of meanings and is translated by many different words in the AV. Gesenius defines it, "to look at or to view with a purpose, especially to be pleased with the sight, as with objects of pleasure; to enjoy, or procure for oneself". In Eccl. 1.16 'raah' is rendered "*my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge*" and in 2.1. "*I said ... therefore enjoy pleasure*". The implication is that Ham was guilty of incest with his mother following a general family partaking of wine to excess, and the birth of Canaan was the outcome. He might possibly have been somewhat inebriated and not fully conscious of the enormity of his action. Verse 22 goes on to say that he "*told his two brothers outside*" where 'told' is 'naged', meaning to show, declare, confess, profess openly, to celebrate with praise. The use of this word could imply that Ham boasted of his deed to his two brothers. The consequent action of Shem and Japheth recorded in v 23 could be a figure of speech indicating that they did what they could to "cover up" or conceal from Noah the wrong done to him, perhaps in the hope that nothing more would be known about it. If so, the hope was frustrated by the eventual birth of Canaan, which would be when Noah found out about it (v 25). The Douay Bible at this point has it "*Noah ... when he had learned what his younger son had done to him, he said, Cursed be Canaan...*" If in fact this is how the matter went, it provides a reasonable explanation of the rather strange insistence in this chapter that Ham was the father of Canaan. No other names of the three patriarch's sons are so defined; the complete genealogy is left to chapter 10 which is probably a much later document. Here Gen. 9.13 reads "*And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the Ark, were Shem, Ham and Japheth; and Ham is the father of Canaan*". Why pick out this one name from the four recorded sons of Ham, and the many sons of the other two, if there was not something special about the birth of Canaan? It is almost as if the historian, in recording the sons of Noah, was at pains to make it plain that Canaan was the son, not of Noah, but of Ham. There is also the fact that in vv 25-27 Noah refers to Shem and Japheth as being Canaan's 'brethren' (*achim*,

normally used for brother or half-brother, as, compared with *ach ben*, brother's son or nephew). On this showing, of course, Canaan would be half-brother to the other two through their common mother, although nephew through their own brother.

Assuming this to be the true explanation of the story, there is no possible means of assessing the degree of culpability of Noah's wife or even if she was to any degree a willing party. One has to remember that the laws of Moses that regulated such relationships (as in Lev. 18) were still fifteen hundred years in the future. There is no doubt that the greater virility of the human race, so much nearer its commencement in the perfect first pair, detracted a great deal from the necessity existing in later times which led to those laws. Abraham and his brother Nahor more than a thousand years later, married their nieces without any thought of impropriety. In this case, it was the violation of the primal law instituted in Eden, that a man should cleave to his own wife, "and they two shall be one flesh" which led to Noah's words of condemnation and judgment.

The fact that Noah was five hundred years old before any of his sons were born may give colour to the supposition that his wife was very much younger, perhaps even a second wife, so that she could be considered a relatively young woman at the time of this incident. Ham could have been as young as 100 and his mother 200, equivalent to 20 and 40 respectively in more modern times. The birth of Canaan brought the affair into the open. It is popularly supposed that Noah uttered a curse upon Canaan and doomed him to perpetual slavery – which would have been quite unjust since on any showing the child was an innocent party. Closer inspection of vv 25-27 shows that what Noah did do was voice a prophecy of things to come which were going to involve Canaan. It was not the displeasure of Noah that was at issue here; it was the displeasure of God. The Holy Spirit, through Noah, revealed something of what the future held for these men who were to be the progenitors of all who would later live upon the earth. It was the Lord who cursed and Noah only stated the fact as it was revealed to him.

The gist of the prophecy was that Canaan – in his descendants – was to occupy a position of servitude to his half-brothers, in their descendants. The people destined to spring from Japheth were to

be 'enlarged', spread abroad in far distant lands, while those from Shem would have God dwelling among them. The true meaning of v 27 is "*God shall dwell in the tents of Shem.*" Shem, represented now chiefly by Jews and Arabs, has long been recognised to be the most spiritually perceptive and receptive of the three great races. It has given the world its three great religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Sons of Japheth, the Aryans, have spread all over the world and dominate it. Those of Ham, at first the most intellectual and artistic, founders of the first civilisations, have progressively changed as they migrated into the tropical and sub-tropical regions and to a great extent have been absorbed by Semitic peoples. The descendants of Canaan, a heterogeneous assembly of tribes collectively

known as Canaanites, have ceased to be representative of their forefather. Noah's forecast of the future came to pass, even as he said.

So ended the first century after the Flood with perhaps a hundred grandchildren of Noah and possibly two hundred great grandchildren growing up in this new world, never having known the old world of sin and death. They probably stayed near the mountain and built their first dwellings on its slopes, having no urge to explore farther until increasing numbers would make more living space desirable. The time was yet far distant when their descendants would find it possible to enter the Plain of Shinar as narrated in Genesis 11 and begin to enjoy its luxurious fertility.

(To be continued) AOH

GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER (2 COR. 9.7)

"*The liberal shall be made fat.*" This is one of the bountiful dispensations of Providence, that the more you give away, the more you have. The generous often find themselves richer rather than poorer while the grudging seem to lose what they so carefully hoard, seeing it dwindle in its usefulness.

Generosity is without doubt a God-like quality, a human likeness of the openhandedness of God whom the Psalmist describes as "*opening his hand to satisfy the desire of every living creature*". Those most conscious of the bounty of God, in turn become bountiful. They are large hearted, their own liberality brings them happiness and peace. There is nothing mean or petty about their dealings with any situation; nothing trivial in their outlook, in their way of life. It is not only material wealth in which the generous display their benevolence but in sympathy, in interest and in practical kindness.

There are many people in distress who do not need money, who are much more in need of a kind word, of some cheerful company or useful deed to assist them in sadness or difficulties they often try to hide. All generous souls have not money to give. They give themselves, their time their talent, their knowledge, their work, the love and compassion of their hearts, that others may be satisfied with strength, with revived hope, with new courage or with assistance in periods of illness and helplessness. Like the Apostles they say to the lame, "*we have neither silver nor gold but what we*

have we give you." What they gave was power to put a man back on his feet.

The widow casting her mite in the Temple treasury won the approval of Christ. He pointed out she had given all she had, which was an act of generosity surpassing those who gave of their abundance. They never missed what they gave. It never cost them anything to give, but the poor woman had given her every last penny to God. Giving to God is only giving back what is His own. Life and all its gains are God's gifts to men. The Christian pilgrim especially realises that he is merely the steward of God, that what he has received must be wisely used, that he must bring his accounts to the great day of reckoning.

"*Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. With the same measure that you give shall it be given you again.*" This is the measure of God, a giving God who has supplied everyone with something they can do or give daily. The mean are warped characters but the generous, liberal givers are men and women made in the image of God. Satisfying the needs of others they are themselves more than satisfied.

*Were the whole realm of Nature mine
That were an offering far too small.
Love so amazing, so Divine
Demands my heart, my life, my all.*

FELLOWSHIP IN SUFFERING

"Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share his glory." (Romans 8.17 RSV).

In meditating upon the suffering and death of Jesus we might think of Mrs. Alexander's lovely hymn

*He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood*

and it is good that we remember the removal of the death sentence from mankind. We must also be able to say "He died for me". This is a vital legal transaction although we may not fully comprehend the way in which heaven's legal system works. It is also a very personal matter because it affects us all individually. Jesus suffered in all kinds of ways before He reached Gethsemane, the 'law courts' and Calvary. Rejection by His own countrymen began early in His ministry. Their attitude must have been very painful to one so sensitive who always spoke and acted compassionately for those around Him.

Jesus began to explain in the Sermon on the Mount another aspect of suffering when He spoke of the 'bliss' of suffering for doing what is right (Matthew 5.10). Humanly, that is an astonishing statement. There was nothing new about being persecuted for conscience sake. The Old Testament and even secular history bear witness of this — because 'darkness hates the light'. But the concept that there should be rejoicing because one is suffering is new; yet it was shortly to be tested in the lives of the early disciples and recorded in Acts 5.41. It was then that the church began to share the sufferings of Christ. As time went by it also became clear why suffering was a necessary part of the process of reconciling the world to God. Jesus was 'perfected' by His sufferings (Hebrews 4.15, 16; 5.8-9) and by His experiences He became a compassionate High Priest and His character became complete. In this way His suffering prepared Him for the work of reconciliation to God and re-education of all mankind. As we ponder this aspect of our Lord's life we can see more clearly why we should follow closely in His steps that we too might become sympathetic priests who will in due time assist the sin-stricken world back to health and life.

The Jewish religious and political leaders, at the

time of the First Advent, should have been familiar with the prophecies relating to the Deliverer of Israel. They should have perceived and instructed the people in the knowledge the Messiah for whom they looked. They wanted a mighty prince or general not a peaceful healer, brought into the world amid the poorest circumstances, reared in a peasant home, ministering to the needs of contrite souls. Comparatively few of the simple folk would understand their intellectual teaching.

Israel had been torn apart by the conflicts of great empires for many generations. Now One had appeared in their midst who healed as many as lay within His immediate reach. Jesus of Nazareth, the wonderful physician, trod the rough roads of Palestine, telling a message of goodwill; preaching of love toward God and fellow man. It was a mission that was undertaken seldom without expense to personal comfort and often He continued His labours weary and foot-sore. He stood out from previous men of God who healed and prophesied. Yet for all that He did and said for over three years among God's chosen people, His own people, they slew Him among criminals.

Rich and poor, pious and lawbreaker, young and old, all felt the effects of His work of curing the sick and making whole those who had hitherto not known the joys of vigorous life. The handicapped, who struggled to survive around the Temple for many years, were bidden to rise and walk. Sightless eyes that had never seen God's universe were able to look into the Master's face. Deaf ears heard the voice of Him who spoke as no one had ever spoken and speechless tongues were loosed to praise their Creator. Whether stricken by bodily disease or afflicted in mind, their distress was remedied, not by freak or quack for an hour or day. The captive was set at liberty to enjoy the health in mind and body that the Life-giver had intended. They didn't ask questions as to where He obtained such power for they knew He was from God. He didn't ask them to join His church but many must have done in later years. He came not only to heal but God had sent Him to turn away ungodliness from Jacob and to mend broken hearts. They failed to appreciate the Word of God through the prophets and could not understand that this was the One of whom Isaiah had written *"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him"*. They failed to recognise that this was the

"Man of Sorrows" who was despised and rejected of men.

Their loss of spiritual vision was more costly than blindness of natural sight. Sin had taken a severe toll of human life during the long ages, and in spite of man's relentless effort to combat disease and pain, the struggle was mostly in vain. Therefore it may seem strange to the casual observer that Jesus of Nazareth, one imbued with a living message and blessed with such curative power, should be so wrongfully treated and put to death. There is much more in the story of the Saviour's ministry than an apparently wasted life and needless death; very much more. Jesus said *"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone."* In giving His life, He made it possible to resurrect all mankind from the dead that they might have health and peace and the promise of reconciliation to God. Without these, mankind could never achieve everlasting life. Harmony with the Creator is an essential part of human happiness. The work of Jesus and His Church in the Resurrection will be to restore conditions that prevailed in Eden when *"God created man in his own image"* (Gen. 1.27).

Before this can happen, God's purpose is to gather a family from among humanity. He planned that those who demonstrate love for Him should be changed into the likeness of their Lord, so that they can share in the work of restoration. Who better to understand the weakness and hopelessness of sinful men and women than those who have walked this way on Earth with their Master? Who could more closely sympathise with fallen mankind than those who have experienced the barrier between themselves and their Maker?

Sometimes the way with Jesus is difficult and sorrows seem to multiply on every side. It is just at those times when we should take a break from life's pressing duties and talk to Him who trod this way before us. Theological books are useful to answer questions but will not comfort us in many of life's circumstances. The simple gospel story of One who endured suffering and death amid the most heart breaking experiences will be more effective balm. Then it is, that we can recall the picture of the Master as He provided bread for a hungry audience after teaching them all day or see Him tenderly speaking to a Samaritan woman concerning the water of Life! Catch again glimpses of the

centurion's servant being made whole or the widow's son raised from the dead. Was He ever too weary or too bitter to minister even to one poor soul? Were any too foreign or too humble or too young for His healing touch? Did He ever lose His temper with that obstinate and cynical generation? It is interesting to see how His life provided an example of the precepts He taught on the mountainside in the early part of His ministry (Matt. 5.1-12). His words and actions never became hasty even under the intense persecution of His last days on the earth. The nearer He came to death, the greater He showed His love for His brethren and for the World.

But what is all this to us and what does it mean to our hearts and lives? If the words of the Lord are rooted in our minds and if our 'first love' for Him has remained strong through the stress of life's experiences, then slowly the words of another hymn become a reality.

*Impress Thine image on me,
Fulfil Thy blessed design
Till others see upon me
That beauteous face of Thine,
Bend me, oh, bend me to Thy will,
While in Thy hand I'm lying still.*

Beyond all intellectual knowledge, above the gifts of speech or pen, beside every Christian activity, there must be this process of cleansing, shaping and polishing within our hearts. So there will be a harvest of love that will bring life to the nations and joy to all mankind. It is the inward response to the buffeting and straining in life's battles that makes or mars Christian character. When troubles arise within the very church, godly souls will respond submissively to the Father's will and with affection for their brethren.

Intellects differ widely and cause development of opposing viewpoints about certain doctrines. Personalities have been formed within contrasting environments and they easily clash, causing friction among God's people. How does this affect the Church? Do such experiences draw us closer together by the very fact that we have to learn to be patient and care for each other's limitations and weaknesses or does the reverse happen? Do the differences of opinion produce the fruit of the Spirit within us, drawing us nearer to God and to each other or is the fruit of the fallen nature apparent? These are the opportunities to show the qualities

needed by those who share the work of the great High Priest. We serve each other now so that we can serve together in some future day. But patience is not developed in a community where everything runs smoothly, where everyone thinks and acts in the same way. Nor is love developed when those who irritate each other part company. That destroys opportunities to express the joy of *"in honour preferring one another"*. The identification that Jesus gave to His followers was *"by this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another"*.

Looking to the future of His church, Jesus saw this feature distinguish His people from the world. He recognised that while they toiled in a scornful world, their unity and their constraining love would shine as a wonderful witness. Has this been the experience of His Bride through the ages? Does this illuminate our narrow path in this day and age when the Gospel is being preached?

Reviewing history is useful if we are not judgmental. By noticing their faults we may avoid the stumbles of others. But the world is quick to criticise weaknesses and internal strife in Christian communities. The display of leaflets and excitement about "world events" is useless unless there is a living witness of loving concern within our fellowship. These prepare us to go into the world now to minister help and blessing that lie within our reach. Good works done among God's people prepare us to help our fellow men and women in the daily routine. It is easy to talk about brotherly love and shut half of God's children outside Christian fellowship. We may readily explain how we shall "bless all families of the earth" and then fail to bless the few families that we contact every day. Our daily work may not be in any healing or social capacity but most of us have opportunities to express sentiments of love and concern that will demonstrate what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. We are sharing Jesus' experiences when we jostle in the bus queue or shopping market. That is where God placed us to show His glory. He is training His people now to be tender, kind-hearted and patient with those around us. Mercy and wisdom will be needed in future days for those who have lived amid iniquity and

unrighteousness for decades. Our training ground is in the uncomfortable experiences of today and the burden of human imperfections. Can we find joy in affliction and not wish for revenge? Do our friends at work, at school and college see in us the gentle and compassionate nature of Jesus or the familiar ill temper of the world? Paul wrote *"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view"* (2 Cor. 5.16). 'No one' includes fellow passengers in the train, the person behind the store counter or the brother and sister in the home; but most of all, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our speech and behaviour are now guided by the new vision that God has given to us and not by our 'human point of view' that we claim to have surrendered to Him. Everything must be seen now as Jesus would see it and as a priest of God would see it.

The development of spiritual character in our lives does not occur if everyone gives way to us and our point of view. The fruit of the spirit doesn't grow well in a hot house climate. The storms of life put 'iron into the soul'. If we walk with Jesus the way will be rough going at times. Sharing His cup, as John and James found, is not always easy.

It is our privilege to come to the Master's table and speak one to another concerning the suffering which He bore for us, and meditate upon the joys we have in following His steps. We are part of one great family, one large loaf composed of many grains of wheat. But the loaf is broken and the grapes are crushed that others may be blessed. May the sharing in the bread and wine give us fresh vitality to strengthen our brethren in the bonds of Christian love and bear one another's burdens to fulfil the law of Christ. Suffering with Christ deepens our union with Him (Phil. 4.10) and it gives us a firmer basis of fellowship with our brethren. Sharing His cross will also bring a share of sovereignty with Him. What we suffer now will be more than outweighed by one glance at our beloved Lord's face. If we labour with Him now, if we talk to Him, if we share His sorrows and joys now, we will share His life, when we are beyond in the life everlasting.

DN

"O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his steadfast love endures for ever. O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures for

ever. O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures for ever..."

Psalm 136.1-3 RSV

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE Notes to aid personal Bible Study

22 - Chapter 19

19.1-10 This is a story full of drama with its chief characters making startling statements. Jericho was a wealthy town, lying in the Jordan valley, 17 miles from Jerusalem, strategically placed for collecting customs on a main Trans-Jordan trade route. Zacchaeus was a publican (Gr. *telones*), one of the *publicani* or public servants but with seniority - '*architelones*'- only found here in the NT. He was rich but why so hated by devout Jews? Whatever his motive for seeing Jesus he was very determined and the Master looked for him. Zacchaeus was a 'lost sheep' (15.3-7).

He plied the same trade as Matthew Levi but his was a very different story. There are similarities such as enjoying a social meal with Jesus and being totally reformed as a 'sinner'. He didn't stand on his dignity when he wanted something sufficiently and he climbed a wayside fig-mulberry tree. Jesus was "*passing through Jericho*" but stopped here and emphatically invited Himself to a meal with a 'sinner'. Zacchaeus was uninhibited about confessing his faults and on the spot he made restoration for 'wrong doing' (more than the law required). It is a lovely story about forgiveness and is a prelude to the 'passion narrative'. Here we have the Gospel in action restoring to a man the meaning of his name - 'pure or righteous one'. His confession is an admission of theft. There were some poor folk in Jericho who had reason to bless the day Jesus passed through the town. Sometimes when the head of the household finds salvation, so do they all (Acts 11.14). What did Jesus mean when He used the word 'salvation'?

19.11-28 As Jesus left Jericho He told a parable (or was it an allegory?) to dispel the dramatic expectation that the Kingdom was about to begin. The parable has similarities with another related in Matt. 25.14-30 but there are distinct differences that give the critical scholars no cause to suggest that they are the same story. Each servant is given a modest sum with an instruction "*trade with these till I come*" (RSV). AV translates "*occupy till I come*", other versions use 'work'. The Greek word is similar to our word 'pragmatic'. The details relate to an historical event of a son of Herod the Great, Archelaus, who was a very bad ruler, massacring thousands; the Jews hated him. Josephus tells us that he built a magnificent palace in Jericho and

provided the town with water via an aqueduct (1). Is the meaning of the story readily understood? What does God give us for His service; skills, opportunities, wealth? They are all His, for us to use for Him. Jesus mentioned the reward of only three of the ten servants. Two did well and received accordingly. The third was fearful of the 'hard' (stiff or churlish) man and afraid of the consequences of loss. He did nothing and got nothing. We lose what we do not use. Jesus revealed a remarkable principle that can apply to the wonderful gift of love (John 3.16). All believers start with the same gift and the more we express that gift of love the more we 'receive'. The more we use opportunities to express God's love the greater its value in our hearts and lives. It is so simple, so logical and so neglected in human life. The motivation for using any gift (eg. teaching, preaching, helping, leading) is love. Can we reach 'perfection' without using God's gifts? Do we all have gifts? Are these the same as the gifts of the Spirit?

19. 29-44 Jesus moved towards Jerusalem. As He did so an event occurred that gives evidence that Messiah was in the midst of pilgrims from Galilee. Zechariah 9.9 graphically foretold the event. Jesus was not the military general the Jews hoped would conquer the Romans. Jesus' teachings and way of life show that He was the Prince of Peace. He was "*humble, riding on an ass*" just as another king rode beneath the walls of Jerusalem to his anointing (1 Kings 1.38). But riding David's mule was probably a lot easier than riding an 'unbroken colt' (Mark 11.2). As one notable jockey said "what wonderful hands He must have had". This drama began on the south-eastern slopes of Olivet, a hill on the eastern side of Jerusalem. Did the owner of the animals know Jesus well? The 'password' "*the Lord needs it*" is interesting and worth studying. Jesus had probably visited the villages often with the 'twelve'. As they descended the opposite side of the hill the Holy City was spread out before them. It was a ride of about two miles, a journey He had made many times since He looked at it through the eyes of twelve-year old. The disciples "*rejoice and praise God*" - the Greek word for 'praise' is used only by Luke and Paul in the NT. Why did Jesus allow the crowds to welcome Him as Messiah on this occasion, refusing the request of the Pharisees

to silence the excited crowds? To what was His answer referring? Luke uses the word 'glory' rather than 'hosanna' - why? There is a reference here perhaps to Psalm 118.26. When Jesus spoke of 'the stones crying out' was there connection to the stones of v.44? It might be translated "*the acclamation would be wrung out of the stones*" (2). This was a day of decision for Israel. There is a change of mood in v.41 when He wept over a city that He knew was bound to reject Him. It was a moment of strong emotion. He knew the hearts of the city fathers and that their rejection of goodness and truth would inevitably lead to the city's downfall. It was a poignant moment that reflected Jesus' true feelings; there was no resentment or retaliation; they are human passions. He had nothing but compassion for sinners; angry, may be, at the evil in their obstinate hearts. Can we have the same cry for people, misled by foolish leaders? Do we ask the Lord how long before they will turn back from their wrongdoing. Jesus' description of the fall of Jerusalem was graphically true. The word 'episkope' is used in 1 Peter 2.12 with the same meaning but in mercy and blessing rather than judgment (Isa. 10; Jer. 10.15; Ex. 3.16 LXX -Vine) and it can also have a meaning of oversight, referring to an overseer, related to the work of an 'elder'.

19.45-48 The last story in this chapter occurred

'the morning after' according to Mark and is referred to as the 'Cleansing' or 'Purification of the Temple' and is about Jesus' visit to the 'Holy Place'. It occurred in the outer court to which Gentiles were admitted. Was this a 'symbolic gesture'? There he drove out the animals and overturned the moneychangers' tables. Is there anything humorous about a dozen grown men scrabbling on the floor for the rolling coins? It's worth comparing the different gospel accounts (Matt. 21.12-17; Mark 11.15-19 and the unusual record in John 2.13-22). Did Jesus lose His temper? Did He use the whip to strike the animals? Why did He take such an unusual action? Why confront the Jewish elite now? Few events in the Gospels raise so many questions. Luke's account is surprisingly short. He mentions an interesting detail - Jesus' reference to Jeremiah 7.11. This occurred not in the consecrated Temple of Solomon of which the prophet spoke but in the Temple built by Herod the Great. The contrast between the attitudes of the Jewish leaders and ordinary people is as marked here as anywhere. The latter literally "*hung on his words*". What then are we to make of this event in the Lord's life?

Used in these studies: (1) & (2) N.Geldenmays: Commentary, on the Gospel of Luke (M.M. & S 1950) E.H. Plumptre The Gospel of Luke - in (Ellicott - Marshall) W. Barclay: The Gospel of Luke (Daily Bible Study, St. Andrews 1967) L. Morris: Luke, An Introduction and Commentary: (IVP 1974)

DN

JUST A WORD - DOMINION!

"Then God said 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, over the cattle and over all the earth'" (Genesis 1.26 RSV).

How did God intend us to interpret the word that has been translated 'dominion' by many of the translations? Derek Kidner quoting Delitzsch points out that "dominion over all creatures is not the content but the consequence of the Divine image". What was Jesus attitude to nature - to the birds and animals? Endeavouring to answer this question, Ian Bradley draws attention to the attitude of the early Church Fathers and the great Celtic saints who had such loving stewardship.

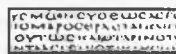
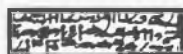
Sadly, western Christian philosophy has interpreted Genesis 1.26 to mean that man can do what he likes with planet Earth and its contents. God gave man *dominion* over animals to rule as a

king but not to dominate as a despot. The misuse of animals, plants and minerals has long affected the health of nations and peoples. We need to foster the Christian principles of loving concern and good husbandry and not manipulate and abuse for the sake of wealth and power. Man was made in the image of God and therefore must act as a viceroy in the spirit and manner of our God of love.

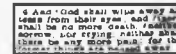
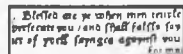
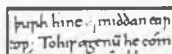
We plough the fields with tractors,
With drills we sow the land;
But growth is still the wondrous gift
Of God's almighty hand

Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,
Ours, as his stewards to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse and destruction,
Good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

Fred Pratt Green



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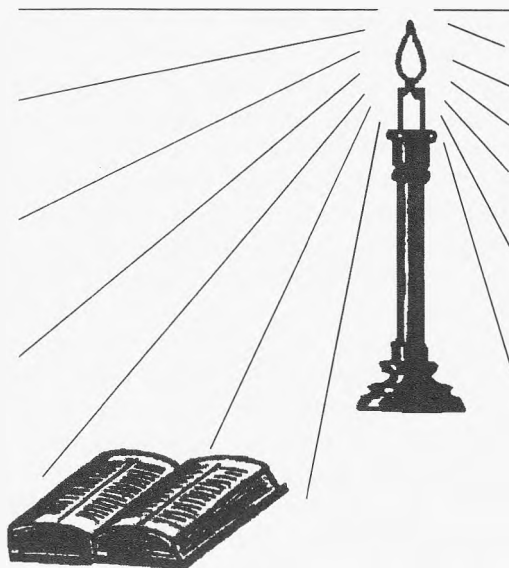
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NOTICES

Literature – During the past 12 months we have received a very large number of requests for booklets which has depleted our stock of some booklets. We are currently considering reprinting: 'The Spirit of Prophecy'; 'The Cup of the Lord'; 'The Tragedy of Samson' and 'Three Stories of Salvation'. 'Good News for All' may also be reprinted but in a slightly different format. We would be very pleased to hear from readers concerning their interest in using these booklets.

We hold very large stocks of '**Future Probation in Christian Belief**' a booklet that was used much in the 1970s. We can post these in bulk on request. We dispatch surface printed paper rate, maximum weight 5 kgs. Any help that can be given with postage would be appreciated.

The book 'Sword Against All Nations' has now been published and is in process of being sent to those who have requested it. All those who have asked to have it sent should have received it by the time they receive this issue of the BSM. Readers who request literature overseas should remember that surface mail takes several weeks to arrive - and all literature is sent surface mail - printed paper rate.

Address Labels – If there are any faults in our addressing system - labels may need correcting - we would be glad to have details. Our faithful computer that has held the records for printing the labels for the past ten years has had to be replaced. For over a week dispatch almost came to a halt. Our worthy 'technicians' quickly rallied to the situation, providing another computer and the expertise to re-start operations. However our 'backing up' system was not up to date and many records need to be updated. We apologise for these problems.

Magazine Material – We look for ways to widen the field of interest in the material published in this magazine. We hope that this is helpful to readers. A magazine ministry that is world wide, non-

sectarian and interdenominational will contain articles which do not suit everyone all the time. We are always interested to learn about this. Articles that are published are believed to be of spiritual value but members of the BFU team may not agree with every expression of thought.

Tell a Friend – if you have found the Bible Study Monthly a blessing in your Christian life - tell others and tell us their name and address. We will gladly send the magazine on an annual basis or as a trial for three months.

A word to overseas readers: some of our friends live in Asian and African countries. Once or twice a week we receive letters requesting items that we cannot send.

Bible Fellowship Union can only send its own literature. BFU cannot send money or clothes or food or other 'relief goods'. Please don't waste your postage money in sending such requests. BFU cannot sponsor speakers or students.

Gainsborough House – continues to serve its seven permanent residents and any visitors that request accommodation. Through the winter we have completed a heavy repair and renewal programme as well as facing up to one or two emergencies. This Victorian villa needs constant vigilance concerning its fabric and facilities but in the Lord's providence continues to respond to the needs of those who use it. Christian brethren meet there, once a week, more join once a month and DV still others come from further afield to a Convention once a year. The Trustees are grateful to those who pray for them that they may continue to serve the Lord through His people. The Convention at Gainsborough 2005 is on 19th June.

Gone From Us

Anthony Todd (Lincoln)

'Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away'

TRANSFORMED

"But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18 RV).

Christians are not the only ones who would like to be better men and women. Professor Huxley said, "I protest that if some great power would make me always think truth and do right on condition of my being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning, I would instantly close with the offer". "Oh, that I could only think right and do right" has been the desire of great men right down the ages.

This is our inheritance if we are the Lord's people. This is shown in the Word of God and can be obtained under the right conditions. It is as natural for the character to become beautiful as for flowers to become beautiful. The same Creator who instituted laws for the production of beautiful flowers instituted laws for the creation of beautiful characters.

Some claim that the only way to be transformed into the likeness of the Lord is to resolve by sheer willpower to overcome sin in our bodies and minds. There is nothing wrong in resolving to overcome sin, but that is not the vital point. Suppose we were on a ship when in the middle of the ocean it refused to go and those on deck tried by pushing at the mast to move it. It would not move, however much pressure they used; their strength would be used in the wrong way. They need to go down to the engine room, the real seat of power and use their energy to put right what was wrong. Effort is useless unless exercised in the right direction. A drowning man cannot pull himself out of the water by his own hair.

Some try to tackle one sin at a time and thus eradicate sin from their hearts that good may work. That would be a very big task for any man, to get sins one by one out of his life. That is the wrong way; sin is only overcome by something taking its place. The evil spirit discharged from the man must be replaced by the Lord's spirit or the last condition becomes worse than the first. The tackling of one sin at a time is therefore not the right method.

Still another method is to copy Christ's virtues. The word "copy" suggests the thought of an artist in wax or paint trying to reproduce a beautiful flower. Many believe in Christ as the standard that is to be copied, but very few are able to copy him.

The power that is used is a power of self – a power within themselves instead of a power from without.

Again, some say, "How about self-examination?" Setting up a code of rules to which we must keep! A watchmaker once made a present of the parts of a watch, but when they were put together the main spring was missing. The vital thing is the power, or mainspring. The Scriptures give us a valuable formula for our sanctification. There are laws of science and art, and if we would produce anything correctly we must use a formula. We are told that God's thoughts are higher than man's, and if the wisdom of men sees the necessity for a formula, God has not left us without one. 2 Cor. 3:13-18 provides this formula, and in verse 18 reveals three processes: 1, reflection; 2, assimilation; and 3, influence.

Notice that it does not say we are transforming ourselves into the same image from glory to glory. We do not transform ourselves, we are changed or transformed. The changing power is something that does not naturally belong to us, it is a power that comes from without. Throughout the New Testament we find that the verbs used in connection with our sanctification are passive. As far as the power of sanctification is concerned it is a power from without. We can come under the influence of His spirit and so be transformed. A barometer responds to the condition of the weather. It does not make the weather but is susceptible to the pressures that create the weather for us. In a similar way our responsibility is to bring ourselves into the attitude of susceptibility in which God can work on our minds. That is our part of the work, to get our hearts into that attitude of full consecration: take out anything and everything that would hinder the working of His Spirit.

The Word of God must be received into our prepared hearts and the whole being must be yielded as members of righteousness. That is the thought in this text. We, beholding Christ with unveiled face, in our study of the Lord's Word and His example and teaching, see the glory of God. We see the beauty of God. He exemplifies to us the character of God and as we set our affections on that lovely character; our love for God and our study of His Word is so close to our hearts, we cannot but reflect it. A man is shaped and fashioned by that which he loves. We find two young people

coming together; they see something they love in each other. They marry and live together for fifty years, and during that time a reflecting work is going on; one would speak, as would the other; their very appearance becomes alike. If we are in love with the Lord, the things He says are the things we would say, the words He has given us are the words that express the sentiments of our hearts. We take them into our hearts and reflect them. Beholding Christ, we reflect His image, and we are changed from glory to glory. What does the word "glory" mean here? The Psalmist says, "The heavens declare the glory of God". There is a demonstration of the glory of God, His power, His wisdom and the grandeur of His mind. In other words, God's glory is His character. So we, beholding Christ, reflect His image and are transformed from one character to a better character, then on to a still better one until we are ready for our final change. We are all mirrors, we cannot help it, and we are all reflecting, whether we know it or not.

Now, what is it we reflect? We reflect what we have gained from our environment. If we choose an environment that leads to a depraved life, we shall reflect that depravity. We shall also reflect what we read in uplifting books and the attitude of uplifting company. Are we living in an environment of the Spirit? Do we read the Word of God? If so we shall reflect it. Do we keep the company of God's people? Then we shall reflect the spiritual effect.

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

impressions into our own beings. This we have referred to as the process of assimilation,

Now let us think about influence. Our study of great men's works or our contact with individuals have the effect of changing our lives. David and Jonathan had a great influence on each other. How about the influence of Christ? If the influence of good people is great and yet they are only, in a very small part, virtuous, in comparison with Christ, what would be the influence of Christ on those who make Him their companion? Some may say that there is a difference, that there is something tangible in a friend. But do we love our friend because of his virtues? So with Christ; it is His life and influence that does the work of transforming. It is by being born again of the Spirit of God that the Christian receives a power that the world cannot know or comprehend. There are certain laws governing the Christian. *"Except a man be born from above."* We must receive a power from above before we can be transformed. There are laws governing the material world, organic and inorganic. A mineral is inorganic and must remain so, for it cannot by any power from within itself cross into even the lowest form of life. Plants are also governed by laws of growth, which are peculiar to themselves. While the mineral cannot reach up into the organic, we find that a plant can reach down its roots into the mineral and by absorbing it, transforms it to part of itself. The mineral has been "born from above" and has entered the Kingdom just above it. No law governing the human can make the human spiritual by effort or power from within itself. God can take hold of us if we yield ourselves to Him, and so we can be transformed into His image. The power is the power of life and we derive that life from the Word of God, for the Word of God is living, and we have been born anew of the Word of God that lives and abides forever. By imbibing that Word we are transformed. If we study His Word and character and take His Word into our hearts, we receive a power that changes us from glory to glory.

AS

"When God began to form the universe, the world was void and vacant, darkness lay over the abyss; but the spirit of God was hovering over the waters."

Genesis 1.1 Moffatt's translation

THE VISION OF JOEL

7 - New Wine of the Kingdom

*An exposition of
the Book of Joel
Chapter 3*

In Joel 3.13 the picture changes. The hosts have gathered in the fatal valley and to the prophet's excited mind they appear as masses of grape-laden vines, full to bursting, awaiting the gathering and the vintage. "Put ye in the sickle" he cries "for the harvest is ripe The press is full, the fats (wine-vats) overflow (with the juice of the crushed grapes) for their wickedness is great". This symbol of the winepress is used elsewhere. In Revelation 14.19-20 there is the same allusion – *"And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city."*

It is here that we are enabled rightly to place these happenings in the times and seasons of the Divine Plan. Verses 15-16 tell us that at this juncture, when the nations have gathered together and have been, as it were, 'reaped' and 'cast into the winepress', *"the sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem, and 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"*. These are the signs of the Second Advent, and of the establishment of the Kingdom in power; the gathering and the reaping lead up to this culmination. The incitement to war, the turning of all the arts of peace to purposes of conflict, the federating of weak nations into allegedly strong unions, constitutes a clear fulfilment of this prophecy. The framing of treaties, agreements and pacts of mutual aid against real and fancied aggression, carried to the extent it has been in recent years are a definite indication of the imminence of that 'darkening' of the sun and moon and 'shaking' of the heavens which in Matt. 24 is given as the immediate herald of the manifestation of the returned Lord in glory to all mankind. That is a late stage in the succession of events which constitutes His Advent; the gathering of the Church and its union with Him "beyond the veil" take place before this, and may well have occurred before the nations have completed their assembly in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

If this "winepress" feature, when the Lord will

"roar out of Zion", is to result in the immediate deliverance of His earthly people in the Holy Land and the almost immediate commencement of Millennial work, as verse 18 seems to indicate, then it must logically follow that the Church will have been gathered some time previously, before Armageddon is fought out around the land of Israel. *"So shall ye know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no stranger pass through her any more"* (v.17). That is the outcome; the Gentile hosts have come up for judgment and have been judged; they have undertaken their last assault against the citadel of God's righteousness and been repulsed, and their power has been broken for ever. Israel has returned wholly and completely to the Lord her God, and the stage is fully set for the Millennial Kingdom.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with water, and a fountain shall come forth of the House of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim." (3.18). This verse is full of Millennial imagery, the wine and milk of the Kingdom, and the River of Life. These symbols are found elsewhere in the Scriptures, separated. Here they are found combined. Here is our authority for linking them together and proclaiming to all and sundry that in that day, when the River of Life commences to flow again from the sanctuary of God, there will be wine and milk. These are the deep truths and the elementary truths of the Divine Plan, the things by which men approach unto God, and enter into communion with Him, as well as the things by which men may learn to live their earthly lives acceptably conforming to His laws – without money, and without price. We are indebted to Ezekiel for the clearest view of this Millennial river. Out from the Sanctuary that symbolises the Divine Government on earth during that Age (Ezek. 47) he saw a stream emerge, waters that rapidly widened and deepened as they pursued their onward course, until they became a mighty river, too wide and too deep to pass over. They flowed down into the Dead Sea, and healed its barren waters, so that fish could live; and upon the banks

of that life-giving river grew every kind of tree whose fruit was good for food and whose leaves were potent for healing. Fitting symbol, this, of the life-giving influences that will flow out from the administration of the Lord Christ and His glorified Church "in that day". Small wonder that men will cry "*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*" (Isa. 25.9). To Ezekiel, the vision was as a restoration of man's lost Eden home; he saw once again the mystic river that watered the garden, and the Trees of Life in the midst of the garden, lost to mankind for so many weary centuries, now restored before his wondering eyes.

Zechariah, in a later day, saw the same thing. Like Joel, he saw it in connection with, and immediately following, Israel's spectacular deliverance from their enemies. He had stood and watched (Zech. 14) the investment of Jerusalem by the hostile forces, and the Lord go forth as when He fought in the day of battle, and the disruption of those forces by the power of that going forth. Then he had seen the living waters come forth out of Jerusalem. This was not a seasonal winter stream to be dried up by the summer's heat, but a sparkling river bearing fertility and life to every thing and every one within its reach all the year round; "in summer and in winter shall it be". So these three prophets joined together in giving testimony to the means by which God will in the coming Age bring life and health to the nations, so that the writer of Revelation, centuries later, was able to revive their vision in his own words. When, in his turn, he came to close the last book of the Bible with his inspired description of what God will do at the end, he saw "*a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb on either side of the river, the tree of life ... and there shall be no more curse.*" (Rev. 22.1-3).

The "valley of Shittim", as the translators, have it, is the "Valley of Acacias." (Shittim is the Hebrew word for acacia). The Valley of Acacias was the name given to the terraces on either side of the Jordan, for a considerable distance above its entrance into the Dead Sea, which in ancient times (and to some extent in modern times also) were thickly forested with acacias. There is a striking parallel with Zechariah's vision here, for he also sees the river of life issuing forth toward the "east

country" – this same district – and thus, finding its way by means of the Jordan into the Dead Sea. One cannot help feeling that both prophets saw the same thing in vision, and described it, each in his own words, and one wonders, is it possible that each enjoyed a foresight of a literal stream that is to flow thus, "*in that day*". This may be so without in any way deprecating the symbolic interpretation of the passage, which to us is in any case the more important. In the natural picture, the flowing of the great "fountain" is not just a single spring. The Hebrew *ma'an* means a collection of many springs gushing forth a great quantity of water at one place, as in the "*fountains of the great deep*" in the story of the Flood in Gen. 7.11. Its consequence in the rivers of Judah all flowing with waters (Joel 3.18) would, of course, result in abundant harvests of grapes, and consequent wine, and ample pasturage for flocks which produce milk. No wonder then, that Joel says the mountains would "drop down" new wine – so heavily laden with prolific vines would they be – and the hills flow with milk, so rich in flocks and herds would they be in their turn. All this is due in the first place to the River of Life flowing out from the house of the Lord. That then must be why Isaiah cries out so triumphantly (55.1). "*Ho, every one that thirsts, come ye to the waters; come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price*". It is in this chapter that the spiritual application of the material illustration is so clearly seen, for Isaiah goes on to say, "*Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently to me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me. Hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you.*"

That is the call and the work of the Millennial Age, to offer the symbolic wine and milk to all men, without money and without price, and exhort them to "listen" and "hear", that their souls may live. That all this is "*without money and without price*" may be taken as an indication of the abundance of wine and milk that the living waters will have brought forth. It will become as common and free as the air we breathe, and the sunshine that warms us. That, at any rate, will be true of the wine and milk of the Millennial Age. So the prophet turns his eyes away from the fair vision, and looks

upon the Divine warfare against evil that has made that vision possible. *"Egypt shall be a desolation"* he cries, *"and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in the land."* What kind of Millennial Age is this that witnesses prosperity and life on the one hand, and desolation and death on the other? Has God His favourites after all, and are Egypt and Edom to be punished eternally for their oft-times misguided and ignorant opposition to the children of Judah?

This verse is symbolic and cannot be literally fulfilled. Edom does not exist and the Egyptians

today are racially a different people. In that day when Israel shines forth resplendent, purified and converted, as God's earthly missionary nation, the nations that cried *"let us cause them to cease from being a people on the face of the earth"* have ceased to exist as nations, but Israel, whom they oppressed, is enthroned forever. That is the Divine decree. *"Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed, FOR THE LORD DWELLETH IN ZION."*

The End.

AOH

OWNERSHIP

3 - The Peace of the Law

"Great peace have they who love thy law; nothing can make them stumble" (Psa. 119.165 RSV). So wrote the poet king of Israel, who in spite of his faults exalted the law of God.

Peace is only a word to many people. In a demanding, pushing, rushing world, it means no more than a cessation from work, noise or competition, a freedom from domestic strife or party feuds or an end to the hostilities of war. Calm repose, serenity of mind, is neither desired nor sought until the frayed system is driven to desperate measures for its preservation in some degree of health and sanity. Even the still silence of quiet places is something generally shunned as unnatural. Modern man has become addicted to the din, the discords of a roaring, restless age where peace is a stranger to his environment.

If outward peace is hard to find how shall inner peace, great peace, be attained under conditions of stress and strain where solitude is frightening and to the busy multitudes, the ceaseless hum of activity is both familiar and safe. Once gained, how can it survive amid the gruelling pressures and discords imposed upon the everyday life of all classes of people? Few are free from fret and worry; anxiety, pain and sorrow stamp many faces. Discontent, disappointment and frustration spoil many more. The varied and hurrying crowds of mankind bear few traces of that serenity and happy confidence defined as peace. That peace of harmony with God is not the calm of a stoic indifference or the quiet of a resigned and uncomplaining spirit, or the dumb lethargy of those who have ceased to hope. It is the strength of

confidence, of harmony with the great fountain of life, a blessed assurance amid the contrary tides and treacherous currents of human frailty and evil forces. For lack of it many people are sick in mind and body. All the pills and treatments of the medical world cannot cure the divided, unhappy souls who voyage through life without the rudder of love and the anchor of faith.

The plausible arguments of natural wisdom and philosophy cannot produce peace, and certainly not that great peace that comes to those who love the word of God, who endeavour to live by it, who make a practical application of it to life's daily affairs. It does not mean they live in a charmed circle, hedged in from the world or the experiences common to man. It does mean they are saved from the consequences of rebellion and self-seeking, from foolish mistakes and empty follies that waste the time and substance of the shallow minded. In a world beset by fears and confusion they are saved from ignorance and doubt. They depend for counsel and guidance upon the invisible source of wisdom and power.

The mistakes of man create danger and bring defeat. God does not make mistakes. There is no room for the seething jealousies and hatreds that torment so many minds when the peace of God occupies the central place. The 'why?' of offended self-will has no voice in the affairs of those who rest their all in the hands of Him who steers the universe through ages without end.

Limited in wisdom, knowledge, power and length of days, dependence upon and submission to a higher authority in no way belittles an intelligent

human being. It is the best insurance for the life we now have and for that which is yet to come. *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul"* (Psa. 7.19). The instructions are ideal, they sum up all that ensures social and personal peace. In their observance lies the power to change people from discontent to noble dignity. They are the standard of human behaviour well within the ability of normal, intelligent understanding and performance. Spoken and written for a nation selected to teach other nations by their example, this second attempt to gain the affections of men foundered on the reefs of a hard human wilfulness and indifference. The riotous worship of the golden calf by the multitude who had shrugged off the absence of their leader as a thing of small account; the broken tablets of the Law and the ensuing miseries of the camp, seem like an omen of all that was to follow. The denial of God has been less than the indifference. The nations of Christendom have professed to know God, to understand and accept His law, but performance has been poor.

The requirements of God are both just and reasonable. The law of the golden rule has in every century been an ideal, ignored or found impossible of achievement except by a persevering few who have been looked upon with curiosity as oddities, or venerated as saints beyond the common touch. The simplicity of the Law, like the simplicity of the Gospel, has been largely lost, overlaid by additions, by creeds, by conventional ritual and a lip-service which has robbed it of its life-giving qualities. The letter of the Law is a dead letter without the stimulating spirit which moves the mind to an acknowledgement of its rightness with a corresponding urge to obey, to carry out and live up to its precept. Its value to man and the trouble arising from a lawless or law-breaking state have never been in question with the discerning. *"In the keeping of them there is great reward."*

In spite of all these assurances, testimonies and the evidences of the need and safety of the governing laws of nations created by or modelled upon the Ten Commandments, written by the hand of God in His mountain rendezvous with a choice and chosen man, there are those who ask "Why the

law? Why should we observe rules ancient or modern? Why bother with religion? It is the cause of a lot of trouble. Why do we not think what we like and do what we like?" Such freedom is a tempting proposition to youthful ardour impatient of restraint. The questions are those that every self-willed generation has put to its austere and critical elders who condemn or mourn the waywardness of its youth. The experiences of life alone offer the best answers and teach the best lessons. The fees are somewhat heavy. It is when they are demanded, when fear, loneliness, pain and frustration assail the human mind and body that men and women begin to realise that everything has a price, even freedom to cast out the Word of God like an old shoe.

For Adam, the ancestor of the race, the beginning of intelligent human relationship with God, the answer was clear but devastating. He was a free agent with liberty to enjoy a thousand lawful pleasures in the sylvan glory of his paradise. Only one restriction tried his metal. The simple record of that first failure, all too readily classed as allegory, folklore or an unforgettable dream of a desirable residence and a care-free life for which the generations, as they pass, persistently search but do not find, has left its mark upon all Nature, a black-mark for which there has been no man-made erasure or remedy.

Untried, unready for knowledge, man chose his own way and broke the one rule of his kingdom. Thus he broke faith with his Maker, lost his trust, his friend and advisor, so setting in operation another law whose grim results are still at work throughout the earth, a law which can neither be defeated nor repealed except by the Author of all law.

As that wise monarch Solomon, after what seemed to be a successful and profitable life, observed somewhat bitterly, *"There is a way that seems right to a man but the end of it is death"* (Proverbs 14.12). Not only were its fleeting pleasures and transitory treasures "Vanity of vanities", but the day came when the whole experience stumbled to a full stop.

(To be continued) BJD

"You indeed, brethren, were called to freedom. Only do not make your freedom an incentive to your lower nature; but serve one another in love. For the entire Law is summed up in the one

precept, 'You are to love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev. 19.18)". Galatians 5.13, 14

'The New Testament in Modern Speech' by R. F. Weymouth – used by students of God's Word for over a century.

AFTER THE FLOOD

4 - The Plain of Shinar

Those first two centuries or so after the flood were stressful times for the little family. The wide plain of Iraq, later to be called the Plain of Shinar, was at that time occupied in part by the northern extension of the sea and for the rest by salt-laden mud and marshland. From their position on the mountain terraces, a thousand feet above the plain, they could see that for many years they must remain in the mountains. They must build their dwellings of forest timber and subsist on such wild berries, fruits and the flesh of small wild animals as the mountains would provide. Later as their children were born and their numbers increased, they would need to find land suitable for growing crops and keeping flocks and herds, to feed the increasing number of mouths. To the south of them the mountains closed in, dark and forbidding. To the north-west they opened out into wide terraces. These offered a mixture of grassland and forest, well watered by copious streams rushing down to the marshy plain below, as they still do today although that plain is now well drained and fertile. Here was the logical place for them to go and it may well be, the recently discovered remains of prehistoric settlements are the remaining evidences of their sojourn for some two centuries before they could "*journey from the east, and find a plain in the land of Shinar, and dwell there*" (Gen. 11.2). Braidwood and Howe, in 1948/51, made some discoveries at Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahr about eighty miles distant from the settlements mentioned above, in the headwaters of the Diyala river system. This must have been the type of life of the sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons of Noah to perhaps the fourth generation. The lowest levels show evidence that the villagers lived on wild wheat and barley, berries and fruits and the flesh of wild sheep, goats, and pigs. Then come the indications of agriculture and stock-breeding. Braidwood records ('Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan', 1966) "The Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world This is a major landmark in human history Nowhere else in the world were the wild wheat and barley, the wild sheep, goats, pigs, cattle and horses to be found together in a natural environment. This meant an entirely new way of

life for all mankind". This was said, of course, upon the popular assumption that mankind evolved from a long continued state of primitive savagery to the point where they began to cultivate plants and breed animals for themselves. The Genesis story contradicts this; the eight who survived the Flood were already civilised and knowledgeable and all the evidence is that they were brought out of the Ark and into the new earth by the providence of God in a locality where they could readily commence to apply the skills they already possessed, and after perhaps a relatively limited number of years begin to reap their own harvests and make use of their own flocks and herds. Pottery at first was unknown; domestic vessels were made of wood but even the earliest ones were perfectly round as if turned on a lathe. The finest specimen of a wooden egg cup ever known comes from a house which must date to the time of Noah's grandsons. Stone was worked to produce bowls and tools.

No village has been found to exceed twenty to twenty-five houses, but there are always six or seven rooms which would seem to indicate large families; this would be essential to the rapid increase of the race from three principal forebears. This brings to the forefront a factor that has no parallel in subsequent times. Although children were born and grew to maturity and in their turn brought forth more children, there was no death! For some three centuries at least no-one died! The ages of the patriarchs recorded in Genesis show that the normal span of life for those born after the Flood was at the first some five hundred years, lessening then in steps to about two centuries a thousand years later. If this unusual length of life betokened a corresponding increase of the childbearing period there would logically be a considerably accelerated growth in population. Even so, it must have been a comparatively long time before the community springing from three brothers and their wives attained any appreciable number. If the span of life of those three and their wives was, as Genesis indicates, between five and six hundred years, the childbearing period would be as much as two centuries. If the children born reached marriageable maturity in something over

fifty years of age, it would follow that at the end of two centuries there could be a population of some ten thousand or more living and no sign yet of any one dying. By this time men would have long since settled into a regime of agriculture and stock-raising and in consequence become organised into separate village communities, each at the centre of an area of farmland which sufficed for their needs.

With the third century after the Flood, there came a change. The population increase would be accelerating; there was still no death and the very genial climatic conditions would be conducive to a high birth rate. At least a quarter million could be expected by the end of the third century. The mountain slopes were proving inadequate. The many sites of prehistoric settlements in this area which have been discovered give testimony to the density of population which must have existed in those early times. It was time to find more living space. Small detachments probably made their way up the river valleys leading into the Iranian Mountains, finding isolated spots where they could settle. This might well have been the time that some of the known mountain sites such as Qalal Jarmo and the half-dozen villages surrounding it, were established. Many of these show the primitive state of life that would be expected of the time concerned. Later on their descendants began to mine copper, gold and precious stones that exist in the mountains, and so became artisans and traders. But that lay several more centuries in the future. By far the greater proportion of the fast-growing community would look longingly at the spacious plain that lay to the west of their mountain home where once the waters of the Flood had extended but which now was in process of becoming fit for human habitation. As they gazed across that plain from the mountains, a little above the latitude of the modern city of Baghdad, they would have seen, in the foreground, a wide stretch of water and salt marshland some forty miles wide. It was an apparently unassailable barrier, a remnant of the waters of the Flood three centuries earlier. Their scouts would have been out, and they would have reported that on the other side of that sheet of water the land had dried, the salt marshes had leached out into fertile ground and there the grass and wild grain was growing and the countryside was fit for habitation. They had but to trek around the northern end of the water and they could reach a plain that

stretched for scores of miles to north and south and there they could find room for their villages and farms for generations to come. So the great migration began. It was not likely to have been a mass journey similar to the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. Many of the older folk probably stayed where they were, preferring to keep to the mountain life to which they had been born and in which they had been brought up. The settlements that have been excavated in the Diyala river area bear witness to that; some of them were inhabited for many centuries. Bands of pioneers would strike out, each finding a suitable place in which to settle, spreading ever farther outwards, and onwards, so that as generation succeeded generation the plain became increasingly populated. This is the event that is described in such brief and concise terms in Gen. 11.2. *"As they journeyed from the east, they found a place in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there"*. They came from the east, and they spread over a fertile country some seventy miles wide by two hundred long, traversed through its middle by the famous river Euphrates. Their children went out from there, to people every region of the earth. It has long been held by archeologists and anthropologists that the first inhabitants in the Iraq plains came from the east, from somewhere in the Iranian mountains. The story of the Flood and Gen. 11.2 confirm their findings.

Of course it was not called Shinar at the time. The need for place names hardly existed. The word is the Sumerian term for the combined lands of Sumer and Akkad, the land of the Hamites and Semites, and did not come into use until the sons of Shem and sons of Ham had evolved into distinct nations many centuries later. A much later scribe, either author or copyist of Gen. 11, inserted the word to explain to his own generation – and to us – just where the plain was situated on which the people settled. Thanks to him, we now know that they had come into the country, the capital and most famous city which was to figure repeatedly in the Bible – Babylon.

About this time the old patriarch Noah breathed his last. He had survived the Flood by three hundred and fifty years, living long enough to see his three sons grow into a company of a quarter million people. The impression given in Gen. 11 is that the community was living in a state of peace

and harmony and one might be justified in thinking that he died happy in the thought that the world was being re-peopled by men and women who had regard for God and righteousness. He could have had no conception of the miseries that sin was to inflict upon the world in later days. Tradition says that he was buried on the mountain on which the Ark had landed but there is not likely to be much truth in that. The more significant thing is that in all probability his was the first death to occur in this new post-Flood period.

For more than three hundred years there had been no deaths; now it was to begin to intrude its power upon mankind again. In another hundred and fifty years his eldest son Shem was to follow him to the grave.

Just how literate were these people back there three thousand years before Christ? No specimens of their writing, if they knew of writing, have survived. The earliest so far discovered dates from about four centuries later, when the cities began to be built and industry and trade began to flourish. But there must have been writing long before. E. J. Geib in "A study of writing" (1965) says that the structure of the Sumerian cuneiform writing (on clay tablets) indicates a long period, perhaps five centuries, of development. The earliest script which is known, earlier than cuneiform, is called 'pictographic', because the signs are obviously derived from pictures of objects, but no examples of the original picture-writing have ever been found. It is clear that other writing mediums were known before the use of clay tablets because the Sumerian word for tablets has a prefix indicating wood or vegetable substance. There were – and still are – no trees on the Euphrates plain and clay made into tablets and baked was the only possible writing material. The survival of words like *Gis-sar*, "to write", and "*Gis-gar*", a building plan, ('gis' being the prefix for wood or trees) indicates that before the people came down into the plain there was such a thing as writing on wood. Mallowan in 1953, excavating on the site of ancient Nineveh, found wax-covered wood panels, bound with gold hinges in the form of a book, bearing traces of cuneiform texts. It has often been remarked that the story of the Flood as narrated in Genesis bears all the hall-marks of being written by an eye-witness. It is most unlikely that the antediluvian world should have endured more than two thousand years

without men having invented writing. The persistent Jewish tradition is that Enoch was the man who did so. There is every likelihood that these pioneers who came into the plain of Shinar carried with them, written in the picture-writing script which no modern man has ever seen, the stories of their ancestors which we now have as the first nine chapters of Genesis.

The plain was fertile and well watered, more so than the mountain regions from which they had come, but it lacked a good many of the things incidental to daily life to which they had become accustomed in the mountains. Up there they could quarry stone – granite, sandstone, limestone, sometimes even marble – and they had learned to make stone bowls and vessels and door-sockets of fine quality. Some of these have been found where they were thrown away and buried, five thousand years ago. Down here in the plain there was none of that, only clay, and so they learned to make their utensils and ornaments of clay baked into pottery, tablets for writing, and bricks for building. That is why the narrative of the building of the great Tower in Gen. 11 says "*bricks had they for stone, and bitumen for mortar*". They were compelled to learn new building and new writing techniques.

Neither had they any metal. It was only after the dispersion, when the peoples began to separate, that the mineral wealth of the mountains was discovered and men began to fabricate those works of art which, brought to light in this modern age, have excited the wonder and envy of the present-day world. Nothing like them has been made since. The skill of the ancient Sumerians has never been surpassed. The finest works of art in gold, silver and copper which have ever been known were produced by craftsmen only seven generations removed from Noah and a couple of centuries after the dispersion from Babel. That scattering of the nations described in Gen. 11 was a blessing in disguise for the developing human race. It sent them into widely separated regions, in which they discovered all kinds of natural products which were going to prove necessary for the well-being of mankind as the human race increased. Without that dispersion they would have remained in the Stone Age much longer than they did. These sons and daughters of Shem, Ham and Japheth to the fifth and sixth generations occupied the length and breadth of the Plain of Shinar. They all were there;

none had yet died, and the three old patriarchs, nowhere yet near the end of their days, must have looked with pride, and thankfulness to God, upon the thousands of great-great-great-great grandsons and daughters to whom they had given the spark of life. It is difficult to visualise the nature of society at that time. Three men, survivors with their father of the great Flood which had ended the lives of all others, could look upon a quarter of a million people and reflect that by the providence of God they had given life to all these. They must have remembered the admonition given them by the Lord when they came out of the Ark into this cleansed new world, *"be ye fruitful, and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein"* (Gen. 9.7). They looked now upon these teeming multitudes and they also looked out across the smiling cornfields and the luxuriant groves of date-palms. They remembered the harder times spent in the mountains where they brought up their first children in an environment hardly yet ready to provide them with the food they needed, and they must have bent their heads and given thanks to God.

There is an old Sumerian story, of which the earliest copies now in existence were written about eighteen hundred years before Christ. It may reflect this change in the fortunes of the human community when they came into the Plain of Shinar, and, too, the beginning of the rivalry between the sons of Shem and the sons of Ham which probably lies behind the Tower of Babel story. The "Epic of Emesh and Enten" tells of the enmity of two brothers and its consequences, for which reason it is sometimes claimed by adherents of the "mythical" school that it was the original from which the Genesis account of Cain and Abel was derived. In fact this cannot be, for every element in the legend is as unlike the story of Cain and Abel as could be. It tells of a time when Enlil, the god of earth and heaven, found it necessary to produce fruit trees and grain to establish abundance in the land to meet the needs of his human creatures.

This at once looks like the time at present being considered, when the rapidly increasing human race moved into the Plain of Shinar to find living space and food. To this end Enlil appointed two men, Emesh and Enten, and assigned to them their duties. Emesh was to set up farmsteads, stables and sheepfolds, multiply the produce of the farms, cover the earth with cornfields and orchards and

bring the harvests into the granaries and storehouses. Enten was to go out into the plain and gather in the wild goats, sheep, asses and so on. He was to make use of their fat and milk and their young as they were born, collect the fruit from the wild date-palms and vines and wild grain, and generally "live off the land". In all of this it is not difficult to see the distinction between the settled farming and industrial way of life which was characteristic of the descendants of Ham, the Sumerians, and the nomadic, wandering from place to place; a way of life that was the hallmark of the sons of Shem, the Semites. In the story the two brothers quarrelled and brought their pleas to Enlil in his holy city of Nippur. Enlil pronounced in favour of Enten and commanded that his decree be observed. Emesh accepted the verdict, was reconciled to his brother and thereafter they lived and worked happily together.

Emesh may have been a dimly remembered recollection of Ham and his descendants, who colonised the plain and remained there. Similarly Enten of Shem, who according to history very largely left the plain and migrated to the north, and after the lapse of centuries returned in force to mingle with the native Hamites and form one nation. If this is so we have here what might well be a dim recollection of the separation which occurred at Babel. Centuries later many of the Semites came back and fused with the Hamites who were still there, so that there were two peoples living side by side. In later times the Semites were known as the Akkadians and the joint country as the land of Sumer and Akkad. The Semitic element was the most spiritually minded and had the higher conception of God. In the story Enlil favoured Enten, the nomad. In the Bible (Gen. 9) God pronounced His blessing upon Shem, the nomad. And that is how it came about that, a thousand years after Babel, Abraham the Semite and his forebears were found living in the Sumerian city of Ur of the Chaldees.

Before this and perhaps three centuries after the Flood and three thousand years before Christ, there had occurred the first great crisis in the affairs of the new world. This was the separation that sent the sons of men wandering in all directions to repeople the earth, the crisis that is recorded in Gen. 11 as the building of the Tower of Babel.

(To be continued) AOH

CHEERFULNESS

"Come let us join our cheerful songs," the hymn says, "with angels round the throne." Cheerfulness is a characteristic of the Christian, shown not only in joyful worship, but in daily tasks and at times of crisis. More than being characteristic, it is necessary. The alternative is depression and discouragement.

In a work of reference such as Vine [Expository Dictionary] the AV words 'cheerful', 'cheerfully', 'of good cheer' are seen to be renderings of three families of Greek words. Their use and meanings overlap. Indeed, looking up the references in more recent translations, one discovers various words and phrases such as: Take heart Take courage gladly not to give way to despair with joy The AV even has in one place the translation "merry"! All these shades of meaning are aspects of a positive frame of mind, cheerfulness. In scripture it is often linked with the particular reasons or circumstances which should produce it.

The Greek '*enthumeo*' means to put in good spirits, to be cheerful. James (5.13) tells us what to do if we find ourselves being cheerful – sing praises. This instruction goes along with advice to pray if one is suffering, or send for the church elders if one is sick. It is the practical reaction – if cheerful, sing praise to God. The same word is used by Paul when encouraging his companions in an endangered ship. "*Be of good cheer!*" Why? "*There will be no loss of life.*" "*It will happen as God told me.*" (Acts 27.22, 25). That our lives are in the hand of God is a sound reason for cheerfulness.

The Greek '*hilaros*' implies a joyful readiness of mind, prompt to do anything. (The English word '*hilarity*' has kept the thought of joy but has lost any sense of purpose in it.) Romans 12.8 speaks of acts of mercy done with cheerfulness (*hilarotes*). This is the right way to do a kindness; just as givers should be liberal and leaders should put their minds and hearts to the task. God is said to love the cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9.7), that is, someone who plans to give a gift, actually does give the gift, and has not just been badgered into it.

Cheerfulness of this kind can require an act of will. Some people are not naturally generous or

cheerful, and to tell them they must do things cheerfully may be a discouragement. There come to mind two elderly ladies. One was ready with a smile and a lively remark right up to her dying day; it was natural, no effort. The other was oppressed, grieving about the wickedness of the world and regretful of her own circumstances. Was she living up to her Christian privileges of faith, hope and cheerfulness? But after she had a course of thyroid treatment, though her circumstances did not change and the world was just as wicked, she faced things bravely with a smile! Or had God been helping her? Be that as it may, we should beware of criticising others, but rather concentrate on being obediently cheerful ourselves, just as much as we find we are ourselves able. Our mind may be cheerful even if our mood is not.

The Greek '*tharsei*' is translated "*Be of good cheer*", "*Take courage*". In other words, "*Cheer up*". Jesus, when he says this, always gives a good reason. The paralysed man is told to take himself in hand because his sins are forgiven (Matthew 9.2). The female outcast moves into a positive hopefulness because her faith has given her a complete cure (with a little unconscious help from Jesus - Matthew 9.22). The disciples see a ghost moving on the darkened lake, and are told "Don't be scared, it's Me." (Can we in our turn recognise the times when Jesus is with us in the dark?) And those same disciples were dismayed when Jesus, about to leave them apparently on their own, said they would have a lot of trouble in the world. "But be of good cheer," He said, "I have overcome the world" (John 16.33). That was just before Calvary, and in the same week as the resurrection.

The hymn 'My song is love unknown' has a phrase concerning Jesus, "But cheerful He to suffering goes." One cannot imagine Him carrying the cross with any sort of ordinary cheerfulness: but perhaps with a kind of stout-hearted cheerful courage? He held in His mind what His faith foresaw as the glorious outcome. Cheerful courage is what, with God's help and because of what He has done for us, we can aspire to achieve.

GC

"It is our hope and our earnest prayer that this Revised Standard Version of the Bible may be used by God to speak to men in these momentous times

and to help them to understand and believe and obey His Word." From the translators preface to the Revised Standard Version, Eyre & Spottiswood 1952

TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

3 - Man of Blood

It was probably not very long after the disastrous sequel to his wedding at Timnath that Samson decided to go to the wife he had abandoned, presumably with the idea of bringing her back with him to Timnath and making her his wife in fact. His anger had abated and his nature was probably not capable of maintaining any deep emotion for very long. In the casual way that seems to have characterised so many of his actions he apparently assumed that all that had happened would by now be forgiven and forgotten and that he would be received as cordially as when he first came to Timnath, a prospective son-in-law.

His easy-going hopes, however, were soon dashed. His father-in-law was by no means pleased to see him. *"I really thought that you utterly hated her, so I gave her to your companion."* (Judges 15.1 RSV). It looks as though the old Philistine quite thought he had seen the last of his turbulent son-in-law and considered the marriage to be at an end. He had in consequence disposed of his daughter to one of the young men who had been the cause of all the trouble at the start. What freedom of choice the girl herself had in all this does not appear. Most likely, very little, but it is quite evident that she was not the sort upon whom much sympathy need be bestowed. The father, however probably eyeing Samson's menacing bulk a little apprehensively, was ready with a suggestion *"Is not her younger sister fairer than she? Pray take her instead."* He misjudged his man. The aggrieved husband was in no mood to discuss the relative merits of the two sisters' physical charms.

He had been slighted once again, his vanity wounded even more deeply than before. One can well imagine the swift revulsion of feeling, the transformation of genial placidity to blazing anger as he strode out of the house vowing vengeance for this, the supreme insult of all. *"This time I shall be blameless in regard to the Philistines, when I do them mischief."* To describe the ensuing wholesale and widespread destruction of the Philistines' standing crops as 'doing them mischief' is such a masterly understatement of the facts that one is justified in concluding that if the word Samson used actually does have the meaning of the English phrase, then he could hardly have been fully

conscious of the enormity and significance of what he did. The whole story of Samson yields the picture of a man whose mind had not developed in pace with his body, a giant not aware of the moral significance of his actions. Now he went out possessed of one idea only, revenge; revenge upon the whole Philistine community which he blamed for the miscarriage of his dreams and plans.

One of the commonest of small animals in Canaan at that time and during most ages since is the jackal (mistranslated "foxes" in the Authorised Version). Samson was a country lad born and bred and he would well know how to track them to their holes and catch them. It was the time of wheat harvest, when the standing grain was dry and ripe. The early rains had ceased and there would be no more rain for several months. The watercourses were dried up or drying up as is usual in the summer.

Samson started catching jackals, tying them in pairs, tail to tail, and fixing a burning truss of straw or similar material to each pair of tails. The terrified animals struggled frantically with each other, darting madly about as each sought to rid itself of the flaming encumbrances, setting fire to the growing grain in a myriad places as they fled. The account says Samson thus treated three hundred of them. It is not necessary to suppose that he caught the entire three hundred at once and released them simultaneously; rather it is more reasonable to think that he went about the countryside catching and releasing jackals wherever he could. The Philistines desperately endeavoured to quench the rapidly spreading flames which burst out anew in one place as fast as they extinguished them in another. They would have little time to spare to hunt down the instigator of the trouble, who in any case could easily keep one jump ahead of them all the time. By the time the last fire was out and order had been restored, Samson was nowhere to be found.

The loss to the Philistines must have been enormous. It was not only a question of their grain supplies for the coming year; it was the fact that the land of the Philistines was the main grain producing centre for their own homeland of Crete, seven hundred miles away across the Mediterranean Sea. This was an area of something

like a thousand square miles. It was some of the richest agricultural land in Canaan and was held by the Philistines for this purpose. Samson's three hundred jackals could easily have destroyed crops over the major portion of this territory. In the dry season, with water scarce and the fields packed with ripe grain, the conflagration must have grown to epidemic proportions and raged for days, leaving at the end miles of blackened fields and burned out homesteads. The disaster might easily have been the turning point of Philistine fortunes in Canaan. They had been in the land for more than eight hundred years without their power being seriously disputed. From Samson's day onwards the Hebrews waged what was a gradually increasingly successful warfare, until in the days of David, not much more than a hundred years later, their power was broken and they were finally subdued. It might well be that the Philistines never recovered from the damage done by this widespread catastrophic fire and that this event marks the real fulfilment of the prophecy *"He shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines"*. But if so, there is no credit to Samson on that account. This is one more instance in which God *"makes the wrath of man to praise him"*. Samson may have diverted the course of history but all he was thinking of at the time was personal revenge.

The Philistine authorities were also in the mood for revenge after this. Samson himself was beyond their reach, but the mob, as mobs always do, demanded a scapegoat. It would appear that the whole trouble had been started by the betrayal of the husband's secret by the wife and the betrayal of the husband's rights by the father-in-law. Mob justice is seldom conducted on judicial lines and is characterised more by expedition than discernment. *"The Philistines came up, and burnt her and her father with fire"*. That did not restore the ravaged grain fields but it probably did help to pacify the homeless and hungry mob. It also did something else. It raised Samson to fresh fury. Throughout the story his intention to be the one to strike the last blow stands out. The Philistines should not have the last word. He had destroyed their crops, but now, learning of the fate that had befallen his ill-fated wife, he declared *"If this is what you do I swear I will be avenged upon you, and after that I will quit"* (Judges 15.7 RSV). He sallied forth once more across the frontier, *"smote*

them hip and thigh with a great slaughter", and withdrew as quickly back into the territory of Israel.

This brought out the Philistine army. Samson was becoming too much of a menace to be ignored. An occasional frontier skirmish in which one or two men were killed could be treated as beneath official notice. However, the way things were going it could be that this Samson would be putting himself at the head of an Israelite army of rebels and that would be a very different thing. The five rulers of the Philistine colony gave orders and the soldiery advanced into Judah to apprehend the trouble maker.

Samson had taken refuge in the precipitous crags of Etam, a jagged peak in the centre of Judah some thirty miles from Zorah and fifteen from the frontier. As he looked down upon the plain he found that he had roused a veritable hornet's nest this time. *"The Philistines went up, and pitched in Judah, and spread themselves in Lehi"*. For the first time he was on the defensive. The men of Judah, in whose territory he had taken refuge, were not disposed to help him. Apprehension for their own safety outweighed any feeling of support they may have had for the man who would fain be their national champion. *"Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us?"* they asked him plaintively *"What is this that you have done to us?"* Samson's sullen reply *"As they did to me, so have I done to them"* did not influence their attitude, perhaps understandingly, for the Philistine soldiers had only just told them that they sought Samson *"to do to him as he did to us"*. The craven-heartedness of the men of Judah is shown by their willingness and even anxiety to hand over Samson, bound, to his enemies in order to save their own skins. Samson might well have asked himself if Israel was worth delivering, but he submitted to being bound in confidence that he himself could burst the bonds when it suited him so to do.

So it came about, the Philistines shouted for triumph as their enemy was brought into their lines, securely trussed up with fine new ropes. Their exultant shouts changed to cries of alarm as the wild-looking Nazarite's bonds snapped like flax under his muscular efforts, and alarm became panic as the giant seized the only handy weapon, an ass's jaw bone lying on the ground, and advanced threateningly into battle.

There must have been a great deal of

superstitious fear in the Philistine attitude to Samson. In this case a thousand men were slain. A man even of Samson's calibre and physique can hardly have been expected to prevail against an army of that size. The nature of his past exploits and the fact that he had always emerged unscathed, coupled with the terror induced by his personal appearance threw the Philistine ranks into confusion once their opponent was seen to be free. He was a giant of a man, with flowing locks and beard, enormous muscles and probably a grim and fear-inspiring face; all might well have built up a legendary atmosphere about him.

It is quite likely that the men of Judah, seeing him free himself and advance into combat, shook off their fears after all and rallied spontaneously to his support. The account says *"the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him"* and something of that Spirit might have communicated itself to the watching men of Judah and caused them to remember the past glories of Israel when their ancestors fought to establish a foothold in the land. Perhaps the Battle of Lehi that day was in very fact the first real blow Israel struck for her independence from the Philistines. It is much more reasonable to think that Samson, wielding his jawbone to good effect in the midst of the Philistines, was assisted by a goodly contingent of men of Judah armed with whatever they could lay hold of. The result of the battle was the defeat of the enemy with a thousand left dead on the field. There is a strange little sequel here. Samson, after the victory, thirsted, and for the first time in the story of his life is shown calling upon the Lord. Regrettably it was only for an immediate benefit, a drink of water, but it does at least indicate some acknowledgment of God. *"You have granted this great deliverance by the hand of your servant"* he said *"and shall I now die for thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"* His mind was still on himself and the material things, but God, ever ready to respond to the slightest trace of faith, gave answer. The hero found water suddenly bubbling out of a cleft in the rock, and drank, and was revived. There used to be an idea that God performed a miracle here in bringing forth water from the discarded jawbone. The Authorised Version says *"God clave an hollow place that was in the jaw; and there came water thereout"*. The translators were confused by the fact that the

Hebrew word for jaw, *lehi* is the same as the name of the place on which the battle took place. Rightly translated, *"God clave an hollow place that was in Lehi..."*

The result of this battle established Samson as the recognised leader of at least the southern half of Israel, including Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, Dan and Ephraim, and possibly the remainder of the tribes also. He remained "judge" of Israel for twenty years although at no time during that twenty years was Israel freed from the Philistine yoke. Such law and order as there was in Israel was vested in Samson. Such freedom from oppression and victory over enemies as was achieved was due to the leadership and prowess of Samson. But there was no religious revival, no national return to God, no restoration of the covenant. The fact that their subjection to the Philistines continued is evidence of that, for whenever Israel did repent and return to God, He gave them actual deliverance from servitude to their enemies; that was a condition of the covenant. The rule of Samson, Nazarite though he was, remained a purely secular one, without God. Small wonder that it ended in disaster.

Not very long after Samson's death another Nazarite child, born of a God-fearing mother, and devoted to God from his birth, was born in a village of Ephraim. Samuel, like Samson, was brought up under the Nazarite discipline, but Samuel, unlike Samson, had an ear to listen to God's voice from earliest years. Samuel also had to contend with the Philistines but Samuel put his trust first in God; and Samuel it was who did deliver Israel for at least part of his life from Philistine domination. Samuel, the last and greatest of the Judges, has the story of his judgeship recorded in extreme detail in the Old Testament and every incident in the story reflects his abiding faith in God and sterling loyalty to the laws of God. The only incident in the judgeship of Samson that is recorded concerns his visit to a harlot in Gaza, the Philistine capital. It is not a particularly edifying story. The Philistines had observed his coming and had shut the city gates and laid in wait for him with the intention of capturing him in the morning. Samson remained with the woman until midnight and then, finding his egress from the city barred, pulled down the closed gates complete with gateposts and crossbar and carried the lot to a hill near Hebron, full forty miles away, in the territory of Judah. He would have to cross

fifteen miles of Philistine territory in order to get to the frontier and one wonders how he could have done that without interference and what was the size and weight of the gates that he carried. The action seems to have been a completely irresponsible one. The record of this incident seems to serve no other purpose than to indicate that Samson during his judgeship manifested the same characteristics as at the beginning, overwhelming indulgence of his animal passions and complete absence of any consciousness of responsibility toward God. It seems that the Philistine endeavour to capture him was at all times a half-hearted one. He came and went to the Philistine cities more or less as he pleased, and for twenty years figured in the public eye as the leader of Israel. He seems to

have remained in possession of prodigious physical strength coupled with a flair for outwitting his enemies on every occasion so that they despaired of ever getting him into their power. It is almost certain that during those twenty years he was a constant thorn in the side of the Philistines and probably waged a constant but half hearted guerrilla warfare against them. It led to sudden raids into their territory and generally keeping them always in a state of tension. But he did nothing whatever to lead Israel to trust in God and in consequence he never achieved real deliverance. At the end of the twenty years the Philistines were still their masters, and Samson himself was still a man in whose life God had no place.

(To be continued) AOH

TWO TIMOTHY 2.15

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (King James Version). That is the text. What is the context?

Paul, the apostle shut in a Roman prison, is writing to the young man Timothy far away in Ephesus. Timothy is not only very dear to him, but he has been charged with continuing the work of spreading the gospel. Over the years he has been Paul's close assistant. These words are personally addressed to Timothy, who will face many challenges.

To encourage him, Paul has just quoted a statement about Christ:

*"If we have died with him, we shall live with him;
if we endure, then we shall reign with him;
if we disown him, he will disown us,
if we are faithless, he remains faithful
-for he cannot be untrue to himself"*

This is the reality that Timothy must remind men of. On the other hand, he must not bandy arguments – *"no good comes out of that, it only means the undoing of your audience."* (vv.11-14 Moffatt).

Then comes our verse. The text quoted above is the AV of 1611, and a hundred years ago some took it to mean "study the Bible, and if you divide it up correctly, God will be pleased with you." This is true so far as it goes, but there is more in the text. Let us explore each word with the aid of an expository dictionary (Vine) and various twentieth

century versions.

Study. Paul is not referring to academic study or Bible study, but to the desire to stand before God in a good light. The Greek word is *'spoudazo'* – to hasten to do a thing, exert oneself. Truly, to be able to stand not ashamed in God's presence demands all we've got. So 'do our utmost', 'concentrate on', 'be diligent', 'work hard', 'earnestly seek', 'do all you can'.

To shew thyself *'Paristemi'* – to place beside, to show oneself. 'Present yourself in front of God'. 'Commend yourself to God.' 'Give yourself to God.' This is a personal matter for Timothy, in contrast to those who got absorbed in arguments. 'Let God see that you at least are a sound workman'. 'For yourself, concentrate on winning God's approval'.

Approved. *'Dokimos'* – a word used for coins and metals, approved coin of the realm, not a fake but the real thing. One version translates it with a phrase, 'the kind of person he will accept'. Another, interestingly, puts 'a man who has come through his trials' – all life's experiences leading to the stamp of God's approval of His genuine servant.

So far then – "As for you, do your utmost to stand before God as someone He approves" – by contrast with those others.

Workman. *'Ergates'*, a labourer. Spreading the gospel meant *work*. Timothy had fellow-workers. So, 'worker', 'servant', 'workman' – perhaps a skilled one.

Not ashamed. This is a long word in the

Greek, 'anepaischuntos', but all the versions translate it in the same way, 'not ashamed'. It must be tremendous to feel no shame before God when He considers our work for Him.

Rightly dividing. 'Orthotomeo' – 'to cut straight'. Vine states that the meaning changed from 'cutting or dividing' to the sense of 'rightly dealing with a thing'. He says, 'not dividing scripture from scripture, but teaching scripture accurately'. The word appears in the Septuagint for Prov. 3.6, 'in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make *straight your paths*'. Weymouth has a footnote, 'cutting, or laying-out, like a new road'. One has the mental image, whether justified or not, of an apprentice tailor presenting before his master the pieces of a garment he has correctly cut out! Or of a surveyor setting out a new highway.

There is a variety of translations:

handling the word of truth accurately
 handling the word of truth rightly
 explaining the word of truth correctly
 using the true teaching in the right way
 laying out the truth plain and simple
 has kept a straight course with the message of truth
 straightforward dealing with the word of truth
 using the word of truth to the best advantage.

In the context of this verse, Timothy should avoid twisting scripture, using verses to bat his opponent over the head, insisting on viewpoints that are obviously unrealistic, logic chopping ... Avoid all that profane jargon, for it leads people still further into irreligion, and their doctrine spreads like gangrene ... but the solid foundation laid by God remains, and this is its inscription:

'The Lord cares for his own', and

'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord give up evil'. (vv. 16, 19)

These truths are important parts of the basic message, which is 'the message of the truth' ... 'the true message' ... 'the truth'.

One further note: we for ourselves apply these words to our use of the Bible. Timothy, in his day, would have used the Jewish scriptures, and probably did not have very much at all of the writings we have come to know as the New Testament. The word of truth which he handled would have been particularly the parts of the Old Testament which pointed to Jesus, together with the whole message about Jesus and the resurrection

and eternal life that he had learned in the first place from Paul.

We live amid people to whom the Bible is a closed book. The word of truth must shine in our lives as well as on our lips.

"As for you, do your utmost to stand before God as someone He approves, a workman who is not ashamed, because he has dealt with the word of truth rightly."

Versions of Scripture quoted from: Authorised Version, 1611; Weymouth NT, 1902; Moffatt, 1922; RSV, 1946 (NT); Phillips, 1960; New American Standard, 1960; Jerusalem Bible, 1966; NIV, 1973 (NT); New Century Version, 1987; The Message, 1993 (NT); New Living Translation, 1996.

GC

CHRIST IS EVERYTHING

He's everything to us! These words touch
 deeply
 Within the inner sanctum of our souls,
 And chords responsive echo rare and sweetly,
 From those whose hearts the love of Christ
 enfolds;
 Who look beyond this world of imperfection,
 To that pure realm of satisfied desire,
 And in the circle of Divine affection,
 Find all those joys to which hearts aspire.

He's everything! But all the hidden meaning
 That lies beneath that all-embracing word
 Is known to those alone who on Him leaning,
 Have had the Spirit's life within them stirred;
 Whose eyes behold in His all-glorious Person,
 An object of their reverential love,
 Who die with Him in deepest soul-immersion,
 Who rise with Him to walk the heights above.

Whose needs so vast and varied He supplieth,
 Each one completely suited to His grace,
 And if sometimes their cravings He denieth,
 His compensating comfort they can trace.
 Yes, Christ is **everything**! And if thus surely
 We find our all in Him who cannot fail,
 What matchless joy to share His love and glory
 In heav'n's unhindered bliss beyond the vail!

BSM - 1952

THE COVENANTS

5 - Covenant in the New Testament

The word covenant is translated from the Greek word *diatheke*. There is only one covenant described in the New Testament and it stands in contrast to the Old or Law Covenant. It is also referred to as a 'better covenant' or 'second covenant' (Heb. 7.22; 8.7). The Old Testament expression used in the Septuagint on a number of occasions is '*aioniou diatheke*' – "*everlasting or eternal covenant*" as in Heb. 13.20.

Paul uses the idea of covenants in Galatians 4 as an allegory. He is teaching about freedom in Christ as distinct from bondage under the Law. The apostle is not suggesting that Christians are reconciled to God through the Abrahamic Covenant because this was a covenant 'cut' by animal sacrifice and was a covenant of circumcision.

Jesus spoke of the New Covenant when He instituted His special remembrance supper and said "*This cup is the New Testament (diatheke) in my blood. Do this as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor. 11.25 RSV). This occasion is recorded in Mark 14.24 but there is doubt about the word 'new' in Mark's record. Just as the 'cutting of the covenant' was an integral part of Abraham's covenant with God and the Law Covenant at Sinai, so the shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross was the sacrifice that sealed the New Covenant.

The 'New Covenant' was first spoken of by Jeremiah (chap. 31). He had been the great prophet of the covenant. Jer. 31.31 is quoted by the writer to the Hebrews (10.16-18) who goes on to write "*Therefore brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,*" Those things made possible by the Covenant at Sinai under the wilderness tabernacle scheme were now made a reality by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Paul's thought was similar when he wrote to Gentile Christians at Ephesus (2.11-13). "*Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh ... were ... separated from Christ,*

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you, who once were far off, have been brought near in the blood of Christ." Paul bears witness to this in Galatians 6.16 when he refers to the Church as the '*Israel of God*'.

In the Old Testament, the Shepherd and Sheep, the Vineyard and the Bridegroom and His Bride pictured Israel's covenant relationship with God. In the New Testament, Jesus used the same imagery but reshaped and reapplied it to the relationship between God and the Church. The big change, however, was His own distinct place in those pictures, as Shepherd (John 10.7-9); Bridegroom (John 3.29; 2 Cor. 11.2; Rev. 19.7); Vine (John 15.1-4). The Church is linked to Jesus in a relationship with the Father, and He refers to this in John 17.20-24. His expressions in that prayer are reminiscent of the Covenant expression, "*I will be their God and they shall be my people*".

Perhaps there is no greater explanation of the working of this Covenant than in Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. In the first few verses of chapter 3, Paul made a striking contrast between the Old and New Covenants when He referred to the written message "*on tablets of human hearts*" with the Holy Spirit. He goes on to show that unlike the fading glory of the old covenant at Sinai, the glory of the Lord is transforming our lives into His own likeness (vv 12-18).

In 2 Cor. 3.4 Paul wrote of God making us competent ministers of the New Covenant. In chapter 5.20 he wrote of the message of this ministry, directed toward the Corinthian brethren, appealing to them, "*We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*". 2 Corinthians 6 is about cleaning up our lives so that we can be united to God in Christ, temples of the Living God with the old worldly nature reluctantly departing. Here again is that wonderful Covenant thought, "*I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God*." (v.16). Reconciliation is the healing of a broken relationship and that is the purpose of a covenant.

Paul, a competent minister, therefore directs the message to us to 'be reconciled to God'.

In his first letter, Peter quotes the Messianic texts from Psalm 118.22 and Isa. 2.8 about a stone that stumbles and crushes. He had used these thoughts earlier in his ministry (Acts 4.11; 1 Pet. 2.6-8). He went on from there to make a re-application of Exodus 19.5, 6 when he wrote to his Christian brethren of the dispersion *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people"*.

There may be a link here with the word of Jesus in the upper room when he said to the disciples *"I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom"* (Luke 22.29). The word 'assign' in the RSV is 'appoint' in the AV. It must have reference to the same Covenant of which He had just spoken when he handed them the cup (Luke 22.20 supported by 1 Cor. 11.25). The word Jesus used for 'assign' or 'appoint' in v.29 is related to 'diatheke' but more from the angle of a 'testator' in a will.

There is similar use of the word in Hebrews 9.16,17 where it becomes clear that the Greek word can refer to a 'testament' as well as a 'covenant'. Hence the two parts of the Bible could equally be called, the Old and New Covenant instead of Old and New Testament. Thus Jesus could say that because He was laying down His life for His people, He was bequeathing to them a Kingdom, Marcus Dods, quoted by Vine, unequivocally insists that in the New Testament the words should be rendered by the English word 'covenant'.

The main principle underlying a covenant is 'reconciliation to God', putting into effect the atoning sacrifice of Christ in which He gave His life as a ransom for all. Beyond all other matters, this covenant in Christ brings the child of God to know His Father. That is the central goal of the Christian life. Without it, we can never be ready to be ushered into His august presence. Once the relationship with God through Christ has been established, the Christian's next step is to recognise and accept all those within that same covenant. Beyond human boundaries of creeds, denominations and sects there is a tie that binds our heart in Christian love. To break that bond is to break the covenant. To be in covenant relationship with God goes far beyond human interpretations of Scripture, beyond knowledge and misunderstanding of other believer's gen-

uinely held viewpoints. We are not the judges of the ultimate destiny of those who claim to be 'in Christ'. Our only badge is 'undying love'. We turn the other cheek to our enemies and where necessary Paul says we are to feed them. Are we then to turn our backs on our brethren and fail to help them in their hour of need? Whatever we think we know about the Covenants, let us be sure of our duty, nay our joy, to accept all those who are in covenant relationship in Christ with God.

That I may know His presence, calm and pure;
Changeless mid changes, and midst loss, sure;
To dwell with Him, in spirit day and night
To walk with Him by faith, if not by sight.
To work with Him, as He shall plan, not I
To cleave to Him and let the world go by.
To live on earth a life of self-less love;
To set the heart and mind on things above
Till I shall see Him without vision dim,
And know Him, as I know I'm known of Him.

(Author unknown)
DN

THE TOUCH OF LOVE

(Matt. 8.15, Mark 1.30, 31, Luke 4.38-39)

"He touched her hand and the fever left her"
So graciously He came
And held that weary fevered soul.
JESUS is still the same.

"He touched her hand and the fever left her"
O, ancient touch Divine!
Come *now*, with that same power, and heal
This fevered heart of mine.

"He touched her hand and the fever left her"
O, come, and let *me* feel
The virtue of that healing Touch,
While at Thy throne I kneel.

"He touched her hand and the fever left her"
O, blessed Touch of calm.
Let my whole life a tribute be
To that same healing balm.

"He touched her hand and the fever left her"
That wondrous Touch of Love
Has still its ancient power to heal,
As we may daily prove.

RW

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE Notes to aid personal Bible Study

24 - Chapter 20

vv 1-8 A chapter of questions. Jesus was teaching and preaching the Gospel in the Temple. The Greek word here for 'preaching' is special to Luke and Paul and almost unknown in the other gospels. Jesus had very recently 'cleansed the Temple' and now the religious leaders wanted to know His authority for doing such a thing. He had poached on their preserves. Chief priests, scribes and elders were possibly a deputation from the Sanhedrin. The High Priest's position was more a political seat of power than a real religious leader. They were Sadducees and well in with the Romans. Scribes were 'writers' or interpreters of the Law. Elders were the leading men of town, forming a presbytery. The object of their question, like so many others at this time was in some way to catch Jesus and convict Him in the eyes of the Law, the Romans, and ordinary people. Jesus did not evade the issue by His counter question. If they had answered His question they would have had the answer to their own. Their question and answer were more about political correctness than discovery of truth. Jesus drew attention to several points, and one was that they had not received John's testimony about himself, so would they be likely to receive Jesus' testimony, to whom John had borne witness? Jesus' question was a genuine teaching method used by rabbis. The problem in the eyes of the Jews was that this uneducated carpenter was teaching them – leading teachers among God's people. Were those who approached Jesus the 'religious aristocracy'? Did they want Jesus to openly say that He was from God and the Messiah?

vv 9-18 What prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the *"Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard"*? Was this a final appeal to Israel to accept God's authority and way, and truly to be His people? As in so many parables, this one could easily have been based on an actual event. Men invested in a piece of property, often in a foreign country of the large Roman Empire. Then they let it out to tenant farmers who attempted to make sufficient profit to pay the rent. They might have had to clear stones and weeds, to build walls, to buy seeds or young plants or stakes. When finally the son appeared they might have assumed that his father was dead and that the son had come to claim his inheritance.

The listeners would be aware of Isa. 5.1-7 and what would happen to those tenants. The word for 'wounded' in v.12 is almost a surgical word characteristic of Luke. The implication was clear. Their rejection of God's Messiah would mean God's rejection of them as leaders. Israel as they knew and dominated it, would come to an end, and in its place would be men who trusted God and whom He could trust. Did any of these leaders remember this parable in the years that followed the resurrection and Pentecost, and realise God was working through men and women to whom He had given the keys of the Kingdom? Morris writes, "Jesus is picturing a nation that is obdurate and a God who is compassionate in the face of obdurate truculence". But this was not a parable of doom, for someone was going to take Israel's place. Were they hard done to? 'God forbid' is the only strong expression found in the NT nowhere else outside Paul's letters. The postscript to the parable is based on a quotation from Psalm 118 used by Peter (Acts 4.10 & 1 Pet. 2.7). The position of the corner stone is uncertain – was it set in the corner of the foundation so fixing the angle of two walls, or was it the top of an arch? It is a stone that wherever set is of great importance. The stone changes its imagery – a stone of judgment that causes loss or destruction. How do we face that stone – in repentance or defiance?

Barclay suggests that this is one of the richest parables. It tells us of human sin and responsibility. It also tells of God's patience and judgment. It tells us that Jesus knew what was coming at Calvary and also of God's ultimate triumph. The parable shows Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Campbell Morgan deals with these discussions in the Temple in this chapter through the eyes of Matthew (ch. 21). In the cleansing of the Temple Jesus had assumed His priestly role requiring holiness in the presence of God. Then Jesus operates in a kingly or judicial role in telling two parables – the first is about two sons who were asked to go and work in their father's vineyard. Campbell Morgan sees this parable as very similar to the 'Wicked Tenants' which in Matt. 21 immediately follows. The astounding thing about this parable is the way the religious leaders pronounce judgment on themselves. Have they, in following the dramatic

story, forgotten their hostility to Jesus until suddenly they realise that He has revealed to them their own evil motives for wanting to kill Him?

vv 19-26 Is it lawful to give tax to Caesar?

Was the Christian right who said that Income Tax is legalised robbery? What did the Jews mean 'Is it lawful' – what law? This is the high point of Bible comment on attitudes to Gentile (worldly) tax and authority. Israel and Christians were told that they were to accept 'lawful' authority in rule and tax. Jeremiah's letter (ch. 29); Romans 13; Titus 3 and 1 Peter 2 all have things to say about citizen's duties; (they don't deal with democratic voting). The Scribes and Priests' question may have been sparked by the parable Jesus had just told. That they sent in 'spies', has almost the feel of laying an ambush. Those same Jews were pleased to handle the Emperor's coinage - a silver denarius. Everyone between 14 and 65 had to pay tribute for the privilege of living in the Empire. Why did Jews object to paying? Surely they benefited from the fine roads and security of military control. In spite of the logic of Jesus' reply this question found an echo in his trial (23.2). The tension between church and state – worldwide – is an interesting one and worthy of study. Geldenhuys further points out that the coin bore the image of Tiberius (son of Augustus) and man bears the image of God – so in the end all is given to God. Can we give to God what He is due if we don't give 'Caesar' what is due to him? Barclay writes, "The voice of conscience is louder than the voice of any manmade law Just because he is the best of citizens he will refuse to do what a Christian citizen cannot do."

vv 27-40 The Sadducees' question about resurrection. This a rare reference to the priestly class. They were a sect that based their theology on the written law of Moses and did not give the prophets and the rabbinical commentaries the same weight of importance. The name was derived from the Zadokites who had descended from Zadok the priest. Morris says "they were the conservative, aristocratic, high-priestly party, worldly-minded

and very ready to co-operate with the Romans." Their question was based on the levirate law (Deut. 25.5) and their interpretation that there is no resurrection and no spirits or angels. Did they believe in life after death of any sort? Was Jesus saying, as Barclay says, that "we must not think of heaven in terms of this earth", or should His answer be taken in quite literal terms covering all resurrected people? Was Jesus deliberately contrasting "*sons of this age*" and sons of the next age? And does He infer that the patriarchs were actually alive in the 1st Century and are so now? It was a fine answer in the eyes of the listeners and they were glad to see the unpopular Sadducees get the worst of the argument.

vv 41-44 Jesus asks a difficult question. It is a theological question based on Psalms 1.1. But why did He ask the Scribes this question? Had they any misconceptions about the Kingdom of God and His Messiah? It was a common idea that previous generations were greater and wiser than the present one. He was the Son of David but greater by far than His illustrious ancestor. Barclay suggests that He was blaming them for their ideas of personal power.

vv 45-47 Warnings of popular acclaim. Jesus repeatedly warned against, in various ways, proud, arrogant, boastful claims to be better than others and seek the place of honour and glory. The desire for reward for teaching, that could destroy other people's lives, was against the rabbinic principles and against the Word of God and in the next incident in the Temple Jesus draws the full lesson as to who really gets the reward. Unscrupulous powerful people have always been able to prey on impressionable women.

Used in these studies: N. Geldenhuys: Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (M.M. & S 1950) E. H. Plumptre The Gospel of Luke – in Ellicott – (Marshall) W. Barclay: The Gospel of Luke (Daily Bible Study, St. Andrews 1967) L. Morris: Luke, An Introduction and Commentary; (IVP 1974) G. Campbell Morgan The Parables and Metaphors of our Lord (Marshall Morgan & Scott 1956)

DN

God's Signature: Our problems look much less terrifying when we realise they are Father-filtered. That filtering is guaranteed in promises such as "*God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*" 1 Cor. 10.13. In other words, nothing can enter the life of God's child without His signature. His approval is based on

what we can bear. He will allow me to be pushed to the building point, but not your breaking point. It's a little like weightlifting. Too much weight will crush us, but greater weight than we have lifted before is needed to make us stronger. Only the Lord knows the difference. He filters every additional load.

Ron Hutchcraft

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF A DUTIFUL WIFE

This incident is set a thousand years before Christ, a thousand years and more before the apostle Paul was called upon to deal with marriage matters in his letters to the first Christians. It occurred in Israel under circumstances which call to mind the praise of a good wife recorded in Proverbs 31.10-31.

In this, we recall that a good wife is trusted by her husband. She has charge of the work of the household, domestic purchases, the control of the servants. She works hard and successfully at all the home industries which made a family community prosperous, not only manufacturing but also buying and selling. The result is that she can help the poor and store up for the future. She is wise and kind, and her husband basks in her success. "Many women have done wonderful things, but you've outclassed them all!" Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades. The woman to be admired and praised is the woman who lives in the fear of God. Give her everything she deserves! Festoon her with praises! (vv.29-31, The Message).

It was a position like this that Abigail held, wife of Nabal in Carmel. From our twenty-first century perspective, we may look at the record in I Samuel 25 and wonder what sort of partnership Abigail and Nabal had. From the apostle Paul's perspective, he might have wondered whether she was properly submissive to her husband. Not knowing their intimate details, we cannot say. We have only one startling incident to go on.

It was sheep shearing time, In those lawless days their flocks had been protected by the outlaw David. Now his men claimed, politely, the reward for their protection. They asked on this special day to be given supplies from the feast being shared among the workers. Nabal, in his accustomed churlish manner, refused it, and sent the men packing. A dangerous thing to do, even if David was no ordinary gangster. Nabal went back to his excessive feasting and drunkenness.

Abigail heard the story of this. Where did her wifely duty lie? She thought first of protecting her husband, their property, and their lives. She understood what was likely to happen, even if Nabal did not.

She overruled Nabal's orders, and without telling him she provided a supply of food for David's six hundred men. Disobedience to

husband? In speaking personally to David, she referred to her husband as an ill-natured fool (an accurate assessment – but should a wife speak in this way so publicly of her nearest and dearest?). Having successfully averted David's anger, she kept the whole matter secret from Nabal when he was merry and drunk (surely her duty was to tell him straight away, as was due to his position?) She waited till the morning to tell him, and her servants must have realised how she was deceiving her lord. When she did tell him, *"his heart died within him"*.

It is difficult to fit Abigail into the role of wifely submission – she was no 'little woman'. In her own right she was of good understanding. She was a sound psychologist in dealing with both Nabal and David. She appreciated what was fair and right in meeting the needs of the men who had protected their flocks. She had some vision of God's purpose for David and the people of Israel. She knew what qualities make a leader great, and she recalled David from anger to be his best self. She was not too proud to take the blame for the incident, and apologise for what her husband and her servants had done.

Set this against Paul's words, *"Wives, be subject to your husbands ... for the husband is the head of the wife subject in everything to their husbands"* (Eph. 5.22-4). If Abigail had been a Christian wife, ought she to have acted differently?

On the other hand, it is very possible that Nabal did not live up to Paul's expectation that a husband should *"Love his wife as himself"* (v.33). Though, for all we are told in scripture, he may indeed have loved Abigail extremely, and still have been a fool.

Human relationships are never perfect – Paul taught an ideal for husbands and wives. Daily life is the test of how we live out that ideal. The rough and ready times when Nabal and Abigail lived brought no greater marital dilemmas than occur today.

We may pursue an ideal of mutual love and mutual submission, amid the personal problems that beset our lives. There are times when a husband, out of his love for his wife, will submit to her judgment – Paul's teaching cuts both ways when he says *"be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"* (Eph. 5.21). And if we take Abigail's example, there may be times when a wife's love for her husband actually prevents her

from obeying him. For the marriage relationship consists of more than rules to obey, or precepts to follow, or status. We need to face each day with understanding, with kindness, and showing active sensible practical love.

We are told of no way that Abigail failed Nabal. If, after his death, she became David's wife, that is another story!

GC

NOTES ON GENESIS 20

Abraham and Sarah had lived 'by the Oaks of Mamre' for some time. From the rugged hills of Judah the patriarch had looked across the Jordan Valley where but a short time before he had seen the cities of the plain. Now they were only rubble and ash from the destruction.

He moved southward to the Negeb into the territory of Abimelech. It now emerged (v 13) that from the beginning of his wanderings from Haran, Abraham had told Sarah to refer to him as her brother. Apparently he was her half brother and also possibly another relationship, for example, her uncle. Close relatives had been able to marry and have children while the genetic stock was good in the centuries following the Flood. As human DNA deteriorated couples closely related found it more and more difficult to produce healthy children.

It was but a little while since God's messenger had told Sarah that she would bear a son to Abraham. That wonderful promise was jeopardised because of what Abraham had said and Abimelech had done. Perhaps on the first occasion of this deception in Egypt it had been somewhat excusable. Abraham had then been in need of adequate food for himself, his vast retinue of servants and his animal stock. This time his trust in God and his moral judgment were at fault.

It seems difficult to understand this man who had been so obedient and had so trusted God. He is described (v.7) as a prophet and one who interceded almost in a priestly capacity for the lives of others, yet he makes this sad mistake, a sin against God. Perhaps we should remember the words of Jesus *"Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."* (John 8.7). It is so easy to criticise but such judgment is a sin.

Abraham took this course of action because he thought *"There is no fear of God at all in the place, and they will kill me because of my wife."* (v.11).

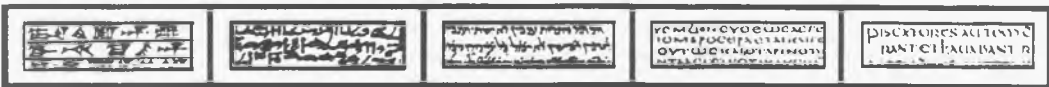
Are you fruit bearers in the Lord's vineyard? Are you seeking to make life one grand act of consecration to His glory? It is often those fruits that are unseen and unknown to man, ripening in seclusion, that He values most. The quiet, lowly

The Lord and Creator of the Universe appeared to and spoke with this man, who Abraham might have described, in our language as 'utterly worldly'. Abimelech recognised the One who had come to him and he understood the moral issues involved. How dangerous it is to judge the relationship that exists between God and others. We, of course, have no time for 'that load of long haired layabouts' (to use modern jargon), 'good for nothings', whom we think are worthless in God's sight. That is probably how religious Jews regarded John the Baptist. Certainly that would be a Pharisees view of Matthew and his colleagues. But are such people worthless? Are those who worship God differently from ourselves entitled to stand in His presence? Does God listen to them?

The chapter poses a lot of questions that may be difficult to answer. The use of Elohim (v.3) in the plural rather than the singular is unusual because the One Almighty God was usually referred to in the singular. Gerar was a royal city with a king and it was right on the border of Canaan and Egypt. Abraham would have been regarded as a chieftain or sheikh, if not as royalty. The 'covering of the eyes' (v 16) is of difficult interpretation – was it a covering as protection for Sarah – a veil for her face? Covering is an interesting word in relation to making good the deficiency of sin before a holy God.

As in Egypt, Abraham left the scene richer and wiser than when he had come. The value of Scripture lies in its showing us what God wants us to be like. This chapter has much to teach us. The wonderful perspective of the Divine purpose that we have is of infinitely greater value when we begin to understand that God has plans for our own lives. Where do we fit into the great scheme of things?

walk, the humble mind, the willing heart, the unselfish spirit, the unostentatious kindness – these are some of the 'fruits' which your heavenly Father loves and by which He is glorified.



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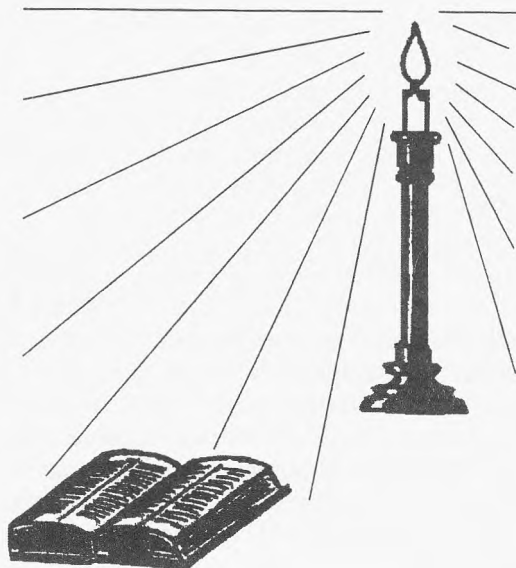
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Not greedy of filthy lucre." (1 Tim. 3.3, 8). One of the characteristics of the modern world is the incessant scramble for money. The urge permeates all classes of society. On the one hand the workers agitate and strike for more wages. On the other, commercial interests, whether small concerns or huge financial empires, strive to increase profits often at the expense of the quality of their products or services. Nationalised industries go for ever higher revenue irrespective of operating costs. Those who live by theft devise increasingly ingenious schemes to rob and defraud. Greed comes in at the door and morality flies out at the window.

Five times does the apt expression *"filthy lucre"* appear in the New Testament (AV). The word 'filthy' really means shameful or sordid. *"The love of money"* wrote Paul *"is the root of all evils"* (1 Tim. 6.10). Says Proverbs *"A miserly man hastens after wealth and does not know that want will come*

upon him" (28.22 RSV). That sentiment is echoed by Paul, *"those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, and into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction."* (1 Tim. 6.9 RSV). One has only to note the consequences, in too many cases, to people who win fantastically large sums of money in gambling to realise the truth of that judgment.

It is not always easy, even for a Christian, to be dissociated from this mad scramble for material gain. It is woven into the very fabric of our society. It is worth fighting against. With all its apparent attractions, advantages and things it can buy, money will disappear when this world order comes to its end. A time is coming when men will *"cast their silver in the streets"* (Ezek. 7.19) for it will have become valueless. Jesus said that only treasure in heaven will remain.

AOH

NOTICES

Literature sent Overseas. We continue to send BFU publications to many countries. It should be noted that usually we only handle BFU publications and therefore we do not stock new Bibles. For those who have recently become readers we cannot send large quantities of literature but supply, in the first instance, samples of BFU booklets, pamphlets and leaflets.

On the other hand, if readers are able to send to us used Bibles or Bible study helps we will gladly send them on to readers who are in great need of them.

We are reprinting 'The Spirit of Prophecy', 'The Cup of the Lord', 'The Tragedy of Samson', 'Three Stories of Salvation' and 'Good News for All'. We are always pleased to hear how useful these booklets are to readers.

Magazine Material. We look for ways to widen the field of interest in the material published in the magazine. We pray that this is helpful to readers. A magazine ministry that is world wide, non-sectarian and interdenominational will contain articles which do not suit everyone all the time. We are always interested to learn about this. Articles that are published are believed to be of spiritual value but members of the BFU team may not agree with every expression of thought.

BFU hold very large stocks of **'Future Probation in Christian Belief'**, a booklet that was used much in the 1970s. We can post these in bulk on request. We dispatch surface printed paper rate, maximum weight 5 kgs. Any help that can be given with postage would be appreciated.

'Sword Against All Nations' a novel parallel to 'Jacob's Trouble' is available on request. All those who have asked to have it sent should have received it by the time they receive this issue of the BSM. Overseas readers who request literature should remember that surface mail takes several weeks to arrive – and all literature is sent surface

mail – printed paper rate.

Address Labels: If there are any faults in our addressing system - labels may need correcting - we would be glad to have details. Following a computer crash it took two months to restore our records. We apologise for these problems.

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

1 - First Principles

It is a principle of Scripture that *"prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (2 Peter 1.21) Although the prophecies of the Bible have been openly derided by sceptics and too often quietly passed over by some Christians, this truth remains. Unless these passages are accepted as definite predictions of future events a great deal of the Bible is meaningless and much that would be encouraging and instructive in the study of the Divine plan is worse than useless.

It is sometimes suggested that there is no need to do other than accept the prophecies and to believe them, leaving out of consideration the questions as to how such predictions can be made and recorded in advance of the events to which they refer. The prophecies should be received, it is said, in faith, and God is pleased with such faith. This is true so far as it goes, but it is also true that those who would be *"watchers on the walls of Zion"* know how the Scriptures bid them be ready always to give *"a reason of the hope that is in you"* (1 Pet. 3.15). When all that can be said and written on the subject of prophecy has been said and written, there is and will always remain much scope for the exercise of faith. Its laws and its principles touch things that are certainly far too deep for the human mind to comprehend. At the same time, it is as well to gain a hold of what the Scriptures do reveal, and what everyday human experience has to show of the true nature of this marvellous power of foreseeing future events. Thus it is possible to answer with assurance those who say "Prophecy? Whoever heard of such a thing?"

Divine foreknowledge, predestination and election and the relationship of these to the will of the individual, are among the deepest of Scriptural themes. An understanding of the principles of prophecy is valuable in the study of these doctrines and indeed the two subjects are closely connected.

It is impossible to read the Bible without ob-

serving the prominent place that is occupied by prophecy (using the term not in its general sense of teaching but in its specialised sense of foretelling). The earliest prophet, according to the apocryphal books, was Enoch, for he is said to have foretold the Deluge and the doom of the fallen angels. Although the book that bears his name is not in the Bible and is not classed as canonical, Jude, in his epistle, quotes from it. In fact it is a prophecy that he quotes: *"Behold the Lord comes, with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all..."* (Jude 14; 1 Enoch 1.9). It is an interesting fact that what is probably the earliest prophecy in human history to be recorded, is one relating to the coming of Messiah, the representative of God, in the glory of the Kingdom, manifest to all men.

The first strictly Biblical prophecy is the vision of Abraham at the making of the covenant (Gen 15). Abraham had laid out the covenant sacrifice and was keeping vigil beside it when he beheld a flaming light hovering over the offering. He entered into a trance-like condition ("an horror of great darkness") and received the supernatural message that told him of the coming Egyptian bondage of his descendants and their eventual restoration to their own land "in the fourth generation". That is the earliest Biblical example of what may be called the 'prophetic consciousness' and it is the nature of that prophetic consciousness and the varieties of its operation which it is proposed to examine.

Dreams, visions, direct revelation, inspired utterances are all manifestations of the spirit of prophecy. They crowd the sacred pages from the history of Abraham onward and the chain ends only with the last survivor of the twelve apostles, and the last book of the Bible, the majestic allegory called the Book of Revelation, the most sublime of them all.

"All Scripture" wrote St. Paul, *"is God-breathed"* (2 Tim. 3.16 NIV) and it is thus that His knowledge of things yet to come is communicated

to those whose hearts and minds are right before Him. That "in-breathing" is the Holy Spirit, dispensing to every man "*severally as he will*" (1 Cor. 12.11) but only to any man in proportion as he is consecrated to the service of God. David was one such man, and David said of himself "*the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was in my tongue*." (2 Sam. 23.2). It is to such that "*the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets*" (Amos 3.7).

Jesus Himself stresses the need of attention to these things. "*You search the Scriptures,*" He said to the Pharisees, "*because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me*" (John 5.39 RSV). He interpreted the Old Testament prophecies to the disciples. "*Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" (Luke 24.27 RSV). "*Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein*" says John in the Revelation (1.3). It should be clear, then, that the study of prophecy should by no means be ignored, but find its place in every Christian life.

The prophecies of the Bible seem to divide themselves naturally into four main classes. The first class is that to which can be given the name **prediction**, that is the plain and straightforward foretelling of events yet future. An example of this is the utterance of Zacharias, recorded in Luke 1.76-79. In this he foretold the future career of his son, the boy who became known in after years as John the Baptist. At about the same time the aged Simeon, taking the child Jesus into his arms, predicted the child's future (Luke 2.26-32). A generation later Agabus, a Christian convert, foretold the coming arrest and imprisonment of Paul (Acts 21.10-11). At the other end of the Bible, Balaam, fourteen centuries before Christ, beheld the host of Israel pouring into the land and predicted Israel's final triumph at the end of this present Age (Num. 24.15-20).

It is to be noted that those who utter such predictions are themselves already men of God devoted to His service, with minds continually dwelling upon the things of God. They are 'consecrated' men. Hence their minds are already, as it were, 'tuned in' to the spiritual world. To some extent at least they have regained that ability of direct communion with God that man in his primeval perfec-

tion possessed but which was lost at the Fall, when man came under the dominion of sin. Through such channels the Holy Spirit is able to work with greater freedom and hence it is, that such men become the recipients of an understanding of the future that is denied to others. The New Testament shows that there were many in the Early Church who possessed this spirit of prophecy but from early Christian literature it would seem that it was rapidly lost after the generation which had known the Apostles passed away.

The second class of prophecy, the one that includes by far the greater part of the prophetic Scriptures, is that which may be called prevision, that is, seeing a representation of a future event before it has happened. Such a sight may be vouchsafed by means of a dream or a vision. It may be a true-to-life view of the event to which it relates or it may be a symbolic representation that needs to be interpreted. The well-known dreams of Joseph and Pharaoh, and of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar are examples of symbolic pre-vision. A true-to-life drama, depicting things as they actually afterward occurred, might well be hinted at in the impassioned plea of Pilate's wife "*Have nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered much over him today in a dream*" (Matt. 27.19). What strange glimpse of the future could it have been that moved the granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus Caesar so to entreat her husband? Whatever it was it seems to have filled her pagan heart with terror and to have shown her something of the consequences of Christ's crucifixion.

The true nature of the visions so often described in Scripture is not fully understood. It is probable that the 'appearance' was an impression made on the visual organs by the power of the Holy Spirit without there being any objective reality. There would be no real shape or form before the observer, so that other men might be in the company of the recipient of the vision and yet see nothing themselves. Prophecies given by means of vision and in symbolic form include the visions seen by John and described in the Book of Revelation and the great Temple with its River and Trees of Life seen by Ezekiel. An instance of this, where the vision affords a true picture of future things is surely the one in which Paul was "*caught into the paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not possible for a man to speak*" (2 Cor. 12.4 Marshall interlinear). In this case it seems that Paul received a clear

sight of conditions in the third epoch of world history. This is the one that is to succeed this present Age, and in which evil will be destroyed and its effects undone. This is the time when Christ's Kingdom on earth and in heaven will be in full operation. Another example may be that view of the future which enabled Jesus to predict the precise manner of Peter's death (John 21.18).

The third class of prophecy is that which is based, at least in part, upon the prophet's own observation of the world around him and his realisation from his knowledge of the Divine principles and plans, of the inevitable outcome of the forces which he can see at work. This can be termed "Prophetic foresight". Such a man must be a keen observer of world events and maintain an intelligent contact with the affairs of his fellow men besides being a reverent and whole-hearted 'servant of God. He needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit but he needs also knowledge of the ways of men. Isaiah and Jeremiah were men of this type and many of Jeremiah's prophecies are clearly based upon his knowledge of the result that must follow the course his countrymen were pursuing. In chapter 44 of his book, he assured the Jews that by remaining in Judah they would live safely, but that if they fled into Egypt they would never return, but would die there at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. He was voicing a conviction that must first have come to him in consequence of his study of the political signs and portents. It was a conviction that was confirmed for him by the working of the Holy Spirit in his mind. Jesus, too, when giving His 'end of the age' prophecy as recorded in Luke 21, viewed the world of His day and the temper of men, and spoke as He did speak, knowing that no other ending to a world built upon such principles, was possible.

The fourth class of prophecy is best designated 'Revelation' for it deals with those communications which are made by God directly to His servants, and usually by means of a 'revealing angel'. Of this class is the noteworthy revelation of world history recorded in the 11th and 12th chapters of Daniel, a vivid narrative given to the prophet, and recorded

by him, in the sixth century BC, so strikingly true to subsequent history that scholars not prepared to admit the Divine origin have been hard put to it to offer a rational explanation of its existence.

We are still witnessing the progressive fulfilment of that amazing account. It is clear that such a revelation of future things, expressed in such definite terms, could have come only from God Himself. He knows the end from the beginning, and it is in prophecies of this type therefore, that the allied subject of Divine foreknowledge comes more prominently to the front.

Behind every manifestation of prophecy there is the mind of God. He who dwells in eternity, outside the limits of time and space as those terms are understood by men, sends His thoughts into the time and space confines of our world and our lives by means of His Holy Spirit. He communicates those thoughts to men whose minds have been made receptive. From His standpoint in eternity God views the forward vista of human history. He tells men of what is yet to be, *"declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my good pleasure'"* (Isa. 46.10). Does God predestinate? The Scriptures declare that He does! Has man a free will? The Scriptures maintain that he has! We should not rest content until in the pursuit of our studies we begin to see how these things both can be. Paul declares in Romans 9 that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he might refuse to let Israel go, nay, more, that even for this very purpose He had raised him up, that His glory and power might be shown by means of him. And who can resist God's will, asks Paul (Rom. 9.19). And yet ... to what extent, if any, was the masterful, ruthless Amenhotep II, Pharaoh of all Egypt in the fifteenth century BC, the victim of a compelling force not of himself leading him on to oppress the Israelites in his land? To what extent can he be relieved of moral responsibility for what happened? These, and many similar questions can at least be partly answered when we have attained a clear view of the nature of Scriptural prophecy. *(To be continued)* AOH

God listens! In ancient Crete there was the image of a god without ears. It was intended as a reminder to passers-by that the god in question was too busy and too preoccupied to be bothered with the prayers of needy people. How different is the

revelation of our God and Father that we find in the pages of Holy Scripture! His ear is ever open to our cry. He hearkens to the prayers of His people. God is never too busy and never too preoccupied to attend to our cries.

HIS PRESENCE IN THE MIDST

About the time of our Lord's departure from this earth He sent His servants out into a wider field of service. Hitherto, at His instructions, they had confined their labours to the Jews, in Judea. Now, the Lord commissions them to go out into the whole world, seeking disciples; and for their comfort and assurance, says: "*Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matt. 28.20).

Thousands of His followers since those days have lived and laboured and faced the ordeal of death, in the assurance of this promise. In densely populated cities, or thinly inhabited country places, thousands who have loved His Name have believed. Although unseen, that great vital Presence has been with them; not only in the great congregations, but also the twos and threes and solitary ones, have had their portion in His watch-care and oversight. It is not possible fully to explain the method or the philosophy of that 'presence'. Even among men there are so many subtle factors associated with 'presence' and 'personality', that even advanced psychology students find themselves unable to account for all the phenomena which different men and women exhibit. There are men and women who repel their fellows on the instant. Others are as magnets, and draw friends from everywhere. In the lesser range of things with which the ordinary man is familiar there is some mystery to what we call 'presence'. We speak of a person being present in a room and of things that transpire in that room as taking place in his presence. In what way is he present beyond the few square feet of space occupied by his body? That his presence extends beyond that small circle, marked by the outlines of his physical frame, all know and realise, but how it does so is not so easily explained. A lecturer is as much present to men in the hindmost seats as to those who sit close before him! It may be a blending of personality and presence, but there it is; some subtle force emanates from that body located within the tiny space, and radiates itself throughout the room! There are dictatorial men in our world to-day who, though occupying but a few square feet, make the whole world tremble and fear. Why? Because out from them goes an aggressive spirit; and because of its peculiar nature, backed by reserves of military power, the whole earth becomes their audience-chamber. Their slightest words and their tiniest acts are spread about the world over. Now, let us try to imagine

these men exalted into a majesty and glory like that of Jesus. Imagine their few square feet expanded out to corresponding proportions! Increase the scale of their influence by as much as the heavenly is greater than the earthly! That may then serve as some slight assistance in conceiving how the blessed Lord can have been present with all His people, and yet have occupied a definite place in the heavenly realms. The whole wide world is not as great to Him as a small room is to us. If, then, it is possible for a mere man to make his presence fill some audience-room, or for a dictator to send thrills and fears throughout this earth, then surely the glorified omnipotent Saviour can fill His Church, entire and individual, with the sense of His saving presence, even from His celestial location at His Father's right hand. This whole world is to Him but as an ante-room. The whole wide universal creation, including every dimension, known and unknown, is his audience chamber. "*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit,*" the Psalmist asks, "*or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.' Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*" (Psa. 139.7-12).

All through her dark days, when faggot and sword encompassed her, the Church of Jesus was never left untended or alone; and though the flame of her love burned low and the glow of her light was feeble, yet, not once in all the years since she set out to follow Him, has He left His charge uncared-for. In her periods of joy, in her seasons of sorrow, He has been at His post – "*walking in the midst of the candlesticks.*"

Her eyes may have been under earthly limitations but His were not. His eyes of flame could pierce the barriers imposed by mundane things and through her walls He made His presence felt – "*a living blessed reality*". Still is He walking among the candlesticks, trimming our lights, feeding the oil, diffusing the fragrance of His Presence and the charm of His Personality through our lattice-window.

TH

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing

And He walks with me and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

C. Austin Miles

WILD BEASTS IN THE ARK

An old topic revived

Sometimes a discussion from years ago comes alive. For example, this year's tsunami has a resonance with the Biblical Flood. The terrible destruction we have witnessed calls to mind the even more cataclysmic events recorded in Genesis 6 to 8. If taken seriously, these events raise questions.

How universal was 'the flood'? What area did it cover? Did it have a natural cause, comparable to but greater than the tsunami? And the Ark, what of the problems of so many animals cooped together, some predators and some domesticated? What species were preserved? What habitats were destroyed?

The usual understanding of the story of the Flood includes the assumption that the wild beasts of the earth, the carnivorous, lions, tigers, etc., were taken into the Ark in company with the domestic and herbivorous (vegetarian) animals.

"In times past when it was universally believed that the Flood waters completely overspread the entire globe it was necessary to include all such animals in the Ark's company, otherwise none would have survived to continue the species. It is becoming increasingly accepted nowadays that the Genesis account does not demand a universal Flood; the Hebrew "*erets*" can mean either the earth as a whole or the local area of land which happens to be the subject of the passage."

One theory suggests "that the true cause of Noah's Flood was most likely a colossal tidal wave set up by the catastrophic descent to the planet of prehistoric aerial waters at the poles, in Noah's case sweeping in from the south and flooding the entire Euphrates valley in concert with other low lying areas such as that of the Indus in India, eventually receding into the ocean". This must be surmise, in the absence of scientific observations such as are available for the study of the tsunami.

Be this as it may, it is easy to conceive that "mountainous regions were relatively untouched, and here the wild species of animals could have survived unscathed. It is easy to see that what might be called the logistics of Noah's enterprise would be enormously helped by having only vegetarian animals to feed for twelve months; provision of

fresh meat for the carnivores for that period would have been a real problem. It is often overlooked, also, that had the Flood covered all the mountains there would have been no olive trees with leaves for the dove to pluck off when all was over." But does the Bible account actually state that wild beasts were in the Ark?

The basis of the argument that they were not, lies in the words used in the account. There are two Hebrew words used to denote animals, quadrupeds. One is '*behemah*' which denotes what we would call domestic animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and so on, together with the naturally wild herbivorous animals as camels, deer and the like. This word is usually rendered cattle, beast, or clean beast and usually in a domestic connection. The other word is '*chaiyah*' , which means literally a living creature and when used without qualification is also applied to domestic animals. When qualified with a descriptive noun or adjective it refers to wild, carnivorous animals; thus '*chaiyah erets*' is "beast of the earth" or "beast of the land"; '*chaiyah sadah*' is "beast of the field" and '*chaiyah yaar*' is "beast of the forest". There are also such terms as "evil beast", "noisome beast", "ravenous beast". Wherever these qualified terms appear the reference is to wild carnivorous animals.

With all this in mind let the narrative be examined. The entire account of the sojourn in the Ark is contained in Chaps 6 to 8 of Genesis. There are fifteen references to quadruped animals in these three chapters. Of these ten are '*behemah*' (beast, cattle, clean beast, unclean beast) and five are "*chai*" or "*chaiyah*" (living thing in 6.19 and 8.17, beast in 7.14, 21 and 8.19 but always meaning living creature). In no case do any of these instances refer to a carnivorous animal. A parallel instance is in the books of Leviticus and Numbers where in ten instances "*chaiyah*" is used to denote sacrificial animals used in the ceremonies, which of course were always bulls, goats, rams or lambs.

Reverting to the story of the Flood, the only reference to carnivorous animals occurs in the 9th

chapter after Noah and his family had come out of the Ark. Said the Lord to Noah (ch. 9.2). *"the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth" 'chaiyah erets'* - the carnivorous animals. It would seem hardly necessary for the Lord to give Noah such an assurance had they been with him in the Ark for the past twelve months. But the decisive verse is ch. 9.10 and this enshrines a quite important point. The Lord told Noah He was making a covenant never again to destroy the earth by a Flood. The covenant was with Noah, his sons, every living creature that was in the Ark, and every beast of the earth, which by implication therefore had not been in the Ark. The full text reads in the AV, "and I, behold I, establish my covenant with you, **and** with your seed after you, **and** with every living creature (*'behemah-nephesh'*) that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle (*'behemah'*) **and** of every beast of the earth '*chaiyah erets*' with you; **from** all that go out of the ark, **to** every beast of the earth '*chaiyah erets*'.

The plain meaning of this passage is that the promised covenant is to extend to all earthly creatures, **from** those that came out of the Ark **to** those that were never in the Ark, and this makes it evident that the *chaiyah erets*, the wild carnivorous animals, were not taken into the Ark.

This conclusion provides an answer to the oft-times mooted query as to how Noah was able to bring in to the Ark animals which are unique to lands far distant from his own country and separated by oceans. The kangaroo and the dingo of Australia, the armadillo and the iguana of South America, the giant tortoise of the Galapagos, how did he get these without trailing round the world after them and building a ship in which to bring them to the Ark. And how did he get them back to their own land afterwards without leaving some of their progeny on the way to breed and remain in other lands -for such animals are still to this day unique in their own habitats. The short answer is, of course, that none of these were in the Ark. Sufficient of them survived in the higher reaches of their native lands to continue their species when the Flood had passed."

In this way we may argue and speculate about these events of long ago - which, if we do it humbly and reverently is a good thing to do. More important for us is to keep short accounts with God. It does not require a universal Flood, it does not need a tsunami, it takes only the most everyday accident, to remind us that as mortal creatures our hope must be in God. He not only sustains the material order, but is the giver of eternal life.

GC based on an article by AOH

THE MANTLE OF SAMUEL

Reflections for Today

He was the last of the Judges and one of the greatest law-givers and administrators that God raised up for Israel. He came to the nation at a time of crisis and the nation took him to its heart. He served his people well and faithfully but at the end they rejected him in favour of a king who oppressed and betrayed them. During Samuel's span of power he brought his people back to God and lifted them to the heights of faith, but before he died he saw them in grievous apostasy and once more under the sovereignty of their enemies. In his life he ruled the nation but at the end he was gathered to his fathers in obscurity. Yet he lit a torch that was never put out. He spent his last years teaching a handful of youngsters who continued in the spirit of his life after that life was spent. He passed on the torch and in after years the work of Samuel blossomed and bloomed afresh.

We do well to heed the story of this man's life. We too hold a torch; a torch of truth that it is our duty to hold aloft while we live, and when our failing hands can carry it no longer, to pass it on to

younger and eager hands outstretched to receive it. This truth which we hold as a stewardship, is not ours alone; it was passed to us from those of former years, as a heritage to be guarded and amplified and passed on to our successors. The work of God goes on in generation after generation, and nothing that we have is ours selfishly to enjoy and cast to the ground when the time comes that we can possess it no longer.

There is a strong parallel in our own time to the early days of Samuel. Once again the lamp has burned low in the Temple of God, and Eli has gone to sleep. Once again the people are sorely in need of instruction and guidance. Once again the word of the Lord has come to some who have been ready to give up all worldly interests and aims in order to serve God in His Temple and await His word. Once again such have gone forth into the world with the message of salvation and have done a work such as the world had not seen for many generations.

Temporarily, it may be, but none the less definitely, the enemies of righteousness have been

checked and the truth made known to the people. But Samuel in his turn has become old and the glories of past days are slipping away. Who is to take the torch? Upon whom is the mantle of Samuel to descend, and continue the proclamation of this glorious truth in the world of men? For there is still a message to proclaim. Those who are disappointed or perplexed, because the establishment of the Kingdom has not come at so early a date as they may have expected must not lose faith. The Plan of God is still being wrought out on time. The fact that we are not able correctly to discern the time makes no difference to that. And in times of uncertainty we do well to study the lives of those ancient stalwarts who, with so limited knowledge, must have found the purposes of God an even greater enigma than we do, and yet triumphed in faith and completed their course with joy.

Samuel was a leader and a prophet, a man of action and vision, utterly and completely consecrated and surrendered to the service of God. That was the secret of his success and that is the secret we have to know if we also would remain steadfast to the end. He went about his work with the serene confidence of a man who habitually walked with God and knew without a shadow of doubt that the work he was doing was God's work. In that confidence was the driving force behind the work he did.

There are many examples in the Old Testament of such men who gained "a good report through faith". Daniel, Isaiah, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, were all men of action, vigorous, positive action, but they were all visionaries. While their hands were set to the plough their eyes were fixed on the heavens and there they saw visions of God. It is noteworthy that so many of these men pledged their lives to God in their early youth and were almost immediately called to serve Him. That should be a pointer to us, not to despise the aspirations of our younger brethren to serve their Lord effectively but rather to realise the immense potentialities in a young life fully surrendered at so early a stage, and to do all in our power to assist it. There is more than a passing fitness in our Lord's reference to new wine and old wineskins in this connection. It is quite possible that some among the younger generation can receive and assimilate some elements of unfolding Truth peculiar to this generation which most of the older ones could never accept and are not expected by our understanding, all-wise Lord to accept. In such a case it is clearly the duty of the

older ones to view with tolerant understanding the endeavours of those who must perforce tread a somewhat different path because they live in a somewhat different world.

The life of Samuel was a hard life; his victories were not easily won. That he was able at the end to turn his back upon all that his prowess had won him and live contentedly teaching his handful of students in a quiet country retreat says much for his strength of character. But then, Samuel knew something of the end from the beginning. He knew that all his mighty works, wrought in the heyday of his physical maturity, must be as nothing compared to the spiritual legacy he must leave behind him if he was to be truly faithful. With nearly all of Israel apostate from the faith and most of his life's work already in ruins he knew full well that in the hearts and minds of those few "sons of the prophets" reposed the real hope of the future. So he taught them in the same serenity of mind in which he had once led Israel against the Philistine hosts, and conquered, without any weapons save his faith, and his people's faith in God.

The story of Israel's varied fortunes in their many wars with the Philistines in Samuel's day is an object lesson in itself. It was when Samuel was quite young and still attendant on the High Priest Eli that the great disaster came. Israel lost her greatest glory, the Ark of the Covenant. The word of Samuel had already begun to go out to Israel, but quite evidently as yet there was no real heed being given. When the fortunes of war began to go against Israel they gave way to superstitious beliefs and took the Ark into battle with them in the hope that God would not suffer the indignity of losing the symbol of His presence into the hands of the unbelievers. But God did. Can there be a more telling example of the utter disregard the Most High has for form and ceremony? If Israel no longer had faith in Him, the sacred Ark was no longer a symbol of any value, and its capture by the Philistines was a matter of indifference to Him. So the first Philistine war ended in disaster for Israel, the death of Eli, last High Priest of the line of Ithamar and twenty years of utter hopelessness and dejection on the part of the Lord's people.

It was during that twenty years that Samuel came into his own. With the death of Eli he stepped into the place of authority, and although he could not be invested with the dignity of High Priest, he was in practice both sacred and secular ruler of the

people.

One wonders why the Ark of the Covenant was not restored to its place after its recovery from the Philistines. According to 1 Sam. 6 and 7 it was in the Philistines' land only seven months but after its recovery it remained in the house of Abinadab of Kirjath-jearim until the reign of King David. It is probable that the Philistines destroyed Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood in the days of Eli, after the capture of the Ark, and with there being no officiating High Priest and Israel as often as not under the heel of alien powers, it seems that the Tabernacle service, together with the Day of Atonement sacrifices, fell into disuse for a considerable number of years. That was the price the people paid for their presumption in taking the Ark of God into battle before them as though in itself it had power to deliver.

The "twenty years" of 1 Sam. 7.2 cannot be the time the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim for that period would not extend to David's reign. It seems more reasonable that it indicates the period during which the people languished under Divine disfavour. Gradually, under Samuel's leadership, they awakened to a sense of their apostasy and undone condition. So at the end they returned to the Lord and 1 Sam. 7 is the account of their return.

That provoked the second Philistine war. The change in the hearts of the children of Israel was remarkable. The same enemy; the same invasion, the same threat, but this time there was no suggestion of taking the Ark before them into battle. They had learned their lesson. This time they said to Samuel (v.8) "*Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines*". And, of course, God heard. The Philistines were routed without Israel having to lift a finger in their own defence. Samuel offered a burnt offering, and cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him. That was all. It was on this occa-

sion that Samuel set a great stone and called it 'Eben-ezer', signifying "*Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*", and gave us thereby a word and a theme that we have used constantly for each other's comfort and encouragement in these later years.

Samuel was now an old man. The time had come for his mantle to fall on other shoulders. The people loved and respected Samuel, but they wanted a king. "*They have not rejected you*" said the Most High to His faithful servant "*but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.*" So Samuel anointed the young man Saul, and saw his own authority pass to the man of Israel's choice. He saw the man prove unworthy of the anointing and heard the Divine sentence of rejection. Therefore in the fulness of time he anointed another young man, one after God's own heart, the youth David. He was not destined to see David as king. Samuel finished his days at length with his own life-work completed but God's work in the nation still unfinished. But he passed on his mantle to those young hearts who surrounded his death-bed.

Perhaps that is one great lesson we all have to learn. Though we live a hundred years twice told, we can do no more than finish our own life's work. The work of God in the world will still remain unfinished and will still be going on. We may, each of us, make our individual contribution toward that work and the contribution we have made, be it great or small, will have made some difference to God's great work. We shall have been co-workers together with Him. But after our own little time of activity is ended, there will be others to continue the work and play their part too in the accomplishment of the Divine Plan. God grant that we individually may be faithful to our calling and before our own end comes, pass the flaming torch to one younger and newer in the race who is waiting to pick it up and follow in the path which we have trod.

AOH

1 Kings 7.23 gives a detailed description of the size of the 'molten sea' (the brazen sea) of the temple. It has a diameter ("from one brim to another") of 10 cubits and a circumference ("a line ... did compass it round about") of 30 cubits. Remember your geometry. The formula is pi times

the diameter. According to this scripture, the circumference of the brazen sea was 3 times the diameter. The value of pi is just over 3 (3.14159). As far as we know, this scripture therefore contains the earliest approximation of the value of pi.

LU - Berean News

Discouragement, disappointment and disillusionment of our day, in this Christian walk, are so forceful that we need power in our lives to be able to withstand their assaults. That power is through

God's Holy Spirit that gives us faith and hope and the spirit of joy. Let us not neglect our privileges and God's promises.

OWNERSHIP

4 - Freedom in Christ

The general tenor of the teaching of God by both the Bible and Nature is that of obedience to universal laws. It is evident that order was brought out of the chaos of remote ages and that it is maintained in a great starry empire that the astronomers for all their probing and curiosity do not fully understand. Turning back the green veil of the earth the geologist discovers the fiery furnace and the watery baptisms through which the earth passed before it became a home fit for man who was a new creature in the great scheme of galaxies and globes. He is a problem to himself, his descendants, doctors and advisors who see something wrong with him and try to put him right.

There has been so much advice, such a variety of medicines and such a host of doctors that a spectator might justly fear they are in danger of killing the patient. While the earth abounds with beauty, riches and pleasures lawful to enjoy, there is also a painful sense of limitation, frustration and failure as though the foundation for some great mansion house had been laid but the building remained uncompleted. A strange contradiction in the conditions of the earth and the life of man seems to retard the progress of both towards that ideal for which they were made, of which both are capable and which remains the ultimate aim and end of Divine purpose. This is nothing less than the complete harmony of man with man and man with God in a liberated earth free to make her deserts blossom, her wilderness places rejoice and her solitary places sing.

Such a picture of things to come is no dream. Past and present are a reality. The future can be no less so. It is yet a vision and though it seems to tarry the advice of the prophet is to *"wait for it!"* In spite of all the revolt, wickedness and wilfulness of humanity as it has marched boldly through the ages in increasing strength and numbers upon a broad road that seemed right and proved to be wrong, the compassion of God for His unruly children has neither wavered nor failed. The goodness and greatness of the prophets softened the severity of the law. These were men of pastoral origin who became by their separation from the throng and their closeness to nature more in tune with Nature's Creator. They became His voice, His pen-men, speaking and writing of clearly determined changes as they were moved by Divine inspiration, not only

to their own generation but to those yet to come.

They not only looked through a long telescope at a rejuvenated earth but into the mind of God and His desire for men, that they would make a right about turn, *"to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God"*. There were pleadings and invitations that fell for the most part on deaf ears. Eyes, long blinded by superstition, rituals and self-indulgence could not or would not see or share the heavenly vision of the prophets. In time even their voices were silenced and it seemed that the race of men, and the people of Israel who had received the Law and the prophets, were left to their own devices. Unknown to man the great time-clock of the Ages ticked on until it reached the appointed hour. *"When the fulness of time was come God sent forth His son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons."* (Gal. 4.4-5). *"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent His own Son"* (Rom. 8.3). The weakness was not in the Law but in faulty human nature. It was the measure of a perfect man's ability, a perfect code for a perfect person. As none such existed, none could keep the law completely. Only a complete performance gained the prize of life. Forty centuries was a full and fair trial with plenty of opportunity to each generation to prove whether they would or could live up to the Law's demands. In the sight of both Divine and human judgement none had obtained what they sought. Every man had gone his own way. Like sheep all had strayed from the path of life. None were completely just and good. All had acquired faults or flaws of character. The Law and the prophets could neither compel nor coerce the human heart to a full compliance with the will of God, contained within the commandments that had been simplified into one word – Love. That love which is the fulfilment of the Law found a way whereby the best intentioned could overcome their disabilities by believing on the Son whom God had sent into the world, their faith obtaining what their works could not. Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, holy, harmless and separate from sinners, did what no other had ever done. He rendered to God a perfect obedience, a faultless performance in spite of all the temptations and pressures put upon Him. By so doing He did for man what man could not do for

himself. His whole life's action and ultimate total sacrifice won 'everlasting life' for the whole human race, *"that whosoever believes in him should not perish"*. The emphasis shifts now from a total obedience to law to an unwavering belief in the Son of Man, as a Saviour, a life-giver. God appeals to man now, not from Sinai but by His Son who fulfilled all that the Law and the prophets had spoken. From henceforth He is the truth, the living way. By Him men may have access to God. In Him they are reckoned as perfect, justified by their faith, accepted by Divine justice and love into the household of sons of God, into the great brotherhood of faith where natural assets do not count nor disabilities create a barrier race. Rank and sex are not recognised by Him who is no respecter of persons. Only the living human creature, the *"new creature in Christ Jesus"* has a valid claim on unending life. To every questioner seeking life; 'What must I do?' 'How can I be saved?' 'What can be salvaged from the futility and frustration of this present evil world?' There is only one answer – *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved"*. *"He that believes on Me has everlasting life."* To the listening Jews this was an astonishing claim. The Law had made them a chosen race, a nation separated from all other nations. They were bound together in their daily life and worship by the ritual of the Law that outwardly at least they strictly observed. Descendants of men of faith who had served God in every century had no difficulty in tracing their ancestry to Adam. As individuals, then as a people they had been taught and moulded to become instructors and examples to all other nations of the origins of man and the ultimate purpose of the Most High God for the human race. That they had failed was evident in their strange and chequered history. A few had found the Law their delight as a few had listened to and venerated the prophets. When Jesus began His teaching ministry among them, the poor heard Him gladly but the rich and the rulers earned His rebuke on several counts.

Arrogantly there was a show of religion without its practice. Hypocrisy and the ritual sacrifice of animals by the blood of which they sought to atone for their law-breaking sins, came under the lash of His righteous indignation. Even their expensive efforts to make converts to their faith did not appear to be a success, for the convert also became enmeshed in the outward forms of the Law that did nothing for the heart (Matt. 23.15). What then, they

asked, should they do? What was the will of God for them? To both questions they received the same reply – 'Believe on Him whom God had sent into the world on their behalf'. Many were drawn to the safe shelter of the great 'Rock of Ages' by the assurance that Jesus was more than a prophet, one of whom all the prophets had spoken. He was Saviour, Redeemer, a giver of life, and this was their strong rope and sheet anchor. It was one of their own ardent young lawyers who saw in a blinding flash of insight that *"The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ"* (Gal. 3.24).

To exchange the rugged hemp which blistered and tore, for the silken strands of the gospel of faith and love, was a hazard for the early believers as it has been and still is for all seekers after truth and life. To cut free from all outward show of the flesh, to soar in the power of the Spirit into a higher realm, to sit with Christ in heavenly places, was a flight which none have ever undertaken without struggle and effort. It was and is an adventurous step into the unknown, as great an undertaking as that of any explorer who has gone out with faith and courage to seek a far country beyond the horizon because he believed it to be there and well worth seeking. To walk alone and free, out of the old paths that used to be, is not without risk. To forsake the world, to leave behind so much that seemed safe, familiar and treasured, was never accomplished without moments of doubt and uncertainty. Jesus said *"No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God."* (Luke 9. 62).

Belief in Christ as the new and living way, the mediator between God and man, in no way sets aside the Law. That is there for all time, the Divine yardstick for human conduct. Faith and acceptance in Christ make up for human deficiencies. As none could obtain life through the Law a way was found by which it could be awarded to faith through the person of Jesus Christ. His claims, His works and His life were a demonstration to men that He came from God and that He had the power of Life. Far from setting aside the Law He came to fulfil the Law, to show that it could be kept. Without fault or moral blemish He had the right to life and the power to give it to others. Union with Him by faith was a passing from death unto life, to walk not after the flesh but after the spirit, to become a new creature.

Spiritual things are a foreign language, a foreign world to natural people who understand natural

things. The one drawn into Christ feels the pull of a force that is supernatural. God draws or attracts to Himself the mind of the seeking one. As God is spirit His power is spiritual. His words are spirit and life, elevating one so drawn on to a new plane of life, like a blind man receiving sight; like one risen from the dead. The new creature in Christ begins to discern hidden things about life. He begins to live and learn; to become a transformed character. The Law is no less the Law. Heart and mind are still prone to err, but there is an inner strength which enables the just who walk by faith to continue the pursuit of the ideal man of God, to fight the good fight and to know the taste of victory through Christ. Such are taught and disciplined by the great Husbandman who through the ages has sought and striven for the minds and hearts of those who would be His people, who were likened to the ripe fruit of the true vine. The Law found its fulfilment in the Son of man, whom God sent into the world to save men from their futile struggle with failure and death. All the promises of God were life but it came not by the written word but through the living Word, the culmination of the love of God in the person of the Anointed Son and Saviour, Jesus Christ. For this reason the great Apostle to the Gentiles could write with confidence *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 6.1). Those words are among the most precious and important ever written to men. It is a declaration of freedom, a promise of life not yet understood by the masses of mankind, a great boon scarcely estimated by the few who have entered into that union with Christ Jesus, who have begun that mystic walk, not after the flesh but after the spirit.

The law of 'Thou shalt not' condemned the transgressor to death. Death being the opposite of life it signifies the end of living. *"By man came death"*, *"The wages of sin is death"*. Since the sentence fell at the beginning of man's occupation

of the earth, death passed upon all, for all have transgressed, fallen short of the original standard. Death has reigned over the house of Adam. None of the 'isms' or theories of the schools can explain away or deny that hard fact. In Christ, God provided a new and living way, by which the believing might get out from under the gloomy portals of the house of Adam into the house of Christ, variously described as a world of light, life and harmony with God. To such as have taken this way through a clear understanding of the human situation, a belief and acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, God's choice and way, there is no longer condemnation to death under the justice of the Law. Favoured are all those who make God their choice, for His path and His gift to men is Life. Love and mercy have provided in Christ a Saviour and deliverer, a way out of the dark world of sin and death into a world of life and love and service. *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made live."*

This gospel, this good news, was the tidings of great joy for the perishing race of man that the angels sang at Bethlehem. It was the message that the Early Church preached with enthusiasm, renouncing the fleeting pleasures of this life to go out into all the world, to make it known to all people. It is the word of God to man, the offer of salvation, still preserved, still available to any who are discontented with the world as it is, dissatisfied with themselves as they are. God has arranged one way, one person, one Name only by which mankind may obtain life, by which they may be set free from the law of sin and death. To step out of one house into the other brings about a change to living as great as that involved in any other change of residence. The eloquent testimony of those who have made this change runs like a river of praise to the ends of the earth.

(To be continued) FAS

Gnats and Camels. Matt. 23.24 reads in the Authorised Version *"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."* What Jesus really said was *"You blind guides straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel"* (RSV) or perhaps a little more forcefully, *"Blind guides! You strain off a midge, yet gulp down a camel"* (REB). "This explains the custom of passing wine through a strainer lest any defiling insect should have got into it. One is impressed with the gentle irony in the Lord's

words. The idea of swallowing a camel verges on the ludicrous. Extreme and exaggerated figures of speech are common in the East; even so one can imagine the covert smiles on the faces of the bystanders at this biting comment on the punctilious observances of the Pharisees and their blindness to the really vital things." – *BSM 1981*. Have we this characteristic of placing emphasis on the less important while forgetting what will change our destiny?

AFTER THE FLOOD

5 - The Tower of Babel

"Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there" (Gen. 11.1-2 RSV).

This is the point at which the history of the "world that now is" really begins. In three centuries the population had grown to something like a quarter of a million people. What had started as a group of families closely knit by the bonds of common relationship was taking on the aspect of a company of tribes rapidly developing divergent interests. For the moment, though, there was no disunity. They had found this fertile plain, so much better adapted to their needs than the mountain terraces upon which they had been born and lived for anything up to three centuries and now by common consent they were on the move to a new home. They were all *"of one language and one speech"* says the narrative. That means they shared one common vocabulary of words and one pronunciation, almost certainly the language spoken by Noah and his sons when they entered the Ark. The human community was united; there was as yet little or no tendency to separate such as became inevitable later on when numbers increased. There was still no death; no one had died since the Flood. Likewise loyalty to the Lord was universal; there is evidence that it was to be quite a few centuries before men began to worship false gods and the dark shadow of godlessness fell across the race of mankind. It is probable that these people enjoyed what amounted to almost Eden-like conditions with less evidence of the power and practice of sin than had ever been known since the beginning. The sun shone warmly down, the summer was almost perpetual, the land brought forth its increase and death seemed something that belonged only to the old world that had passed away. The first two or three centuries after the Flood must have resembled in many respects the terrestrial conditions of the still future Millennial Age to be established when our Lord takes His great power and commences His promised reign over the nations. There are legends of old that appear to relate to this period. A thousand years later Sumerian scribes began to write histories of the early days of their nation. In one, epic they spoke of a 'Golden Age' in which all peoples dwelt happily together in a land where there were no wild animals, the ground brought forth abundantly, there was no war or strife, and the whole world gave

praise to God. Then came war and the harmony was shattered. In the "Pyramid Texts", a collection of records found in pyramids of the 5th and 6th Egyptian dynasties, dating to several centuries before the birth of Abraham, it is stated that at the first there was no death. One early Pharaoh was assured by his god that he had been born before death began to come upon men. The Persians had a similar legend about their early days. "In the reign of Yima the valiant, there was neither heat nor cold, neither old age or death, nor disease." It could well be that this recollection of those first three centuries of harmonious living together remained in the folklore of the nations after the separation. Their dispersal over the world ended that and when, a little later on, death began to make its appearance among the oldest of them it was almost like the end of an era.

So they *"journeyed from the east"*. The word is expressive; 'journeyed' in this text means to pull up and move away, as the pulling up of tent-pegs when an encampment is being moved. Gesenius defines it as a verb of departure, a nomadic term for "breaking camp" and moving on. That was the position here, the abandonment of their mountain home for this much more desirable territory in the plain. It was probably over a term of years that the transfer took place, one village after another thrusting westward with their goods and chattels to take possession of unclaimed farmland in this rich alluvial well-watered plain where life could be easier and more pleasant.

The AV margin suggests a variant rendering *"journeyed eastward"*, which has a precisely opposite meaning, that they came from the west. Geographically, that would be impossible; to the west lay what is now Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea, in the opposite direction altogether from the land of Ararat, which comprehended the Iranian mountains from which the settlers must perforce have come. Virtually every modern translation with the exception of Margolis and Leeser, maintain the accuracy of "from the east" and in fact the modern Hebrew Received Text has this; *mini-gedem* where *min* is the preposition 'from' or 'out of'. 'Eastward' or 'towards the east' would have been *el-gedem*, 'towards', 'to' or 'for'.

Modern research has confirmed this statement of Gen. 11.2. It is very generally agreed now by archaeologists that the earliest inhabitants of the

Euphrates plains came from the east, from a source somewhere in the mountains of Iran. Frankfort in "Birth of civilisation in the Near East" puts the source as the district marked by Tepe Khazineh near Susa, which is within a hundred miles of Anaran, where the Ark landed. Kramer in "Sumerian Mythology" speaks to the same effect; so does Seton Lloyd in "Foundations in the Dust", and many other leading authorities. Genesis said it originally, nearly five thousand years ago.

So they settled and established themselves, creating villages surrounded by farmlands, growing their crops and keeping their flocks and herds, fishing in the shallow waters of the Gulf and its surrounding marshes. Their numbers continued to increase, but not so rapidly as hitherto. There were several reasons for this. The basic one was that the climate was changing. The pleasantly warm and genial conditions of those first three centuries changed suddenly, and for the worse. Brooks has shown that at this time, about 3000 BC, there commenced a sudden period of abnormal volcanic activity all over the world which continued on and off for the next four hundred years. The effect was a steady climate deterioration to cold and wet conditions which of necessity had its repercussions on the emergent human race. The Paradise land they thought they had found began to ~~change~~, as the years went by, to a land of floods and storms and incessant rain, and life became more difficult. It is significant that the three patriarchs living during this period whose life spans are recorded, Cainan, Sala and Heber, show a sudden reduction of length of life to 400 to 460 years as contrasted with their predecessors' 530 to 600 (See the Septuagint). Successive periods of further climatic degeneration in later centuries are matched by similar corresponding reductions in the span of life, and it is impossible not to see a connection between climate and life-span during those early years. Hence the period of fatherhood was proportionately shortened and the adverse climate must have played its part in hindering the rate of population increase. There was still no death. Noah himself died about this time, three and a half centuries after the Flood, but his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, must have joined in the trek to Shinar, still hale and hearty. There was no war or violence, there may not have been any disease and it might well be that the only deaths were those due to accidents. Taking all these circumstances into consideration, it is possible that the estimated

quarter of a million who had made the journey could have grown to seven millions in the next hundred years. In the emergence of this very considerable body of people spreading over the land and developing varied tastes and interests there reposed the seeds which blossomed into the situation described in the story of the Tower of Babel. *"Come", they said 'let us build a city and a tower whose top shall reach into the heavens, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth.'"* The motive has not always been properly understood. At a much later date a copyist added his comment which forms v 9, *"therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound all the languages of the earth"*. The word translated "confound" is the Hebrew *balbal*, which means mingling or confusion. It is really a pun upon the word Babel and not a very good pun at that. It could not have been written at the time of the original story for there was no Hebrew language then nor yet for many centuries thereafter. But this set the stage for the later Jewish tradition, carried over into Christianity, that the Tower was built as an act of defiance against God. Josephus, improving upon the tradition, asserts that its builder was the Nimrod of Gen. 10, and this name was identified with the Hebrew *ni-marad*, a form of the verb '*marad*', 'to rebel', having the meaning "he was rebellious". On this somewhat flimsy foundation Nimrod was credited with being a rebel against God and leading the project of the Tower.

There is nothing in the Genesis narrative to associate Nimrod with the building of the Tower although there is plenty in Sumerian legend. That will be considered later on. The likelihood is that the motive for building the Tower was a good and praiseworthy one, but it went wrong. Nevertheless the project was contrary to the will of God. That is evident from the sequel; the Lord came down and frustrated it. The situation is not difficult to visualise. The Lord had instructed the three sons of Noah to be fruitful, and multiply, and bring forth abundantly in the earth. The fulfilment of that injunction implied a scattering over the face of the earth, to explore and discover its resources and use them for the common good. This idea of concentrating the whole human community in one given area, however praiseworthy it might have appeared to the originators, militated against the proper development of mankind. There are no minerals in the plain of Shinar, no metals and no

useful stone or rocks, no forests, no soil of the kind that would grow many of the products men would need in future days, cotton, rubber, rice, maize, fruit trees, timber bearing trees and much besides. The Sumerians lived on a staple diet of barley, pulse and dates, and little else. For men to exploit and put to good use the possibilities of this new post-Flood world they must scatter over the earth, and this they were refusing to do. So God came down to inspect the work they had undertaken.

Fifty miles south of the present city of Baghdad, on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, there is a level stretch of country that those settlers in that day found ideal for their purpose. Here they would build their Tower, and around it would rise a great city, the first city of this new earth. In that city they would concentrate all their activities and all their learning, and no matter how far away other men might ultimately penetrate, here would be the centre, and, perhaps, rulership. Here they would make themselves a name that should endure forever. Nevertheless it is not to be inferred that their motives were altogether to be condemned. As is so often the case with the works of man, motives are mixed, and the evidence in this case is that the building of the Tower of Babel was in considerable degree incited by a desire to retain and perpetuate the worship of God.

This fact is established by the names given by the builders to the Tower, the city, and the land in which they dwelt. It must be remembered that there was as yet no idolatry among mankind, no worship of false gods. That came later. At this time the God of Noah was still the One venerated. The people still counted themselves as faithful to Him. It has to be realised that Shem, Ham and Japheth, were still alive and their influence must have counted for much. These people would have known the story of the Flood and of the mountain where the Ark came to rest. Some of them might well have made the hundred miles journey from the mountainous area where they had been born to see the place for themselves and view the remains of the Ark in which their fathers had been saved - there is nothing unlikely in that. That mountain became sacred to them and their descendants into future distant ages. It was never forgotten; it became a central feature in their myths and legends. And all the evidence is that the Tower of Babel had a direct connection with that mountain.

A distinguishing feature of all Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian cities, from their

beginnings to their final end, was the "ziggurat". This was the original Sumerian name and this is the name by which these structures or their remains are known today. The ziggurat was a pyramid built in stages, or steps, each stage smaller than the one below so that a concourse ran round the building at each stage. Stairways ascending the sides of each stage gave ultimate access to the level platform at the top, where was always erected a temple facing towards the east. The entire structure was solid, built of brick, usually sun-dried brick in the interior and furnace-baked brick on the outside. The ziggurat was the focus of religious ceremonies and worship, in latter days of the idol gods of the land. It also provided a useful means of astronomical observations; but its primary purpose was religious.

The Tower of Babel was a ziggurat. Its remains are still there today and it is known to have been, in its heyday, one of the greatest and most magnificent of such buildings. According to Strabo, the Greek geographer of our Lord's day, it was six hundred feet high and its base platform was six hundred feet square. That is not to say it was that size when first built. Strabo and Herodotus both described it as it stood in the days of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar; it was common practice though for later kings to enlarge the ziggurats they inherited from earlier generations and archaeologists have found evidence of this in cities other than Babylon. Seton Lloyd in "Foundations in the Dust" (1955) says that the ziggurat of Babylon was about 250 feet high originally.

Now the word "ziggurat" in the Sumerian language means "mountain peak". The ziggurat in each city was built as an artificial mountain peak to remind the people of the Mountain of the Ark from which their ancestors had come. In later times, knowledge of the location of that mountain was forgotten and lost, only that in a general sort of way it was "in the east", for which reason they called it "the Mount of the East". So, in the main, they built their ziggurats, with the front side facing northeast because that was the direction from which their ancestors had come when "journeying from the east." But two noteworthy ziggurats are exceptions. One is at Babylon. The other was built not so very long afterwards by the Sumerians, after the dispersal, at their new holy city of Nippur, sixty miles south of Babylon. Both of these face directly to Anaran, the mountain of the Ark, so that a bearing taken from each intersects on the mountain itself. In no more convincing manner could these

early settlers have demonstrated their regard for the salvation that came to their fathers at the hand of God on that mountain.

They called their Tower *E-temen-anki* which means "the house (or temple) of the foundation of heaven and earth". By that they seem to have referred to what was to them, a very real "new heavens and a new earth" founded or laid down by the Lord after the Flood had swept away the old heavens and earth. *"The world that then was",* says Peter in 2 Pet. 3.6 *"being overflowed with water, perished. The world that now is, is reserved to judgment; and we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"*. They perhaps thought that the new heavens and earth was here already, not realising that sin was shortly to enter their society again and create what Peter again calls "this present evil world". The city they called by a name which meant "the Gate of God". It is noteworthy that the word is in the singular, not the plural, so supporting the evidence that as yet there was only one God known. In later times, when languages had differentiated, the sons of Shem, the Semites, from whom Abraham and Israel came, knew it as Bab-il, and the sons of Ham, the Sumerians, as Ka-dingir-ra, but both names mean the same, the Gate of God. At a symposium at Baghdad in 1979 organised by the Iraq government Department of Antiquities, dealing in part with the history of Babylon, it was stated that the original name was Bab-ila, given by a people before there was any distinction between Semites and Sumerians, whom the speaker named "proto-Euphrateans". This definition exactly fits these people who commenced to build the Tower before the races separated. Another name given to the city in association with Bab-il was Tin-tir-kj which means "the place of the forest (or trees) of life". Does this mean that those settlers believed that in this new world of theirs the way to the Tree of Life (in Genesis it is composite, grove, or group of trees of life) barred from man since the expulsion from Eden, was to be opened again to them? Is this an indication of their failure to realise that sin had not yet been finally overcome. Were they like Israel at Sinai twenty-six centuries later who thought they could keep the perfect law of God not realising that no man can do that without a Redeemer? If so, it becomes easier to see why the Lord had to put a stop to this project without delay.

They called the name of the country Shumir, the Semitic equivalent being Shumeru, from which we have the modern English Sumer for the land and

Sumerians for the people. Langdon in his "Sumerian Grammar" says the meaning is "Place of the faithful lord". There is a note of reverence in this name; they apparently dedicated this new land of theirs to God and named it after him.

At a point of time which was probably about two centuries after the episode of the Tower two successive rulers of the country bore archaic names which Jacobsen in "The Sumerian King Lists" (1966) has interpreted as bearing the meanings *"reign of righteousness"* and *"God listens with gladness"*. Here again, it seems there is a note of reverence for one God. Even then, five hundred years after the Flood, the shadow of idolatry had not yet fallen upon the human race.

But the Lord had to act. The presumption of men, however well-meaning, had to be halted and the Divine injunction to fill the earth obeyed. *"The people is one,"* He said *"they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them from thence upon the face of the earth; and they left off to build the city"* (vv 6-8). It need not be thought that there was some kind of instantaneous bestowal of various languages. What is more likely is that differences of ideas, of wishes, of policies, of methods of working, arose among this great concourse of people which first hindered and frustrated the work and then brought it to a halt. It would be strange were it otherwise. There were by now far too many people to ensure unanimity. The obvious and natural result was that the grandiloquent scheme was abandoned and the various communities began to drift away and re-establish themselves in new surroundings with those of like mind. That separation in itself sparked off the development of variant languages, a process that has continued as men spread over the world.

Later on, the project was resumed by those who remained in the land. The Tower was built, and stood for more than two thousand years. The city was built, and became one of the greatest and most magnificent cities the world has ever known. But they are all gone now and the site is rubble and broken bricks, desolate and barren. It started out to point the way to the true God of creation, but it quickly became the haven of false gods and the Lord abandoned it to its fate. And the sons of men spread outwards to populate the waiting earth.

(To be continued) AOH

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

4 - Delilah

Samson had now exercised rulership over Israel for twenty years without having made any contribution to the moral or religious progress of his people. The period was one of stagnation. Israel remained uneasily under the yoke of her Philistine masters, although it is very probable that while Samson lived the Philistines left them more or less alone, probably contenting themselves with the exacting of a certain amount of tribute in kind – wheat, olives, grapes, cattle, and so on. It was probably not as heavy a bondage as they had known in earlier times, and for that the credit went to Samson. It was not a time of religious revival; Israel in the main went on worshipping other gods and no voice was raised in the land calling them back to the God of their fathers.

The blame for this has to be laid at the door of the ruler. Samson had every possible advantage fitting him for the role of a national religious leader as well as political ruler. His Nazarite upbringing and early training coupled with unusual physical attributes could have marked him out as a leader whom all would follow. Had the power of God been behind him he would have been irresistible; but God can work only through men who are utterly and sincerely devoted to him, and Samson was not. He was too much a slave to his own fleshly desires and passions. It is impossible to read the story without realising that the women in Samson's life were the cause of his undoing and his failure to achieve what otherwise would have been a memorable destiny. Now after twenty years of unchallenged rule we find him entangled with yet another woman, Delilah of Sorek in Judah, forty miles from his home village of Zorah and not far from Etam where he had taken refuge from the pursuing Philistines twenty years earlier.

The nationality of Delilah is not known. She was not necessarily a Philistine – living in Judah so far from Philistine territory it is in fact unlikely that she was a member of that race. It has been thought that she was probably an Israelite, but there is something that does not ring true in the idea of any Israelite woman, however abandoned, betraying the hero of her nation to the unbelieving Philistines. It is perhaps more likely that she was an Amorite, a daughter of the people which inhabited Canaan when the children of Israel first entered the land, and whom Israel never succeeded in completely

driving out. Traces of Amorite descent still linger in even the present inhabitants of the land. The Amorites, like the Philistines, were exceptionally tall and well built, usually having fair hair and blue eyes; it is quite possible that Samson, himself a giant among his fellows, would feel a natural preference for the tall Amorite and Philistine women as against the more slightly built Hebrews. At any rate, we are told quite frankly and brutally that "*Samson loved a woman in the vale of Sorek named Delilah*". There is no intimation that he was married to her or had any intention of marrying her. The setting of the story lends colour to the supposition that he visited her whenever he saw fit and interspersed such times of dalliance between periods of attention to such of his duties as ruler in Israel that he chose to discharge. He had long ago given up any apprehension that he stood in any danger from the Philistines. Twenty years' confidence in what men would today call his "good luck", and reliance on his personal strength and agility, had built that impression firmly in his mind. As for the things of God, it is evident that he never gave them a thought.

Samson's infatuation for this woman did not go unnoticed. Such things rarely do. In this case it proved the subject of interested discussion in very high quarters indeed – no less than the councils of the five "lords of the Philistines". This word "lords" is the Hebrew "*seren*", describing an official rank amongst the Philistines which denoted a member of the quinvirate, or ruling executive of five, which governed affairs in the Philistine colony in Canaan. Samson had proved too elusive for all their efforts of twenty years past but they still wanted to get him in their power. His personal prowess had hitherto defied their schemes; could they get at him through this woman? Samson was neither the first man nor the last to be brought to ruin that way.

The upshot of all this was a visit to Delilah by duly accredited representatives of the five rulers. For information leading to successful apprehension of the hero they would each contribute the sum of eleven hundred *keseph* ("pieces of silver" in the Authorised Version). Five thousand five hundred silver *keseph* amounted to a sum that would have the purchasing power of about six thousand pounds sterling, or seventeen thousand dollars, in our day. Such a sum of money must have represented a big

temptation. True, no scope for spending it or even a fraction of it could possibly have existed in the primitive villages of Judah. However the emissaries would not have been slow to point out that life could be very different in any of the five Philistine cities, Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, Lachish or Gath. All were on or near the seacoast and replete with all the luxuries, the pleasures, and the vices also, of the Cretan civilisation from which they had sprung. They might well have pointed out that a smart girl like Delilah was wasted in a backwoods village like Sorek and upon a country-bred Hebrew like Samson. With her looks and money she could enjoy life and see life to the uttermost in the Philistine cities or even, perhaps, travel to Crete and move in the highest of Cretan society. There is nothing fantastic or impossible in all this, for human nature is much the same in all ages, and these arguments have been advanced, and accepted, in similar circumstances a myriad times in the world's history.

Delilah accepted the proposition. She agreed to betray the man who, for all his faults, trusted her, and to learn from him the secret of his great strength and how that strength could be nullified. One incidental evidence which might indicate that Delilah was not of Samson's own people is the fact that a Hebrew woman, unless profoundly and improbably ignorant of the Mosaic Law, would have known the Nazarite secret without having to worm it out of the man.

One would have thought that Samson, after a similar disastrous experience at his marriage twenty years earlier, would have been proof against a repetition. He would by now be at least in his early forties and, presumably, wiser in the ways of men, and women, than he had been in those past days. But there is no indication that he was any wiser, or at any rate more discreet. Perhaps the guileless blue eyes of the fair-haired Amorite damsel persuaded him that she was incapable of the villainy once perpetrated by his dark-eyed Philistine love. More likely it is that he had become reckless in the conviction that he was invulnerable, and that come what may, the Philistines could never capture. So whilst fully aware of the danger of revealing his secret he was prepared to "play with fire" in a spirit of bravado, purely to torment the Philistines with false hopes which would not be realised. So to Delilah's tearful entreaties he responded with an entirely fictitious story, to the effect that if he could be bound with seven green withs (the stem of a rush-like plant) that had never

been dried, his strength would go from him and he would become like any ordinary man. Delilah, being after all, only a simple country girl, believed him, and next time Samson visited her she had a suitable party of Philistines concealed in the chamber where she waited to receive him. Samson probably had a shrewd idea they were there, especially when Delilah proposed a pretty little piece of play-acting in which she would bind him with seven green withs just to see if his strength really would go from him. The giant probably assisted in adjusting his bonds, and stood there laughing as Delilah, believing that her fifty five hundred keseph were as good as in her purse, called out the pre-arranged signal "*the Philistines be upon thee, Samson*". Even as his would-be captors burst forth from their hiding-place he had snapped his bonds "*like a thread of tow in the fire*" and was gone, laughing uproariously at the joke.

It was not long before the moth was again fluttering around the candle, to be met by more tears and reproaches. There was probably a certain amount of comforting to be done, and in order completely to restore friendly relations Samson indicated to Delilah that the real trouble was that the green withs had snapped unexpectedly. What were actually needed were two new ropes that had never been stretched. This sounded reasonable enough; it may be imagined that Delilah, in consultation with her advisers, took a few lessons in knot tying. It was not desired that the fiasco of the last occasion be repeated. It was then necessary to wait until Samson's next visit was due; it does not seem however that he allowed affairs of State to interfere too much with pleasure, so that before very long the Philistines again lay concealed in Delilah's room - but with no better result than before.

This was discouraging. Delilah would have a hard time explaining to the Philistines that all this was not her fault; she was doing her best. She was probably told she had got to do better; there may even have been threats of possible unpleasant consequences in the event of failure. At any rate, perhaps with some misgiving, she approached her admirer once again.

Samson was getting reckless. Mischievously, as his eyes fell upon the loom standing in the corner of the room - a loom was a very necessary implement to every woman in those days - he suggested that an effective method of curbing his strength would be to weave his long hair in with the web of the partly made cloth even then standing on the

loom. Delilah would look at the loom and realise that a man whose hair was woven in with the cross-threads to make a piece of cloth, tightly stretched on the loom, would be quite unable to break free unless he scalped himself. The more Delilah considered the idea the more foolproof she felt it to be. The loom was a heavy timber construction and once securely fastened to that a man's enemies could easily make short work of him.

The next step was to persuade Samson to act the part he had facetiously suggested. He may or may not have demurred a little. Some thought may have crossed his mind that he could conceivably tempt his good fortune too far. Perhaps Delilah intimated to him that the continued granting of her favours would be dependent upon compliance with her wishes, and he, infatuated man that he was, would comply rather than risk losing the object of his desires.

So it came about that on a set night the hopeful captors crouched in their hiding place while the loom creaked and turned as Delilah steadily wove her lover's luxuriant hair with her balls of yarn into the strangest cloth ever woven by an Amorite woman. When it was finished the weaving lay wound tightly around the roller (the "beam" of the Authorised Version narrative) which Delilah thoughtfully locked with the "pin" to avoid any possibility of unrolling. Samson must have presented a pitiable and undignified sight with his head drawn close up to the roller, around which his hair was now wound, and his body sprawled across the woodwork of the loom. What more fitting a picture could, there be of a man who had become a complete slave to his own weaknesses? Could the writer of the Book of Proverbs, a couple of centuries later, want any better inspiration for his picture of any man caught in the same kind of snare? *"With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goes after her straightway, as an ox goes to the slaughter or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life"* (Prov. 7.21-23).

So, for the third time, the Philistines sprang out expecting this time that there could be no escape. But they had still under-estimated their quarry's strength. With one mighty heave Samson wrecked the loom, tearing free the roller with its roll of cloth into which his hair had been woven, together with the broken pin and such parts of the loom as could

not be detached from the cloth, and was away. The account does not record how, on arrival home, he explained the peculiar condition of his hair and perhaps his beard, ostensibly sacred to God, but now inexplicably and inextricably woven in with some woman's weaving material. Neither does it say how many women of Samson's household laboured, and for how long, to disentangle the yarn from the hair and restore his flowing locks to their usual luxuriance. In any case Samson's own people must by now have become well used to his eccentricities and only a few of the older ones who had regard for the God of Israel and remembered the circumstances of Samson's birth, would shake their heads sadly and look hopelessly at one another.

Here in this story is enshrined all the tragedy of a man who flirts with temptation and whose successive escapes from serious consequences only encourage him to live even more dangerously. In a sense it is the story of mankind, fallen into sin. Only utter disaster and heartbreak at the end brings him to a consciousness of his own folly and the true means of reformation and eventual happiness. So it was with Samson; so it is with all men who tread this way.

At this stage the Philistines apparently lost interest and went home. The attempt to capture Samson with the help of Delilah was written off. But Delilah had no intention of giving up so easily. The promised reward still dazzled her. So she resumed her efforts with Samson and began to wear down his resistance. He was apparently seeing a great deal of her now, for *"it came to pass when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, that he told her all his heart"* Wearied by her importunity, and lacking strength of character to resist, he at length imparted the fatal secret. *"There hath not come a razor upon my head, for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my birth"*.

With that admission Samson signed his own death warrant. Delilah's instinct told her that this time he had revealed the truth. Maybe she waited a while to lull any suspicion on Samson's part that she might make use of the information. His utter blindness to possible consequences is almost incomprehensible except on the supposition that he relied again on his own physical ability to extricate himself from any difficulty into which Delilah might seek to involve him. He was now altogether entrapped in the snare of his own folly and he could not escape. Delilah was clever enough and unscrupulous enough to do so.

pulous enough to know how to hold and keep him. The expression in Judges 16, 19, "*she made him sleep upon her knees*" is almost identical with an ancient Sumerian allusion which would indicate that Delilah held him in an intimate embrace from which he had neither strength nor will to loose himself. Devoid of all feelings of modesty or shame, she held him thus fast whilst her confederate deftly shaved the luxuriant tresses from the head of the unheeding giant, oblivious to all but his passion. The task completed, triumphantly and cruelly she jerked him back into consciousness with the familiar words "*The Philistines be upon you, Samson*".

This tragic highlight to the story demands more careful consideration than any other part of the narrative. Samson, shorn of his locks, found himself suddenly bereft of the mighty strength which had so long been his and in which he had trusted. He himself had apparently believed that the secret of his strength lay in his standing as a Nazarite, the symbol of which was his long hair. And the symbol meant more to him than the reality. It would seem that he could break every law of God and every aspect of his vow without considering his status as a Nazarite imperilled but he must retain his long hair. Samson's tragedy was to hold to the symbol whilst rejecting the reality behind the symbol, and that has been the tragedy of a great many Christians and has led them into excesses as great, or greater, than those of Samson.

Must it then be assumed that the removal of the hero's "seven locks of hair" was in fact the actual cause of his loss of vital strength? As a medical or physical reason the idea is absurd. It has also to be noted that nowhere in the story of Samson, or elsewhere in the Bible, is unusual physical strength said to be inherent in the Nazarite's long hair. Samuel was a Nazarite but no indication is given that he was of other than ordinary physique. The idea that the strength was in his hair rests entirely on Samson's own testimony and represents only his

own belief.

If then Samson's physical strength was not affected by the shaving of his head, to what must be attributed the fact that at this moment his strength evidently did desert him, and at last he fell into the power of his enemies? What was it that happened in the instant he said "*I will go out and shake myself, as other times before. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.*"?

He had betrayed his God. That was the terrible realisation which smote Samson with all the force of a sledge-hammer blow as he leapt up and realised that the hair in which he had taken such pride was gone. He was no longer a Nazarite and God was departed from him. It had been so long since, he had given any thought to the things of God that he had become quite unable to distinguish between the reality and the symbol. Whilst he kept his unshaven locks he gloried in the strength which he believed they conferred on him and cared not one jot about the remainder of God's commands. Now he had lost that which had been his glory. In one moment of acute self perception he saw himself as he was, a man whose persistent self indulgence had separated him from God and blinded him to the calling of God and at the end had betrayed him into the hands of the enemies of God. The bitterness of that moment deprived him of all power to resist, and as his exultant enemies led him away securely bound, he went with them passively, helplessly, a broken-hearted and despairing man. His own foolishness and wickedness had led to the loss of that which made him a man of God and with that loss he had lost all. God had departed from him and he would never again possess strength with which to outwit and overcome his enemies. Bitter thoughts possessed his mind as he trudged wearily into Gaza and through the cheering crowds, who came to gloat over the capture of the man who had been their scourge for twenty years.

(To be continued) AOH

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

25 - Chapter 21

*Notes to aid
personal Bible Study*

vv 1-4 A widow's gift. Was Jesus resting after the controversies with religious leaders? Offerings for the Temple treasury were made in the Women's court, so named because women were allowed to enter the Temple thus far. Money was thrown into thirteen trumpet shaped offertory boxes. Each box was labelled according to how the money offered

would be used. Affluent people threw in large sums of money that they were able to afford comfortably. Then a destitute woman, a poor (*penichra*) widow with none to support her, went quietly to the trumpets to throw in all that she had, two tiny coins. It is fascinating how Jesus noticed the spiritual qualities of women during the course of His ministry.

The New Bible Dictionary, (1962) equates one of the copper coins (*lepta*) with a tenth of an old English penny (or an eighth of an American cent). It is supposed that this is the lowest value offering permitted. Yet Jesus insisted that this was the most generous gift – it was a big sacrifice and needed a tremendous effort, giving all she had in this world. It contrasted with the 'pretence' piety of the religious rich. Jesus saw the sacrifice and the spirit in which the lady made her offering.

vv 5-24 Is the remainder of the chapter controversial? Does it contrast to the many records of Jesus' compassionate concern for the less fortunate? Verse 7 provides reasons for Jesus' discussion of the great crises in human history. The disciples were admiring the wonderful Temple buildings and Jesus told them about the destruction of the Temple. Is Luke's account clearer because there is less detail? The disciples asked when this would happen to the Temple. Mark too writes of the one simple question although he tells us that it was asked by Peter, James, John and Andrew privately. Matthew (chapter 24) is rather more complex – there the questioners link the destruction of the Temple with Jesus' Second Advent and the end of the 'Age'. Was this a discussion of one single occasion or were there several such occasions? Does Luke's record tell us the answer to all the questions in Matthew's Gospel? It appears more precise in separating the events around AD70 (v.25) from those concerning the end of the age and the return of Jesus?

Does the prophecy that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles over a period of time after the destruction of the city, show that Christ did not return in AD 70 as some believe?

How important are the several warnings that Jesus gave about deception in this chapter? Certainly He did not satisfy idle curiosity and Acts 1.7 contains a strong warning "*It is not for you to know the times and dates the Father has set by his own authority*" (NIV) and this matches Matt. 24.36.

The prediction of wars, earthquakes, famines and diseases would be quite terrifying to those who did not know the reason or the ultimate triumph. Does history record such events at any particular point in the last two millennia particularly around AD 70 and in the Twentieth century? How would Jesus' followers distinguish normal from abnormal?

How does Ghengis Khan differ from the Roman Caesars or the 'Black Death' from the great plagues? How have the events during the last 500

and 1000 years differed from today? Those who would understand these verses must be careful objective observers of what is happening in the world today. It is easy to see these events happening in our own time and be ignorant of what has happened in history. Students need to be very familiar with the appropriate prophecies (eg The Day of the Lord, Isaiah 13; Joel 2; Amos 5). Parts of Jesus' discourse here must refer to the First Century; but some sections must refer to a much later period when Messiah would return. These passages have given students of prophecy plenty of scope for interpretation. Most important are the warnings of sufferings and hopes of future glory given by these verses. As Barclay says, Jesus' disciples could be sure that He would always be with them through the worst of the storms and they could depend on Him to bring them safely through whatever the trouble.

As with so much that is in the Bible we need to be clear how the Scripture being considered should be interpreted, literally or symbolically and is the suffering spiritual and physical?

Geldenhuis suggests, the events in AD70 foreshadow what is to happen at the end of the age – certainly with respect to persecution by Nero of the Church. Many Jewish Christians did flee from Jerusalem to the trans-Jordan town of Pella. They were the first ones permitted back to re-populate the city.

Critical scholars have tried to explain the prediction of events leading up to the Romans' crushing Jewish resistance, but Jesus' words have been fulfilled so accurately that there is no point in explaining them away. Josephus' record of the Jewish wars is worthy of examination. Campbell Morgan has shown that the events which Jesus describes later in the prophecy could not possibly have been fulfilled either at 66-70 AD or during the age that followed.

The parabolic picture of the fig tree putting forth its leaves has been an interesting point of contention as to its relevance to the Jewish awakening before the end of the age. The words "and all the trees" cause some commentators to believe that this is not a reference to the Jewish people's return to their own land.

If Christians make the contention too sharp over Jesus' prophetic utterances they lose the benefit of His warnings and His expressed desire that "*they all may be one as we are one.*"

PAUL'S LAST LETTER

It may not be the last letter that Paul ever wrote, but 2 Timothy is his last epistle to be preserved in the Bible. When he writes it, he knows that he is near death. *"The last drops of my life are being poured out for God. The time for my departure has arrived"* (4.6). *"At my first defence no one supported me. All deserted me"* (4.16). *"Yet the Lord himself stood by me and gave me the strength to proclaim the message clearly and fully so that the Gentiles could hear."* On that occasion Paul was rescued 'from the Lion's mouth'. But what next? He believed the Lord would deliver him from every evil plot, and keep him safe until he reached His heavenly kingdom (4.18). Paul knew who he had believed, who would keep trust through all his life until 'that day' (1.12). He knew that he had fought the good fight and had finished the course. He had kept the faith. And in future the Lord would in all justice award him the crown of righteousness which all who love His appearing may expect.

As for Timothy? He was the son of a mixed marriage between a Greek father and a mother from a Jewish family whom Paul came to know well. A native of Lystra, where he met Paul on his first missionary journey, his family accepted the Christian faith. He was well thought of by local believers, and when Paul visited again, he took Timothy to join his team of workers in travels all round the eastern Mediterranean over a period of some 17 years. Timothy was sent on special missions, and was associated in the writing of many of Paul's letters. When Paul had been set free from his first imprisonment at Rome and travelled once more, he left Timothy at Ephesus. But soon Paul was once more arrested, and was writing to this young man whom he thought of as a son.

Paul was remembering Timothy in his prayers night and day. He remembered their parting, and longed to see him again. His mind went back to their early days together, to Timothy's mother and grandmother, and how his laying his hands on Timothy had brought a gift from God into his life. Twice in the letter Paul calls him 'my son', 'my beloved son'. And as parents do, he filled the letter with instructions and advice, reminding Timothy of what he ought to do.

1st Timothy must stir up the inner fire God gave when Paul ordained him (1.6)

2nd He must not be ashamed of speaking out for the Lord, or for Paul in prison (1.8)

- 3rd He should be prepared to accept his share of hardship for the gospel (1.8)
- 4th He should stick by the sound teaching Paul had given him (1.13)
- 5th He should guard the treasure entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit (1.14)
- 6th He should be strong in Christ's grace (2.1)
- 7th The message must be entrusted to reliable men (2.2)
- 8th (as 3) He should suffer hardship like a loyal soldier (2.3)
- 9th He should consider how devoted he must be to his task - like a soldier, or an athlete, or a farmer (2.4-7)
- 10th He should remember Jesus, who is risen from the dead and was descended from King David (2.8)
- 11th He must remind people that
 - 1. If we die with Christ we shall live with him
 - 2. If we endure with Christ we shall reign with him
 - 3. If we deny him, He will deny us
 - 4. If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He should tell them not to have disputes about words (2.11-13)
- 12th He must be diligent to gain God's approval as a good workman dealing rightly with the word of truth (2.15)
- 13th Avoid worldly and empty chatter (2.16)
- 14th Have nothing to do with the turbulent desires of youth (2.22)
- 15th Pursue goodness, integrity, love and peace (2.22)
- 16th Have nothing to do with silly controversies (2.23)
- 17th Realise that difficult times are coming in the last days (3.1)
- 18th Avoid hypocrites (3.5)
- 19th (as 4) Go on steadily in the things he has learned (3.14)
- 20th A solemn charge: preach the word; be ready; reprove, rebuke and exhort with all patience (4.1-2)
- 21st Keep your mind sane and balanced, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, carry out the full commission God gave you (4.5)

All this, in the space of four brief chapters! What else is left for Paul to say? It is very interest-

ing to notice what truths Paul mentions in the course of this letter. They are thoughts which are on his heart. It is urgent for Timothy to grasp them and pass them on to those who are becoming Christians.

1.9 God has saved us and called us with a holy calling. This is not because of what we have done, but by His own plan to do this for us through Jesus. It is a plan made before time began, but was brought to light when Jesus came on earth. Jesus has abolished death, and immortality came to light as Paul preached the gospel.

2.8 Jesus is risen from the dead.

2.10-13 Paul's purpose in his sufferings is to bring the message to the people whom God has chosen, as a means for them to receive salvation in Christ Jesus and eternal glory. He quotes the saying that those who are faithful to Christ will live and reign with Him.

2.19 God knows who belongs to Him (and will save them). The corollary of this is that those who claim to be God's must not do anything evil.

2.22, 24-5 All who sincerely call on the Lord should aim for righteousness, faith, love and peace. As God's slave Timothy should be: not quarrelsome ... kind to all ... able to teach ... patient when wronged ... correcting opponents gently.

3.1-9 Difficult times will come in the last days. Paul lists all the evil that will be in men's hearts. He especially condemns pseudo-Christians of various kinds (4.3 They will not accept wholesome teach-

ing.)

3.10 By contrast, Timothy was aware of Paul's teaching ... way of life ... purpose ... faith ... endurance ... love ... courage. He had been witness of Paul's persecutions and sufferings. All who desire to live good Christian lives can expect persecution.

3.15-17 Timothy should trust those who have taught him, and the holy scriptures. The words that God has inspired should open the mind, resulting in faith in Christ and salvation. The scriptures are the full equipment of the man of God, and are useful to teach, reprove, correct and train a person.

4.1 Christ Jesus is to judge the living and the dead, by His appearing and kingdom.

These are great themes, and among them there is a continual personal theme in this letter. Paul tells of his love for Timothy, his anxiety for his work. He makes personal requests. *"Do come to me soon."* (4.9) *"I'm on my own, except for Luke"* (4.11). *"Bring Mark - he's useful. There's my cloak to bring, and the books and manuscripts. Especially the manuscripts."* *"Give my love to Prisca and Aquila, and to Onesiphorus and his family."* *"Do come before winter."* *"I have fought the good fight ... I have kept the faith ... henceforth..."*

"Timothy, the Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."

(Versions referred to for this article: New American Standard, J. B. Phillips) GC

HULDAH

A short study of a remarkable lady

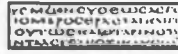
Huldah the prophetess lived in the days of Josiah, king of Judah. It was the happy twilight in Judah's history before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Josiah, at the age of 8, decided to remove the pagan gods, the Baal, with all their priests and sacrifices. He ordered the restoration of the Temple that Solomon built. As the rubbish was removed some ancient scrolls were discovered. Shaphan, the court secretary read them to Josiah who was alarmed at what he heard. Unless there was spiritual repentance and reformation according to Moses' Law, Judah would follow Israel to destruction.

Without hesitation he sent the High Priest, Hilkiah, to enquire of Yahweh, their God, what they should do. The religious leaders went not to the young Jeremiah but to Huldah, the prophetess, who was also wife of Shallum, who was responsible for the court robes. She was a genuine prophetess, in the line of prophets through whom God had spoken, to Israel from the days of Samuel. She told Hilkiah of the ultimate tragedy of Judah but be-

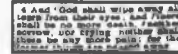
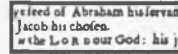
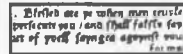
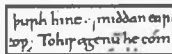
cause of the devout young King Josiah, it would not come till he slept with his fathers. It is a wonderful message in which God is ready to forgive those who truly repent and determine to worship and serve Him.

Huldah was no longer young and she had lived through the reign of one of Judah's worst kings, Manasseh. Against all the wickedness and religious malpractice in the worship of Baal, this woman had kept alive the true faith. She recognised the Word of the LORD as soon as she saw it and she spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit, communicating God's message. Did she have any hand in the education in righteousness of the young king? However that may be, Judah had been given a temporary respite from God's wrath. Huldah "seems to have been of some repute and held in some respect. Her words leave us in no doubt as to the forthrightness of her allegiance to the God of Israel."

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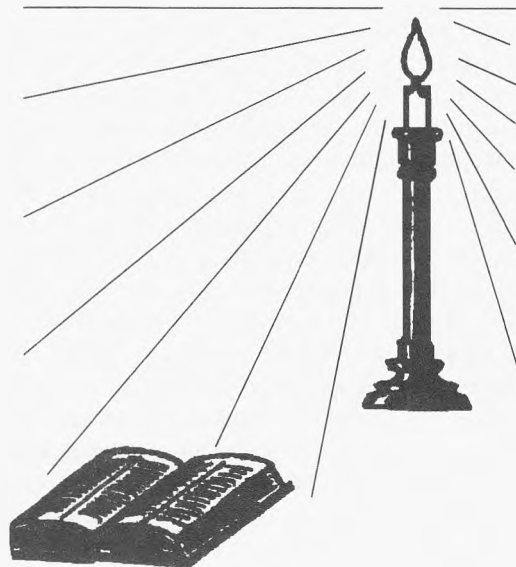
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

In Greek tradition Odysseus was a famous warrior, King of Ithaca, and Orpheus a great musician. Somewhere in the ocean, a long way from Greece, there lay an island on which dwelt three maidens, known as the Sirens. Their singing was so sweet and compelling that any sailors upon whose ears the strains of their song fell were driven to turn their ships to shore, where the Sirens met them and after making them intoxicated with wine, slew them and devoured their flesh. No seafarer, said the story-tellers, had ever heard the Sirens' song and escaped with his life. So Odysseus determined that he would be the first to hear the song and yet live to tell the tale. A time came when his ship came within sight of the enchanted island. Odysseus commanded his men to bind him firmly to the main mast with leather cords, stop their own ears with wax and row swiftly past. As they came near the three maidens could be seen making gestures to the travellers to come closer. The sweetness of their voices seemed to draw the very soul of Odysseus out of his body. He struggled and strained to break his bonds that encircled him. He alternately implored and commanded his men to set him free; he groaned and cried in agony as they refused to heed him, until, bending to their oars they had carried their ship out of earshot and their commander was himself again.

Later on, Orpheus, the sweet musician at whose playing, it was said, the birds hushed their songs and wild beasts became docile and gentle, passed the Island of Sirens. But there were no bands and no straining in agony this time. Orpheus played his lyre so skillfully and sang so sweetly that neither he nor his shipmates heard so much as a note of the Sirens' song, and they passed swiftly by the fateful place into safety.

So it is with the Christian. We may, as Odysseus

did experience a temptation but put ourselves in a situation where we are prevented from succumbing to it. This is doubtful conduct, showing perhaps curiosity about the world, the flesh and the devil, perhaps a reliance on pride in our own cleverness and strength of character. We may get by, for God will surely honour our good intentions, but it will prove to be a hard way. Much easier will it be if we fix our eyes upon Jesus and let His voice ring in our ears; the temptations then will not obtrude themselves so easily upon our notice and we shall withstand them with greater ease. God does not ask us to give up anything that this world has to offer without putting something else in its place. Perhaps that is why Jesus gave the parable of the man who was cleansed of a demon but put nothing else in his mind and life to replace the obsession. The demon looked back and saw his old home empty, swept and garnished. So he took seven other demons more evil than himself and they all entered in and dwelt there, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. And there was no need for it. The man could have filled his emptied mind with Christ. So should we, "*bringing every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ*," so being transformed at the last into his own image.

AOH

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In publishing the Bible Study Monthly and other literature we try to reach all ages often using modern translations. We keep articles to moderate length with varied presentation and retain original viewpoints when reprinted material is updated. We publish what is believed to have a wide interest; but everything printed may not necessarily be the opinion of those responsible for editing.

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

2 - Prophetic Foresight

A series of notes on the principles underlying prophetic interpretation

The class of prophecy to which is applied the description "prophetic foresight" is that which foretells events yet to happen in the affairs of men, and which is described, spoken or written, by the prophet but is not the result of visions or dreams. It has to do chiefly with the affairs of this world and generally has some direct relation with the condition of the world in the prophet's own day. Although the influence of the Holy Spirit is behind the giving of such prophecy, its utterance is also dependent upon the prophet's own foresight into the affairs of men and nations, and his observation of world or national events. It follows therefore that such a man is not a recluse or a mystic, retiring from contact with the world and its affairs into a secret retreat of his own, confining his thoughts and his utterances to the unseen things of God's spiritual world. It is one who takes a lively and intelligent interest in the events of his day and concerns of his fellow-men. It is for this reason that we find prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel closely connected with the political affairs of their day and often holding high office in the State. This does not mean that Christians today are necessarily called to follow their example in this respect; it does mean that such a station in life was God's will for them and had its place in the orderly development of His Plan.

This class of prophecy, then, is mainly concerned with predictions of the course of world history during the progress of this 'present evil world' up to its close and the establishment of the Kingdom. Prophecies concerning the 'Kingdom or Millennial Age' are usually of a different nature, based upon visions. The scenes of the coming Age rise before the prophet's eyes so that he can describe what he actually sees. The type of prophecy now being considered does not come by means of such visions, but from the illumination of an already instructed mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. The prophet lays himself out to be the recipient of Divine instruction concerning the future, by studiously observing current events and diligently learning the lessons of past history. The knowledge of human action and reaction thus obtained enables him intelligently to receive the information regarding the future that the Holy

Spirit is waiting to impart.

Such a man must therefore and first of all acquire a knowledge of those Divine principles which ought to govern the conduct of earthly affairs. He must become a student of Divine Law and this involves diligent study of the Scriptures. He must also be an observer of the habits and lives of his fellow men, and of world conditions and events. Thus he applies Divine principles to them, perceives how *every* infraction of those principles is reflected in the further degeneration of the human race. From this he learns how to deduce the probable outcome of the state of affairs in the world as it exists in his own time, and to warn his fellows of the dangers of the course of conduct they are following.

This is so often the burden of those Hebrew prophets who lived in the days of the monarchy, from David to Zedekiah and onward to the end of Old Testament history. Nearly all the books from Isaiah to Malachi have predominantly the same note. *"Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59.2). *"And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear I will even send a curse upon you says the Lord of Hosts"* (Malachi 2.1-4). Therefore *"woe to them that go down to Egypt for help"* cries Isaiah (31.3) referring to Judah's leaning toward political alliance with Egypt at that time *"but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel"*. He goes on to predict that the power of Egypt shall fail, and with that failure Judah will fall also, *"When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helps shall fall, and he that is helped shall fall down, and they all shall fail together."* The rulers and the people of Israel took no notice of His words then, but they must have remembered them a few years later when Sennacherib's general stood with his army outside the walls of Jerusalem. He declaimed in tones of the bitterest sarcasm *"Lo, you trust in the staff of that broken reed, on Egypt on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it, so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him"* (Isa. 36.6). And it was then that Isaiah's prophetic foresight was doubly vindicated, for in the same breath that he had declared woe to Judah for going

to Egypt for help he also predicted a great Divine deliverance. *"As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem passing over he will preserve it... then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword"* (31.5 & 8). That prediction was fulfilled in the celebrated destruction of Sennacherib's host in one night outside the walls and in his own violent death at the hands of an assassin (37.36-38). The entire section, chapters 20 to 37 of Isaiah, covering a period of some thirty years from Sargon's campaign against Ashdod (20.1) to Sennacherib's death, is a splendid example of this particular type of prophecy. Isaiah's shrewd summing up of the situation added to the influence of the Holy Spirit working on his mind, enabled him correctly to estimate the immediate political consequences of his countrymen's attitude and also to foresee ultimate Divine intervention.

In a very real sense, therefore, these prophets were in the world, mixing freely with their own fellows, maintaining a lively interest in events and trends of the day, whilst most definitely not being of the world. In this, their lives are an example to us, for we too, if we would be *"as men that wait for their lord"* must have that same lively interest in the changing panorama of world events and the same aptitude for correctly interpreting that panorama in the light of Divine prophecy, as did they. We therefore cannot assent to the principle of the monastic life, one that demands withdrawal into a pious seclusion, experiencing nothing of what goes on in the world outside. Our Christianity must be vigorous and practical, based upon a recognition that we are God's warriors in this world and His witnesses testifying to the utter inadequacy of any system other than His coming Kingdom for the bringing of life and happiness to men. Nevertheless we must realise that not all believers are called to observe the changing of prophecy into history with that clarity of vision that is so characteristic of the Hebrew prophets. All do not possess the powers of intellect so to understand world events. It must always be true that many will obtain their understanding of these things from the relative few whose natural talents, consecrated to God and so amenable to the power of the Holy Spirit, can be so used for the assistance of their fellows. So it must have been in the days of natural Israel. There were many pious, God-fearing Israelites, students of the Scriptures, waiting and looking for the coming Kingdom but they were not

all like Isaiah or Jeremiah. One or two prophets in a generation were all that God needed then; and so now, *"God that set the members in the body as it has pleased him"* and all members have not the same office.

There are many striking examples of this kind of prophecy in the Scriptures. The story of Jeremiah and Hananiah is one such (see Jer. 28). Hananiah had promised that within two full years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would be broken and Judah would be free. Jeremiah replied that the prediction was false, that the yoke would not be broken: moreover, since Hananiah had prophesied falsely, he would die within that same year. Two months later Hananiah died – and the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar did remain on Judah for seventy years. Jeremiah gauged the power of Babylon more correctly than did Hananiah: and he knew that in consequence of Judah's transgression the "seventy years" of captivity was to come upon them. So far his prophetic foresight aided him in coming to a true conclusion. But his knowledge that Hananiah was to die within a few months reveals the illumination of the Holy Spirit, guiding his mind so that the prediction he uttered was not entirely of himself, but was inspired and directed of God.

History sometimes repeats itself. A sequel to a set of conditions existing in the world at one time is often matched by the sequel to the same set of conditions existing at another time. It may be that the prophecy of an Old Testament seer, intended to refer to his own people and generation, becomes equally applicable to another people and generation where the same conditions obtain. It would seem that God has caused to be recorded such prophecies to the deliberate end that they be so used for the instruction of later generations of God's people. Thus when Jesus gave his famous prophecy of the End Time on the Mount of Olives, He cast His words in a mould that also fitted the events about to befall the people of Judea in His own day. The ending of the Jewish Age was an anticipation in miniature of the ending of the Gospel Age. Hence much of the prophecy in Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 has a double application, one in miniature to the events of AD 70, and another, on a greater scale, to the events of the present time. Another case that comes readily to mind, is the promise of Malachi that God would send Elijah before the coming of the day of the Lord. Jesus said that this

prophecy was fulfilled in His own day (Matt. 11.14) and yet it is clear that a further fulfilment must be expected at the end of this Age. It does not follow that every prophecy must of necessity be applied in this fashion.

The Book of Nahum is a case in point. Nahum lived with his brethren of the Captivity in the mountainous country north-east of Nineveh, a generation or so after the Ten Tribes had been transported from their own land. He broke into a passionate denunciation of Nineveh and foretold its coming destruction. From his own observation he knew that its iniquity had come to the full. The great repentance of the time of Jonah was at least a hundred and fifty years in the past and the city had long since gone back to its bad ways. Nahum sensed that the time of judgment had come, and in three short chapters he foretold, in superb language, the coming destruction. The whole of his predictions were fulfilled within the next half century, and with that fulfilment, the prophecy served its purpose. There is nothing in it to justify its application to events at this end of the Age, and nothing in later Scriptures to authorise its use as such a prophecy.

Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies of the fall of Babylon constitute an instance of the opposite principle. Their vivid descriptions of Divine judgment upon that city are used in the Book of Revelation in a setting that points unmistakably to the end of the Age. We can, therefore, if we wish, take these prophecies to have a double application, in the first place to the literal overthrow of the

literal city – and although Jeremiah spoke more than fifty years before the event, his words were wonderfully and accurately fulfilled. In the second place to the downfall of the great world system of evil which Babylon so fitly pictured. We need therefore to view these "political" prophecies against the background of the times and the circumstances in which they were written. We then must note what use is made of them by later Biblical writers of the New Testament, and decide whether or not a particular prophecy is intended to convey a meaning beyond its purely local one. We may have to give up some cherished interpretations in the process, but the prophecies that we do accept as having definite bearing upon our own day and time will become fraught with deeper meaning and rest upon a more secure and logical basis than before. Some knowledge of the history of the prophet's own period is therefore essential when it comes to interpreting such prophecies. The knowledge of such history is constantly being amplified by research and discovery. It follows that our understanding of these things will be subject to clarification as time goes on. The interpretations of the nineteenth-century commentators are often quite out of date in the twenty-first.

The next article in this series is entitled "Visions and Dreams" and will examine the difference between "prophets" and "seers" and the conditions under which holy men of old have received revelations regarding things to come.

(To be continued) AOH

Miles Coverdale prefixed to his translation of the Bible, certain 'Rules for Reading the Bible': "It shall greatly helpe to understande the Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or wrytten, but of whom, to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before, and what followeth."

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them! Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them! Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised." Matthew 5.3-5 Good News Bible, The Bible Societies, Collins Fontana 1976

Let me use disappointments as material for patience;
Let me use success as material for thankfulness:
Let me use suspense as material for perseverance:
Let me use danger as material for courage.
Let me use reproach as material for long-suffering:
Let me use praise as material for humility:
Let me use pleasure as material for temperance
Let me use pains as material for endurance.

John Baillie 1886-1960

CHRIST IN YOU

An essay

Enshrined in those simple words is one of the most important doctrines of Scripture. Some might say the most important and daring assumption that any 'religion' could make. It is also an idea that can readily become lost in a repetition of saying and be meaningless. Perhaps that is why Paul and other New Testament writers used different approaches to the same idea.

In Colossians 1.27 (RSV) Paul wrote *"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* 'Them' refers to the saints; not people awarded a title after they are dead, but all those who are truly the people of God, whom He has made holy through Christ. One of the objectives of being 'in Christ' is that His real followers may grow up in Christ and become like Him. 'In Christ' is a favourite expression of the Apostle and we must ask whether this is the same as 'Christ in you'. The question may be answered as we proceed with the study. There are other expressions such as 'in the Lord' and 'Christ be formed in you'.

In Col. 1.27 Paul refers to a 'mystery' which he says had been kept secret for ages. This is not a mystery of the type found in the Greek mystery religions or among the Gnostics.

Such pagan mysteries belong to the few initiated into the ritual and kept secret from the vast majority of adherents. Nor were they the kind of secret that the Jews had known concerning the purpose of God but which had not hitherto been disclosed to the Gentiles. This was the whole revelation of God in Christ – of man being brought close to God through Christ in a new relationship. The people of Israel had but dimly seen this great conception of the Divine purpose and few had perceived the suffering Messiah, the Son of God. That anyone could share His life was the great mystery now being explained by the Apostle Paul. Paul was not alone in this revelation for Christ Himself had been the first to make the matter known in the great exposition at the Lord's Supper, in John 14-16. In John 15.5 we read *"I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."* Most scholars would agree that the four gospels were not written before Paul's letters but their teaching must have been circulating in the early church. Paul was given

seed thoughts which he developed by revelation of the Holy Spirit so that he was able to explain how this mystery was not only operating but available to all Christians to bring them to the fulness of Christ.

Moses had been given a wonderful idea of the character of God. Jeremiah was given glimpses of how the image of that character was going to be restored to the life of the believer – the New Law of Christ was going to be written on the fleshy tables of the heart. But they could not foresee or know how that was going to be outworked by Christ living within the believer. How could it be different from a true Israelite following the teachings of Moses and obeying God's Law given through covenant at Sinai? How would it be different from the disciples of many of the great prophets who taught about the character and teachings of God? Saul of Tarsus knew the Law, the Histories and the Prophets of Israel as well as anyone. He put tremendous physical and intellectual effort into obedience to God's Word as he found it in Israel's Holy Writings yet he was aware of spiritual failure. The pattern of good men and women and the commandments of God alone were not enough to rid the soul of sin. This is shown in Romans 7.

The example and pattern of Christ are vital as John writes *"he who abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked"* (1 John 2.5, 6). During Jesus' earthly lifetime the disciples had tried so hard to walk in the Master's steps and tried so hard to keep His commandments. Yet they found themselves often out of step with Him. They found it so difficult to obey. The old nature, the human nature, had not been changed by their efforts to obey; nor had their pre-conceived notions of holiness been changed by looking at Him.

Slowly a change came over the disciples and was noticeable in the "twelve" about whom most is written. Some of the women too had caught something of the spirit of Jesus, judging from His remarks. The real difference came after Pentecost when the 'risen Christ' sent the power of God's spirit into their lives. The cowardly, confused men of Gethsemane and crucifixion days became bold clear speakers of the Gospel. Some of them had been prejudiced, and could think in no other grooves than their tradition, but now were adventurously crossing man-made boundaries and

launching out toward the Kingdom of God.

The commandment and the pattern were still vital to their growth and service. Through the whole Christian era godly men and women have walked the way of Christ and have found the necessity of knowing and obeying the Word of God. Others have sought wisdom of the Greeks and human philosophies and science; of the occult, subservience to human emotions and supernatural forces, only to find that they have parted company with Christ the Son of God. The example and commandments of Christ are vitally important to our recognition of Him and it is through the Word that He still speaks to us and directs our footsteps. What is important to us is that human ingenuity and will power – and indeed human passion and physical powers, are not enough to make us do the things that we would do if we could fully understand the Bible. Our powers of reason and intuition are not enough to unravel either the mysteries of God's purpose or the way in which our lives should be shaped and guided. We depend upon Christ Jesus our Lord – that He lives in us – and we in Him. This is clearly the thought of Jesus in John 14.23 when He said to the disciples that He and the Father would make their home with those who loved Him and obeyed His commands. This is not just a mystical expression of the supernatural based upon our nervous system that having a religious experience, seeing, hearing and feeling things with the natural senses. The people of God have had these experiences – in the days of the Old Testament and in the period since then – members of the Christian church. But the religion of the Bible was not totally based on those experiences – nor did all God's people have them. Only a select small minority was to know their reality. But the whole of God's people since the days of Pentecost have been able to enjoy life of the indwelling Christ within the framework of their human life. If they can but realise that it is theirs to have – without vision or supernatural event but spiritual transformation which can change their lives not only within but without – to become living witnesses of Christ.

So we ask how can any ordinary believer share this wonderful transformation? Does not the old nature get in the way of such a change? How can God work in our lives so that the person inside this imperfect, sinful nature inherited from humanity,

becomes fit for His eternal kingdom, prepared for the very presence of the great Creator of the Universe. The answer to our question is found in Paul's words to the churches in Galatia. This is an early letter of Paul to churches that were among his early converts and first missionary journeys. Exponents of the Jewish religion had insisted that to be saved they must accept Jewish rituals and come within the covenant of Israel. To them only total proselytes from the Gentiles were acceptable to God. They taught the need for physical circumcision but seemed to ignore the need of cleansing and purifying the heart. Thus Paul writes that he is crucified with Christ and the only life he now has is the life that Jesus lives in his, Paul's, human nature.

For him humanity and in particular his own humanity died with Christ on the cross. This doesn't mean that his own physical body has died. He still has a human body but he says that life is under the control of – has been taken over by – the Son of God who loved him enough to die for him so that His resurrection life could be given to Paul. What died with Jesus was the humanity of Adam – Paul no longer belongs to the fallen creation of Eden vintage but the new creature of Gethsemane vintage where once and for all Christ gave His life – it ebbed slowly away – cruelly – in trial and crucifixion. Now the things he had been proud of – the things of human nature – his Israelite ancestry – his relationship to God under the law – his obedience to the sacrifice and ritual of Sinai – these, says Paul, are all gone. They were crucified with Christ. To the Philippians he says "I've put them in the dust bin – they are only refuse". His own efforts to please God – to do the right thing he says are but dirty linen – not fit to be worn. He's not talking about sin specifically here but he's talking about everything that was Saul of Tarsus until he met Jesus on the Damascus road. From that time forward Paul discovered a power within his life which ancestry, rules and animal sacrifices could not give. They could provide a standard of holy living which he had no power to live up to. Now he obtained a much higher standard of living and was given the strength and know-how to live up to it. He talks about their former effort to please God in Colossians 2.20-22. Paul had tried these things for himself most ardently and failed. Now he had found a way of life which worked – a faith and

piety which is as different from his former religious exercises as the heart and lungs are from the digestive system. That is just what he means when he says, "set your affections on things above and not what is below." These things below are all right – part of God's creation – harmless – but passing away. The things above are the integral part of an on-going process which will go on into eternity.

Paul in chapter 3, goes on to show the Colossian church that not only the ordinary religion and efforts of the old life have gone but Christ has the power to rid us of those vices which seem to be part of humanity. This goes deeper than our former religious life. Maybe that was non-existent and that

we had no pride of traditional goodness. Paul now addresses himself to that part of our nature that is in rebellion against God. The selfish part of our make-up that readily and weakly submits to hurting others and subscribing to idols that do not belong to God. Wanting what doesn't rightly belong to us in anger and cruelty – evil and dirty language – all these belong to the old man – to Adam and his race. But a second Adam has come – Christ the new man has come into our lives and Paul exhorts us to take off that old nature with all the things we despise in ourselves and put on the new as a man takes off one coat and puts on a new one.

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CHRISTIAN AFRICAN RELIEF TRUST

Spring Newsletter '21st Birthday Edition' tells something of the story of this charity from its beginning in 1984 in two domestic garages and a greenhouse, then in a farmer's barn and eventually in a large warehouse and shop in Huddersfield. It is a story of how God made several devoted Christians aware of a desperate need and inspired them to do something about it. Hundreds of boxes of food and clothes were sent to Africa between 1984 and 1987. Schools and churches began to help as the boxes began to fill 20 and 40 foot containers. The Charity Commission gave charitable status and the objective has been "The relieving of poverty and the advancement of the Christian faith in Africa." "From the start it has been CART's policy to only send supplies to reliable Christian ministers or charitable organisations for distribution and requires them to send reports about the distribution. All recipients were informed that goods were 'love gifts' from people here and to be distributed as such free of charge to the needy irrespective of caste or creed." The flow of goods has included sewing machines, computers, medical supplies, educational books and supplies as well as Bibles, Christian books and magazines. The work includes helping people to develop their own skills, produce their own food and clean drinking water. The number of containers sent annually has grown to 27, costing many thousands of pounds to send. It

involves the physical labour of many hundreds of people and the support of many different organisations. Yet it remains the privilege of individuals 'here' to give to help the need of thousands of individuals 'there' – and 'there' includes Asia as well as Africa.

CART's 21st anniversary has been marked by greetings from home and abroad. "May God bless whoever benefits from CART services, directly or indirectly - Uganda." "May God Almighty bless your effort and bless those who we do not know in person but whose concern for us remains constant - Liberia". "Thank you CART ! We are indebted to you All - Zimbabwe." "The relief containers you are sending to Eritrea are a lifeline for almost 10,000 refugees." "CART has sent its invaluable relief-goods to the tsunami affected people of Tamilnadu, India and especially occupies the hearts of Tamilians". And so the story goes on, showing how the work of this charity of small beginnings has really affected people of Africa and Asia.

We add our own congratulations and good wishes to this work, carried on by selfless and loving Christian brethren and pray that our Heavenly Father will continue to bless them and what they are doing. If you would like to help or know more, please write to: Guildford Tomkins, 'Whitegates' Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, West Yorks. HD8 0LR

One of the greatest judges of all time, Lord Birkett, of international repute, has said, "Here is a mystery which seems past finding out; how it comes that certain simple words placed in a certain

order can yet move the human heart beyond all expression, as they do. Open the Authorised Version of the Bible almost anywhere you like and you will find exactly what I mean."

THE TRAGEDY OF SAMSON

5 - Light at Eventide

There, in the prison house at Gaza, Samson found God. There is really not much doubt about that. Blinded, in chains, condemned to spend the rest of his life trudging round and round a circular path pushing the bar of a heavy corn mill, work that was normally performed by animals, he had time to think. He did not have the admiration of the multitudes, the excitement of skirmishes and battles of wits with the Philistines or the indulgence of his tastes and desires. Men and women alike had deserted him and he was left entirely alone; alone to reflect on his past life and his failure to accomplish that mission which had been his from birth. What passed between Samson and his God during those dark hours is not known to any man; all we do know is that at their close Samson is found supplicating God in a manner which is entirely alien to his former attitude. That is the evidence, that in prison Samson became a changed man. There he saw himself in his true light and there he repented. God, who desires that no man or woman should die, but wants them to turn from their wickedness and live, accepted that repentance and wiped Samson's slate clean. Something happened in prison that must have been an outward evidence to Samson of God's acceptance of his repentance. His hair began to grow again!

The Philistines had apparently overlooked that contingency. The thick, long tresses began to fall around the shoulders of the poor slave labouring at the mill. As they grew Samson began to flex his muscles and discover to his surprise that he still possessed his tremendous physical strength. It is perhaps understandable that he concluded that there was a connection between the growth of his Nazarite locks and the re-discovery of his physical powers. But this time there is no attempt to deliver himself. It does begin to look as though now he is waiting upon God. The recovery of his long hair became a sign to him that God had forgiven him. But he made no attempt to escape; submissively he waited God's leading and God's time.

So it came about that on a set day all Gaza was gathered together for some particular celebration, of which a feature was acknowledgement to their god for delivering Samson into their hands. The blinded giant was led out of prison and into the arena to be made a public spectacle. The five lords

of the Philistines were there and all the appropriate nobility and gentry, and on the roof of the building some three thousand of the public, shouting themselves hoarse.

It is said that Samson was brought forward and compelled to "*make sport*" for them but it is not very clear what this implies. The word means 'to play' and it is probable that in his blindness he was baited in various ways to the vindictive delight of the barbarous crowd which formed his audience. Tiring perhaps of this after a while, the people looked on interestedly as the lad appointed to guide Samson's steps began, at his request, to lead him toward "*the two pillars upon which the house was built and whereby it was held up*". What was he going to do next?

There is a well-known painting of this scene in which Samson is depicted with his arms clasping two solid stone columns each about three feet in diameter, in the act of pulling them down. In fact of course, no man, even one of Samson's reputed powers, could dislodge massive stone structures of that nature. It is necessary to visualise the type of building that was probably used in order correctly to appreciate the story.

This function was apparently a public celebration and holiday, not a religious proceeding. The building concerned was not a temple but more probably the local games stadium. There would almost certainly be an open-air arena in which the players performed, with a kind of "grandstand" of which the interior was reserved for people of importance and the roof thrown open to the public. A clue to the size of the building is given by the intimation that there were three thousand people standing on the roof. To accommodate such a crowd, even if closely packed as at a modern sporting event, a structure something like eighty feet long by thirty from front to back would be needed. Both the interior seats and the standing space on the roof would be sloping upward from front to back so that all could see. If made like modern grandstands the front of the building would be open throughout its length and the roof supported along the open front by light wooden posts, perhaps little more than slender poles, with a balustrade along the roof to keep the excited crowd from falling off. The five lords of the Philistines

would of course be seated in the middle of the interior in the best seats, surrounded by the nobility and gentry of Gaza.

Upon arriving at the pavilion, Samson can be imagined as taking his stand between the two centre pillars and grasping them in his strong arms. There then follows one of the most tragically pathetic prayers of the Old Testament, a prayer noble in its utter dependence upon the power of God. Samson had never prayed like this before; he had always relied on and exulted in his own strength. That strength, misused, had brought him to this sorry state. So he prayed to God that he might do at least one deed of valour, though it should be the last deed of his life, in the strength and power of God instead of his own. *"O Lord God" he prayed "remember me, I pray and strengthen me, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes."* And so saying he bore with all his might on the two posts around which his strong arms were braced.

Jostling humanity to a total weight of something like two hundred tons, occupied that roof. Samson had for the moment disappeared from sight just under its front. Human nature being what it is, there was undoubtedly a movement of people to the extreme edge of the roof in the endeavour to look over and see what he was doing. The distribution of weight on the roof was altered and a strain imposed on the front portion and the front pillars that they were never designed to take.

It is a fundamental mechanical property of any long thin column supporting a superstructure that its power of support decreases rapidly so soon as it is bent or bowed from its normally straight position. When bowed beyond a certain point it will tend to collapse without any additional strain being applied. This is evidently what happened in this case. The excited people crowding to the front of the roof and craning over the edge, had already increased the load on the front pillars to danger point. Then Samson voiced his prayer and braced himself against the two columns. They would probably be made of wood and no more than four or five inches in diameter. They were already creaking and bowing under the undue strain and Samson heaved with all his might. The more he was able to bend the columns out of the perpendicular, the greater would be the crippling effect of the human load above, until at length he reached the "point of no return". After that the roof

would begin perceptibly to sag as the milling crowd above started to shout their apprehension. Under the roof the cynically smiling nobility would jump up in sudden alarm at the reality of what a few seconds earlier had seemed but a foolhardy gesture of the blind captive.

At this point the wooden pillars would fracture under the tremendous strain, and then, with a rending and cracking of heavy timbers accompanied by cries and shrieks from above, the entire roof would cave in and fall forward, with its three thousand occupants, upon the seated audience below. The heaviest casualties would be among those nobility, crushed and buried beneath a tangled mass of timber and struggling survivors. The story infers that when at last the wreckage was cleared away and the victims extricated, more than one third of the people in the building were dead. Among them lay the body of the Nazarite. True to his nature he had the last word with the Philistines after all.

"So the dead which he slew at his death were more than those which he slew in his life." It is not a particularly creditable epitaph, but it is spoken of a man who despite twenty years of failure to live up to his calling repented at last in time to justify the angel's original prediction. In life an apostate, in death Samson was a true Nazarite, in communion with God, putting his trust in God, and invoking the power of God. His was a wasted life, but before his death he saw the light.

The disaster must have shaken the Philistines, for without interference *"his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the burying place of Manoah his father."* It is evident that his parents were already dead. They were spared the final heart-break of seeing him captive to the Philistines. He judged Israel twenty years, the chronicler says, but he never delivered Israel as did the other judges. He shook the Philistine power but he did not destroy it. If, as is very probable, the five lords of the Philistines perished in the catastrophe at Gaza, there would be a period of political uncertainty in the country. That would help to explain the evident decay of Philistine power over Israel in the time of Samuel, which was only a generation or so later. Samson, the Nazarite who failed his commission, was the one judge who wrought no deliverance in Israel. He did at least *"begin to deliver Israel out of the hands*

of the Philistines".

It might reasonably be wondered why the name of Samson appears in the gallery of "heroes of faith" in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. His life was not one of service to God; he had nothing of the faith of Abraham, the loyalty of Moses, the devotion of Samuel. There is nothing in his story to hold up to emulation or to glorify as an example to be followed. He does not appear as a leader of the type that will be wanted in the next Age when the law of the Lord goes out from Zion and there will be princes of God established to direct and lead men in the ways of God.

Yet his name is included as one of those who having "received a good report through faith received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us" (the Christian Church) "that they without us should not be made perfect." Is it possible that God, who knows the secrets of all men's hearts, saw something in Samson's character that the story, written by onlookers, does not reveal and that we cannot see? Could it be that the lad Samson up to, say twenty years of age or so was sincere and devout in his profession of God's service? Was he swept off his feet by the attractions of the woman he wanted for his wife and thereafter floundered twenty years without God, basking in the light of popular admiration and flattery? Did the final tragedy of blindness, captivity and neglect bring him to his senses so that like the prodigal son in the parable he said to himself "I will arise and go to my Father"?

If so, we know the Father would go out to meet him and bring him home. Although the consequences of those twenty years of folly could not be avoided, the Father could put them behind his back and they were no more seen. Might it not be that the character of Samson while in the Gaza prison was purified and ennobled by this sequel to his life's experiences so that in the future whether he lived or died, he would forever be God's man? If this be so, then he suffered physical blindness and death in order that he might receive spiritual sight and eventual life. So it might well be that Samson, at the end, in the all-embracing sight of God, was after all seen worthy and suitable for a place in the procession of "Old Testament Saints or "Ancient Worthies" as they are variously called. They will occupy positions of influence in the new Kingdom when Christ reigns on earth. If that is so, we can

only praise God who alone produces characters of sterling worth from such weak clay.

As a pictorial representation of the entire history of man, the story of Samson is very apt. Mankind, in the persons of our first parents, was created for the Divine purposes to fulfil a Divine commission, and endowed with every possible blessing and advantage. Like Samson, mankind turned away from God and into paths of self-indulgence, dissipating the marvellous powers given by God in unworthy ways. At the end, mankind's own wilful course leads him to utter ruin, as is evident when we look at the world around us today and realise that we are now face to face with that ruin. But after the wreck of all that his own hand has created mankind will find God, and "whosoever will" become reconciled to God. For God has appointed a day, the coming Messianic Age, in which men, chastened by their experience of sin, will be led in better ways and brought face to face with the ultimate choice between good and evil. The salvation of Samson at the eleventh hour is our guarantee that God will never let go of the sinner whilst there is any hope whatever of his seeing the error of his ways. He may come to Christ in sincere repentance and acceptance of him, and so being reconciled to God, becoming a citizen of God's world. That is why in the wisdom of God there is an Age appointed to follow 'this present evil world', an Age in which Satan is to be bound that he might deceive the nations no more, and Christ reign as King over the restored and perfected earth. In that Age the entire human race will continue their lives' experience with full opportunity to compare the equitable administration of the Kingdom of righteousness with the darkness and injustice of this present world of sin. Only after that final lesson in God's school, will the ultimate choice be demanded. The incorrigibly unregenerate will reap the inevitable wages of sin and the regenerate be received, like Samson, into full fellowship with God and into eternal life. That is the gospel of the Kingdom, the good tidings of great joy that shall be to all people. That is the sublime truth that lies behind the words of Jesus *"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"*. And it will always be gloriously true that *"there is joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner that repents."*

The End

AOH

FINDING THE WORD

There is a hymn which speaks of Jesus Christ flinging stars into space. It is a picturesque thought. Imagine Him, standing like a juggler and casting sparkling stars up into the sky, which do not fall back, but stick there, scattered in the beautiful pattern of the night skies. It cannot be literally true. It almost seems irreverent. It is rather a poetic thought. It can hardly be scriptural.

Admittedly, scripture contains a lot of poetry. Poetry has its form and its pattern of language – our hymns have verses and rhymes, the Hebrew had its parallelism, balancing one thought by an echoing thought, perhaps the same thought in different words, or perhaps contrasting. Poetry also has the capacity to enlighten us, by putting the strange alongside the familiar – for example, describing the Holy Spirit as running water (John 7.37-39) or as the wind (John 3.8), or presenting the change in a repentant human being as being born all over again.

There is a passage in the Book of Job not unlike the picture of Christ with which we started. Job thinks of God as a judge to whom he longs to present his case, but cannot get through – almost like a mighty warrior king whose power gives him *de facto* the right to judge. But Job's thought is on a cosmic scale.

"But how can a man be just before God? If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength – who has resisted him, and succeeded? He who removes mountains and they know it not when he overturns them in his anger; who shakes the earth out of its place and its pillars tremble, who commands the sun and it does not rise, who seals up the stars, who alone stretched out the heavens, and trampled the waves of the sea, who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the Chambers of the South, who does great things beyond understanding and marvellous things without number..." (Job 9.2-10 RSV)

Here we have pictures of the Creator shaking the earth (earthquakes), commanding the sun (eclipses), stretching out the heavens (galaxies, space). It has a resonance with our hymn, particularly when we consider certain New Testament passages regarding our Lord Jesus Christ:

"In the beginning the Word already was. The Word was in God's presence and what God was, the Word was. He was with God at the beginning and through him all things came to be, without him

no created thing came into being." (John 1.1-3 REB.)

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col. 1.15-17).

"For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." (1 Cor. 8.6)

We draw our breath in awe as we realise that the person who walked about in Palestine doing good for a period of years, was the same one who was responsible for the existence of humankind. *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not."* (John 1.10.)

This is a strange thought to the scientific mind, which seeks explanations not in terms of who did it, but how did it come about. People look for explanation not in terms of a mind and a purpose, but of a process. For example, one can imagine a young cyclist toiling up a hill. The poet sees him striving to succeed, and enjoy the exciting view from the top. The scientist sees the effects of a gear ratio, measures the force needed to overcome friction and the pull of gravity, and how one movement affects another. Modern minds see the world in terms of descriptive laws and operative systems, but religious thought can take account of both approaches.

Here is part of a contemporary prayer, which blends the poetic and the literal, accepting the emotional impact of accepted facts of science: *"Creator God, the universe you created, the millions of stars, the burning sun, the planets, the deep rich blackness all amaze us. The laws of gravity and relativity amaze us. We are in awe of you..."*

"The earth you created, the lush green forests, the dry stark deserts, the deep blue seas, the beautiful gems hidden in the earth amaze us. The inter-connection of the ecosystems and the abundance of your planet amaze us. We are in awe of you"

Long ago it was written: *"When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established, who is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?"* (Psalm 8.3)

"Hands that flung stars into space ... to cruel nails surrendered." It is a vivid picture. The joy of creation is followed by the dragging, tearing pain of redemption. Of course, the hands that made the world are a picture. The hands nailed to the cross are only too real. But the Person involved is the same, whether imagined or seen. *"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails"* said Thomas, *"I won't accept it."* When he saw, he exclaimed *"My Lord and my God!"*

Peter, speaking fifty days after the crucifixion, could see what had been happening. *"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."* (Acts 2.23.)

David the psalmist, speaking hundreds of years earlier, has a remarkable picture similar to Isaiah in chapter 53 of the suffering Servant who in the end is successful in His mission. Yet before that triumph, it is evident that *"a company of evildoers surround me, they have pierced my hands and feet."* (Psalm 22.16).

Paul, when writing to the Christians at Colosse, completed his statement about our Lord as follows: *"He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."* (Col. 1.18-20).

Scripture is full of word pictures and examples

"Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path" Ps. 119.105

For a long time I was content to use my computer completely under the direction of our two sons. The manuals on the shelf and the instructions within the computer programs were virtually a 'closed book' to me. I was quite happy 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 very 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 – the Word of God. It decorates a bookshelf – it's nice to follow the preacher when it's read in Church but personal discovery alone with God is not so readily tackled. They miss much. God's Word is a challenging book – it challenges our behaviour and use of words, it challenges our thinking and attitudes. If we are aware that God is

– it is the way our finite minds can understand. The picture of the hands nailed to the cross brings clearly to mind how awful are the results of human sinfulness – my sinfulness. Paul too, saw himself as an example – both of sin and of forgiveness. *"And I am the foremost of sinners; but I received mercy for this reason, that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."* So, *"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever."* 1 Tim. 1.15-17.

Words of worship like these help to carry us beyond what we can picture to what we cannot even imagine – the absolute wonder of the Father. But the Jesus we meet in the gospels is a picture of Him.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,

Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise."
We live not by sight but by faith, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Tim. 6.15,16. *"And this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen."*

GC

leading us by His Spirit in our study of His Word, we shall be changed. Our Father speaks to us in other ways, but the Word is our touchstone, and the 'other ways' can be checked for their truthfulness by a careful look at the Bible.

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's sensible, to study the literature. The Bible was written by a number of people in different eras and languages from our own. By study we saturate ourselves with Scripture so that at critical moments such as temptation, like Jesus, we can answer the Devil by God's Word. So we become skilful in using the sword of the spirit. Prayer is vital to Bible Study and enables us to make it practical. Let us thank our Heavenly Father that He provided teachers within our churches and our families who encouraged us to 'learn the Word of God!'

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE *Notes to aid personal Bible Study*

26 - Chapter 22.1-40

1-23 In these last three chapters of the Gospel there is a special need to deal carefully with the sacred grief surrounding Jesus' death and the ecstatic joy and excitement of His resurrection. Chapter 22 is about the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane and the Jewish Trial and is fraught with meaning. It has been the centre of argument, partly because of the apparent differences between the Gospels. This simple meal intended as a symbol of unity among all Christ's followers, has been the subject of angry contention. Each believer should realise that their attitude may mirror the betrayal, the denial and the competition for the chief place. The immaturity of the '12' must have caused great grief to the Saviour – but has it not been so until today in the Church.

We glimpse the inner sanctum of those who sat in Moses' seat. There the priests conspired to destroy the Son of God helped by one of His intimate friends. Why did Judas do it? What was it that Jesus said or did that made Judas want to get rid of Him? Was it avarice? (John 12.6). Was he trying to force Jesus to declare His Messiahship and His Kingdom? This is the view of some commentators including Dorothy Sayers in 'Man Born to be King'. The evangelists do not vilify Judas (Morris). The blame is laid upon Satan. He couches at the door, waiting to bring sin into our lives and ruin them. It happens little by little (foxes) in unguarded moments and temptation can only be snuffed out by remaining close to the Saviour.

The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were really two separate feasts. They ran concurrently and were often treated as one long festival. Barclay tells how the Jews prepared – in the synagogues, in their homes and on the routes to Jerusalem. Morris suggests that possibly the best explanation of 'what happened when?' is that Jesus died at the time of the killing of the Passover lambs by the official calendar and He held the Passover with His disciples the previous evening by the unofficial calendar (New London Commentary - Morris). The Gospels do not mention an animal being killed and eaten. That could only be done under licence from the Priests and in Luke 23.7 the RSV incorrectly inserts 'lamb'.

Peter and John prepared the meal. John's family may have had links with the priests, so he might

have known his way round the city. The man with the water jar was very distinguishable, as women usually carried these large containers. Was the supper held in Mary's home, John Mark's mother? (Act 12.12) Where was Mark's father? Was the venue kept secret to prevent Judas acting prematurely? It was a large house and couches were spread (Moffatt), Jews reclined according to the elders' tradition. Verses 19-20 are worth some investigation and are partly omitted in some Greek texts. They provide a problem as to whether the cup was drunk before or after the bread was eaten.

"With desire I have desired" is characteristically Hebrew intensity of expression. Eating the bread and drinking the wine (Passover included four cups) reminders of deliverance in Egypt but also reminded them of the greater deliverance in God's kingdom, Jesus placed new meaning on these symbols or emblems. They signified that He was going to die and that His body would be broken in order to give life to all those who believed on Him. This was a representation of the blood of the New Covenant. 1 Cor. 11.25 and indeed the whole of Paul's directions to the Corinthians concerning the Lord's Supper must be taken into account when studying the Gospels and comparison made between the Gospels themselves. John has so much more information about this subject including Jesus' teaching and prayer. This is a 'Memorial' of His death and God's children show to one another and to the whole world that they have a part with Him in His work. The bread and wine represent to each who participates. 'The body that was broken and blood that was shed so that they might have life – it is a sacrament. The bread and wine are also a symbol of the unity that exists between all who follow Jesus in total commitment and surrender to Him.

Jesus identification of the traitor is interesting. He expresses nothing but loving friendship for Judas; right up till His trial. There must have been great grief in His heart that this one had been lost hence the words 'Woe is that man', "As it was determined" is typically Luke's expression and recognizes the reason why Jesus came to Earth as outlined by the prophets.

vv 24 -38 Lessons in the Upper Room and Gethsemane. The disciples were arguing as to

who should be regarded as 'greatest' and 'leader'. Was the argument about seating arrangements at the Passover table? Is it unthinkable that they should engage in petty squabbles like this? Is it unthinkable that we should do so? Might we not all say 'Lord, is it I?' Am I the one giving you pain and betraying you?" John 13.2-11 records Jesus' example to them. We serve one another as slaves whoever we are and there is no room for domineering arrogance at the Lord's table. Selfless service is the only CV we need for leadership. Shepherds in the east lead the sheep but never drive them.

But there is some comfort for the hard road that lay ahead of them. Through all the hardships and heart searching, they would eventually arrive at the Messianic banquet and the thrones of those who were sharing His Kingly reign (see RSV Rieu and Phillips vv 29, 30). Jesus said this in the language of the covenant that he related to 'the cup'. The verbs 'assign' and 'assigned' are translations of *diatithemai* "the usual biblical verb for making the covenant" (Morris).

Peter is about to receive a severe testing but only if God in His wisdom permits. The thought of 'sifting' is very specific. The 'wrack' and 'stake' at which so many martyrs suffered at the hands of false 'brethren' was always under God's control. Peter suffered the heart searching temptation to deny his Lord. Jesus said that he would not hold up under the strain but the 'sifting' would go ahead - God was analysing the character of Peter because of the great job he had to do. Peter would know himself better as a result and would 'turn' and help his brethren. When such experiences occur in our lives, we too must 'turn' - repent of sin. The great 'assayer' knows what the metal needs to purify it and the furnace will not be heated one degree above what is necessary. Peter was all the better for his testing.

Jesus gave the '12' some practical advice. Firstly, He reminded them that things are going to be different from the earlier preaching tour. They

would need to take material supplies but still they could rely upon God for all their needs. Whatever did Jesus mean by asking about swords? Did he really mean the kind of sword that kills people or was it a 'symbolic' sword? A literal sword would be quite against the tenor of His teaching? (Morris)

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 53 stating that he was to be "*numbered among the transgressors*". He is making Himself one with mankind. Does He infer that His death is substitutionary - taking the place of mankind in death? Jesus' final comment is "That's enough" - enough swords or enough of that kind of talk?

Fellowship is almost over. Teaching time is running out. The scene moves to Gethsemane - they had often been to this garden on the east side of the hill of Olives. Was this the last great battle within? Were these hours of temptation? This was normal sleep time for the disciples but it was not the first time Jesus had spent all night in prayer. Who recorded His prayer? Did He say much more? Was a teenager there, greased all over and dressed only in a strip of linen so that he could escape if caught? How much of the evening's proceedings had he heard? And what was he to make of it all? Mark tells us more than anyone else. Luke gives a brief summary. We can learn much by meditating upon this extraordinary event but the vital lesson is what Jesus told his disciples - "*Pray that you will not fall into temptation*" - was Peter prepared to face temptation during the priestly trial? Can we prevent drowsiness in our prayer time? Writing the prayer down may help. Praying about that which causes our mind to wander sometime helps too. Jesus had won the victory and was at peace. He trusted His Father completely. The time of freedom to lead and teach the disciples had ended. Now He was in the hands of sinful men who are driven by the Evil One. He was about to die for them.

(*The arrest, trial and death of Jesus follows in the next study.*)

DN

PROVERBS 8.6-8 SEPTUAGINT

"Go to the ant O sluggard; and see, and emulate his ways, and become wiser than he. For whereas he has no husbandry, nor any one to compel him, and is under no master, he prepares food for himself in the summer, and lays by abundant store in harvest. Or go to the bee, and learn how diligent

she is, and how earnestly she is engaged in her work; whose labours kings and private men use for health, and she is desired and respected by all; though weak in bodily strength she is increased by honouring wisdom."

AFTER THE FLOOD

6 - The Dispersal of the People

The tenth chapter of Genesis is called the 'Table of Nations'. It is the famous chapter in which the names of the immediate descendants of Noah to the second and in some cases the fourth and even seventh generation are recorded. There is an intimation that these became the names of the nations that sprang from them and the territories in which they lived. It has been argued that the reverse is really the case, that the names of existing nations and peoples have been applied to mythical ancestors and so written up in Genesis. This is a hypothesis having no logical foundation and is advanced in order to dispute the historical accuracy of the account. The rational explanation of the name of a people is that it was derived from the founder of that people just as the surname of a family is derived from the ancestor of that family in the male line. In fact many of the names in Genesis 10, crop up regularly in the later historical books of the Bible and in secular history as those of nations occupying the lands Genesis says they did. Some of the place names have endured into much later historical periods, even modern times. The outward expansion of peoples from the originating centre at Shinar at the time of the episode of Babel, recorded in Gen. 11, was likely to have commenced round about 3000 BC. This follows from a comparison of the declared ages of the patriarchs succeeding Noah with what is known of earliest history and pre-history in the land of the Old Testament. Within the ensuing two centuries most of the so-called 'Bible lands' were occupied and being populated by their respective peoples. The principal basis for this conclusion is the probable time of the beginning of Egyptian and Sumerian civilisations. The time of the dispersal must have 'sparked off' the emergence of those civilisations. In those two centuries the population could have grown to something like sixty millions, spreading over the present lands of Egypt, Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, an area of about three million square miles of which the population at the present time is about 80 millions. The location of the various nations hearing these tribal names, the names of their first ancestors, is in most cases fairly attested by reference not only in the Bible but in the writings of ancient historians and also in the inscriptions and records left by those ancient

nations themselves. The patriarchs must have had other sons, whose names are not recorded. Those that are known became the tribal names. One nation often dispossessed another of their territory or settled down beside them and eventually amalgamated, so that it is not possible to be too precise. Accepted history, however, leaves the general framework of the dispersal in little doubt.

The sons of Japheth (Gen 10.2-8) appear to have left the plain of Shinar completely. They rarely appear in later Bible history. They migrated north and then west and east, moving up the valleys of the rivers Tigris and Diyala into the mountainous regions and beyond. Extensive remains in northern Iraq dated by archaeologists to what is called the Halafian period, from Tel Halaf where the first such remains were found by Baron von Oppenheim in 1914 and later by Mallowan in 1933 are perhaps due to their passage. Eventually they penetrated into what is now modern Turkey, whence they later advanced westward into Europe, and eastward into Siberia. Many centuries later in the days of Ezekiel some of their offspring, the tribes of Meshech, Tubal and Gomer, all names of sons of Japheth stormed down from their Siberian homes to invade the lands of the Middle East. But in these first two centuries of the dispersal, Turkey and northern Iran was probably as far as they got. Bible maps of the 19th century show them penetrating into southern Russia. During the 20th century, it was established that at the time in question the great Russian seas, the Black Sea, the Caspian and the Aral, were connected by an extensive sheet of water stretching far into Central Siberia, so the old maps are incorrect. The sons of Japheth had only the alternatives of turning east or west. It is generally accepted that Javan and possibly Tiras, and their sons, colonised Europe, and the others, Asia. The writer of Genesis 10 denoted both these continents by the expression 'the coastlands of the Gentiles' (Gen. 10.5), territories he knew very little about.

The sons of Ham went south, then west and east, in the opposite direction to that of Japheth. The descendants of Ham's sons Mizraim settled in Egypt, which thereafter bore his name (Misr) and the Egyptian language bears it still. Here was speedily set up the second great civilisation of the ancient world. Before another two centuries had

passed away they were building the Pyramids and the glory that was Egypt was beginning to flourish. It is important to realise that they were already a civilised people and the rule of the Pharaohs commenced almost at once.

Canaan, son of Ham, did not go so far. His people reached the Mediterranean coast where Israel is now, built Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon and possibly Jericho. Sidon still exists. In later times they were overwhelmed and absorbed by descendants of Shem and after the conquest under Joshua lost their identity as a nation, surviving only as scattered tribes subject to the Israelites and others thus fulfilling Noah's prediction in Gen. 9.26. The settlement of the Canaanite tribes is detailed in Gen. 10.15-19.

Phut is the son of Ham of whom the Old Testament writers know little or nothing. Gen. 10 records neither the names of his sons nor where he went. It is evident that he and his descendants lost all contact with their fellows after the dispersal. The Old Testament mentions the Phutites only twice afterwards, in connection with matters two thousand years later, from which it appears they were celebrated as mariners and soldiers. It is known that the Phutites in after years, became a virile race of commercial traders ranging over the whole of North Africa from the borders of Egypt to the Atlantic. As late as the beginning of the Christian era they are noted by Roman writers. Their empire at its greatest extent included the whole of the Sahara desert, which four thousand years ago was a well wooded and fertile country with abundant animal life, capable of supporting a large population. It seems that the people of Phut made their way from Babel to north-eastern Africa and thenceforward broke off all contact with the homeland, spreading over westwards as the centuries passed until they reached the Atlantic ocean. The Book of Jubilees (c. 150 BC) has a detailed account of the lands into which the grandsons of Noah migrated. A rather cryptic expression in Jub. 8.22 could be held to infer that the territory assigned to Ham's posterity extended across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea and by inference to the West Indian islands immediately beyond. 'Jubilees' was written about BC 150 and the Phoenicians were in continuous contact with the West Indies and South America as far back as 800 BC. It not unreasonable to suppose that the first mariners fulfilled this part of the mandate and

crossed the Atlantic although it must have been many centuries after Babel. Another point of interest in 'Jubilees' is the assertion that Canaan was first allotted the far west of Africa on the Atlantic seaboard as his domicile, but refused to go so far west and settled instead in the land later known as Canaan, after his name.

The Hamites of greatest moment in Bible history are the sons of Cush. Cush, son of Ham, was the ancestor of the Sumerians who played so important a part in the early history of Israel. The descendants of Cush appear to have been by far the most prolific of the Hamites. Some went southwards into Arabia and colonised the whole Arabian continent, passing over the Red Sea in later centuries to establish a powerful empire in what is now the Sudan. (The 'Ethiopia' of the later Old Testament is the African Cush). From there they went on through the ages to colonise Equatorial and Southern Africa and most of the black races are their modern descendants. Another branch went down the other side of the Persian Gulf through modern Iran, by 2000 BC reaching north-western India which maintained close commercial links with their brother Sumerians back in Iraq. That civilisation was wiped out by Japhetic invaders from Siberia a thousand years later and the remnant slowly spread across and populated in turn central India and Bengal, the far eastern countries and eventually Australia. (In 1961 some 400 rock carvings were discovered near Alice Springs so similar to Assyrio-Sumerian style that it was considered they must have been done by a people coming from the Middle East.)

But the flower of the Sumerian peoples remained in Sumer itself. Many of them did not leave Babel; they remained there and built what is universally considered the world's first and finest civilisation. It lasted a thousand years and in its development was set the pattern of future empires of mankind. Here the arts and sciences were born, reaching a level that in many directions has never been equalled. Their systems of measurement, of time, quantity, weights and measures, has formed the basis of all such systems in the world since then, until the modern introduction of the metric system. The degrees of the circle, the hours and minutes and seconds on our clocks, the days and months of our calendars, we owe to the Sumerian. The chariots gave us the width of our mediaeval farm cart tracks and therefore that of our present

railway gauge. In almost countless ways the effect of Sumerian culture has survived five thousand years and remains with us today. Here, in this land, where the sons of Cush remained after the dispersion from Babel and multiplied and established their cities and their commerce, was the seedbed where the true faith of God lay dormant until many years later it found its most famous champion in the man God called his friend, Abram, the Semite, a citizen of the Sumerian city of Ur. When Abram obeyed the Divine call to leave that shining civilisation and go out to a strange land that God would show him, Sumer had served its purpose. It gave way before its enemies and ere long the glory of Sumer was no more.

Abraham was a Semite, a descendant of Shem. The evidence is that most of the Semites left the land at the time of Babel. Many returned in later centuries so that by the time of Daniel, for example, the Semites were in the ascendancy. But here at this time they seem to have turned their backs on the land of Shinar and made their way, in the main, north-westward along the course of the Euphrates to find new homes. They did not go so far as the peoples of Japheth and Ham. Elam went eastward into the Iranian mountains and became a powerful nation inter-marrying with the Sumerians and becoming indistinguishable from them. Ashur went northward and survived into later times as the Assyrians. Aram finished up in modern Syria and southern Turkey and perpetuated his name to the present day in the racial division known as Arameans. No satisfactory identification of Lud seems to have been made. It has been suggested that the much later kingdom of Lydia in Asiatic Greece stemmed from him but there is not much foundation for that although in all probability it is somewhere in what we now call Turkey this people did settle. The remaining tribe that of Arphaxad, is of the greatest interest since it is from this that Abraham, and ultimately Israel, were derived. The known territories of Semitic peoples in later time seems to justify the conclusion that the people of Arphaxad settled on the middle Euphrates a few miles to the north of Babel, to give birth several centuries later to be the influential empire of Mari.

So within say two centuries from the first entry to the land of Shinar and the incident of the Tower of Babel, men had reached and populated a wide area reaching from Egypt to Iran west to east, and Turkey to Arabia north and south. These are the

lands with which the Old Testament is mainly concerned, and in fact the further distribution of humanity after this time is barely noticed. It was, of course, to be a long time before the farthestmost recesses of the earth were reached; a coherent picture of the process is almost impossible of attainment, for the migration communities crossed and re-crossed each other's paths and settled in each other's territories so that there was continual intermarrying and cross-breeding with consequent emergence of new and differing racial types. Various types of climate and food played their part in this and all these factors worked together so fulfilling the Divine purpose to produce the varied types of people with which we are familiar today.

It may seem difficult to accept the fact that the many widely divergent types of men, in colour of skin and hair, tall and short, some suited to extremes of heat and cold, should be derived from three sons of one father so recently as five thousand years ago. There are several main races of mankind but there has been a bewildering number of permutations from a vast number of intermingling peoples of those races during the five thousand years. This might be expected but the rapid change in racial skin colour took place in less than a thousand years as attested by tomb paintings of the 7th Egyptian dynasty about 2100 BC. It is commonly held that the characteristic colours of different races are primarily due to the effect of food, climate and prolonged exposure over many generations to tropical, temperate and polar conditions. H. G. Wells in 'Outline of History' (1930) cites anthropological thought of his time that the human race in its early days was more 'plastic' in its reaction to external conditions, so that it responded much more quickly to factors inducing physical changes than would be the case in later times. The same authorities contended that the original colour of the race tended to be dark rather than light. (This raises questions of the inheritance of acquired characteristics - Ed.) With respect to Noah's three sons, there were also three wives whose different characteristics may have affected the divergence of appearance of the races.

The foregoing cuts right across accepted theories of the origin of man and the time he has inhabited the earth. There have been many theories such as 'The Testimony of the Rocks' by Miller concerning the degeneracy of the human race. What is known of the human race does not conflict

with the Genesis record, that in the 3rd Millennium BC it was wiped out and recommenced by three couples. Amid the changing theories and pieces of 'evidence' the Bible record remains consistent and unchanging.

The Genesis account indicates that about four centuries after the Flood, there was a concerted migration of peoples from the central homeland between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. These populated the Middle East that afterwards became famous as the lands of the Bible, those with which

the history of Israel became bound up and subsequently with Christianity. That migration gave an impetus to the emerging nations that accelerated their development and then we pass to the sphere of recognisable history. We then can relate the continuing story of Genesis to the records and inscriptions that the archaeologists of the past two centuries have recovered in such profusion from the dust of long vanished cities of the ancients.

(To be continued) AOH

MANY WONDERFUL WORKS

Coming at the climax of a sermon unparalleled in all the recorded sayings of Jesus Christ, the reference to those who sought entrance into His Kingdom by virtue of their words and works has formed the subject of many an exhortation. Generally we agree in condemning those who put their trust in the 'arm of flesh' and bring the fruit of their own work as an offering to the Almighty. Here in no unmeasured terms the Saviour of all men denounced the mental attitude that had made the religious people what they were in His day – a class who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and who despised others. The awful results of that self-blinded egotism were shown when they crucified the Prince of Life and desired a murderer to be given them.

Thus does evil bring forth its bitter fruit – the husk of outward righteousness as fair to the casual eye as the white washed sepulchres to which Jesus pointed. But they concealed a corruption and defilement as nauseous and repugnant to the All-seeing One as ever the contents of those same whitened sepulchres were to the Jews.

Like Isaiah, we see the glory of the Lord and wish straight away to be used as His messengers. Then we easily fall victims to the temptation of engaging in outward activities for their own sake rather than the inward work of the heart, to which all external things are but handmaidens. Just as a church is a shell that houses a congregation of worshippers and has no lasting value in itself, so also must the whole our earthly fellowship and service ever remain a means by which we can feed and build up each other with the realities of Divine Truth. Yet just as in a church there is an altar which symbolises the presence of God, so in every form of Christian activity and service springing from the efforts of sincere and loving hearts, there is always

manifest the Spirit of Christ – the material being an agent of Divine things.

The truth was announced by Paul in saying *"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."* (2 Cor. 5.1 NIV). So must it be with all our fleeting arrangements and organisations, all those things which minister to the needs of the saints while in the flesh, but which must necessarily vanish away when their work has been done. Not one of these "mighty works" goes with us into the eternal light of the Divine presence -their purpose will have been served, and amply served, in the ministry to the saints here below. The Church, founded at Pentecost upon a hope and conviction that had its anchor in things unseen, developed and multiplied by means of the unrelenting toil of saintly men and women, who counted not their lives dear to them. They gave up and sacrificed on the altar of service and found a richer and fuller and nobler life even here amidst the imperfections of the earthly condition. Paul organised new communities of believers. Timothy set in order things that were wanting. Seven deacons administered the serving of tables (Acts 6). In all of this we do not see the frantic building-up of a vast and imposing edifice which would absorb the thoughts and energies of all believers and dissipate those energies in a useless beating of the air. What we do see is the serious and solemn administration of a sacred trust left by the Master Himself. He knew only too well how the heart left to theorise and meditate upon His message without the broadening influence of service for others must inevitably become self-centred and egotistic. We see thoughtful and zealous men and women full of the Spirit and of wisdom rejoicing not only a clear knowledge of the

Word but also in the opportunity of exercising the effect of that knowledge by their service and activity among their brethren and neighbours. The early years of the primitive Church were years of ceaseless activity. *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts"*. (Acts 2. 46 NIV). The wonderful growth of the Christian community was due as much to the burning zeal of those who went forth to propagate the new faith as to the readiness of a sin wearied world to listen with hope to the message. But in all of this the early Christians thought little of their own personal relation to the organisation they were building. It was sufficient that this marvellous fellowship which was coming into being was steadily making progress through every stratum of society. It was sufficient that the name of Jesus Christ was becoming increasingly familiar to those who met on the Sabbath day throughout all the cities of the Dispersion. It was sufficient that the words of Jesus *"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1.8 NIV) were having a glorious fulfilment. Of their own place in these things they thought not at all, but, like saints of earlier times, took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and a more enduring substance. Let us take to ourselves the lesson they so nobly

taught. Let us, in all our activities and arrangements, our organising and building, ever remember that all these 'mighty works', desirable and even necessary as they are today, are not intended to endure for all time, to be jealously guarded and handed down to posterity. They are for the needs of the moment. They enable the preaching of the Word of God and the edifying of the Body of Christ until we all come, in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the full stature of the Anointed. Happy is the brother or sister who can touch lightly these things of this earth, realising their place in the leading of the Good Shepherd, thankful for their provision, and yet without regret on seeing them wax old and varnish away when their period of usefulness has passed. So doing, we shall not be of those who, at the end, must needs claim their wonderful works as their only recommendation for entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom. Our building must be with the gold, silver and precious stones of the eternal truths that are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit of God. Then if we have learned in Christ that the failure of all material supports and defences leaves us *"strong in the Lord and in the power of his might"* we shall not be of those to whom will come the sad, regretful words *"I never knew you. Depart from me"*.

BJD

AN EARLY PSALM OF DAVID

I was small among my brethren and youngest in my father's house: I tended my father's sheep. My hands formed a musical instrument, and my fingers tuned a psaltery. And who shall tell my Lord? The Lord himself, he himself hears. He sent forth his angel and took me from my father's sheep, and he anointed me with the oil of his anointing. My brothers were handsome and tall; but the Lord did

not take pleasure in them. I went forth to meet the Philistine; and he cursed me by his idols. But I drew his own sword, and beheaded him, and removed reproach from the children of Israel.

"This is a genuine Psalm of David, though supernumerary, composed when he fought in single combat with Goliath." It appears in the Septuagint after Psalm 150, with this superscription.

BOW OF PROMISE

The ancient Peruvians had a legend to the effect that the sea was prevented from overflowing the land and drowning all the inhabitants only by virtue of the rainbow, the two ends of which were continually pressing upon the ocean and holding it down. This legend is quoted on the authority of Francis Lenormant, the French archaeologist. To those acquainted with the Biblical record of the Flood the story has interest when it is remembered

that Gen. 9.12-26 tells of the rainbow being given as a sign of God's promise never again to destroy the world with water. Some dim memory of those days immediately after Ararat, handed down through the generations, has survived in this legend and creates a connecting link between Father Noah and his sons, and the Peruvian Indians of South America.

OWNERSHIP

5 - The World's Broad Road to Destruction

There were those who came to Jesus to be made whole. He had the power to heal the sick and they came to him crying out, begging for His word and touch to relieve them of their pain, distress or the severe handicap of lameness, blindness or deafness. Whether they were conscious of other defects that made them mentally unsound or morally unwholesome was not always clear to themselves but it was clear to Him. His advice was often *"go and sin no more lest worse thing befall you"*.

When the Pharisees, in an attempt to disparage Him, accused Him of associating with sinners, He replied that *"they who are whole need not a physician"*. He had the power to make men whole. He touched those with leprosy and they were cleansed of the dreadful malady that made them outcasts from society. This dreadful contagion of the flesh had become a synonym of that sin that made man an outcast from God. It was a hated word, a thorn in the flesh to all who heard it or were conscious of its unhappy consequences. When Jesus forgave sins for which the Law demanded punishments and sacrifices, his critics were quick to question His authority. To tell a man his sins were forgiven was even worse than opening blind eyes or healing the sick on the Sabbath day! He saw them as both sinned against and sinning, the blind leading the blind, walking in darkness, beset by rampaging foes which destroyed the wholesome vigour which might have been theirs.

He pitied them in their rejection of His remedy of love, for He had come to seek and to save that which had been lost. Sadly He watched them turn away. *"You will not turn to me that you might have life."* When Paul the Apostle was reaching the end of his mission to the Gentiles he wrote to Timothy *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."* (1 Tim. 1.15). Sin, its vicious consequences and its removal by Christ were much to the fore in his writings. Perhaps his insistence that sin and death entered the world by man has rendered his doctrine unpalatable to those who look on the fall of man as a myth, who by elevating him to the stars, hope that he has found his salvation through a more scientific way than that of the sacrificial lamb of God on the cross at Calvary. The

sad truth is that while science and the engineers have provided the power to send man soaring into the skies his moral path does not correspond with his lofty ambitions. Sin and sensuality pull him down as the thorns and thistles spring in his footsteps, vexing his heart and blighting his best endeavours. It is a common experience to do and say the wrong thing while the good deed and the right word at the right time seem elusive, defeated by emotional conflict to become so many lost opportunities.

The search-light of heavenly wisdom, turned upon the struggling mass of mankind tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, heaving with discontent, reeling under the weight of its own intoxicating self-indulgence, reveals it as lost, stupefied and dying. These are afflictions for which the most skilful have no remedy. Only those who have been warmed by the Divine ray, moved by the spirit of God to turn in His direction, have received the healing touch. They are alive as those risen from the dead.

"Awake you that sleep and arise from the dead: and Christ will give you light" (Eph. 5.14). This is the confident cry of hope, the stirring voice, the loud ringing of the bell that arouses the sleeper, sets him on his feet and turns his face toward the risen Sun of Righteousness. His warming, healing beams will yet thaw the whole race out of the frozen torpor of its unbelief giving it the living light of day in exchange for its night of sin and death.

Change is the great unwritten law of the universe. All things change and are changed. The earth itself is the product of change, and there are others yet to come before it is complete, a fitting home for a changed and nobler race who will match its beauty and peace. Old things pass away. Reconstruction and renewal follow disintegration and decay. The end of the twentieth century saw a moral world change for the worse, seduced, deceiving and deceived. A failing faith, worn out systems that have outlived their usefulness, threats to end all life by the use of modern weapons are indisputable evidence that the present civilisation has reached a perilous period in its history.

The time is ripe for a removal of much that is evil, for a shaking of everything that can be shaken, for a throwing down and a casting out of a great

deal that spoils the planet. These oppress the spirit of discerning people with a sense of failure, tragedy, fear and future disaster. Some see it as an ebbing tide, others as a gathering storm. By whatever picture events present themselves, to the serious minded, they indicate change of a hitherto unknown nature, both turbulent and drastic. Nature is the living parable of change with her Winters of death and her Springs of renewal. As a poet exclaimed, "Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" If the old ways die off in a winter of great tribulation can the Spring of renewal, of restoration, of rejuvenation be far behind? The new heavens and the renewed earth under a new rule of righteousness, where evil will not prosper because the sacred law of God will be at last in full operation. This is looking ahead with hope, but, the Word of God sees the end from the beginning. It is full of hope. Those who have discarded its testimony as myth, who have changed the truth of God into a lie, who are without God and without hope, must either be very frightened people or utterly indifferent to their own fate or that of the millions who occupy the earth. In plain words, by metaphor, parables and by living pictures the Bible declares that God by His knowledge and use of powerful forces created all things. He formed the earth to be inhabited by the race of man whom He made at the beginning of a new epoch which seems to have run its course.

When Paul spoke to the men of Athens about the Unknown God and His determination for mankind, most were sceptical and some mocked. There have always been mockers of God and goodness. The ribald and the irreverent were at the cross of Calvary mocking the Saviour who would not come down and save himself, who endured their jeers in silence. The modern world has its scoffers who treat lightly the subject of sin and death, who can without a blush of shame turn the life of Christ, the life of man and the authority of God into impudent farce. For them and for all who are ready to scorn virtue and exalt evil, the Apostle's warning to the Galatians is still timely: "*Be not deceived: God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap*" (Gal. 6.7). Defied or ignored it is still a law which will not be repealed until the day of reckoning when all will be forced to reap the harvest of their words and deeds. After two thousand years of religious strife there is a critical spirit abroad which

questions the need and purpose of religion. God is being ousted from His place in the earth, in the minds of men, women and children by what is called "the beauty and truth of science". Salvation has become an outmoded and meaningless word to many. Science with its power over the atom, its raising of man from the swamps to the stars, is the new miracle-worker which excites the wonder of a generation which knows not God. Jesus had no illusions about the reception of His message, neither had the apostles who were commissioned to carry it to all nations. They spoke of tares among the wheat, of wolves in the fold and of strong delusions. Paul in his letter to Timothy advised him to "*avoid profane babbling and opposition of science, falsely so called*" that even in those early days, "*some professing have erred concerning the faith.*" (1 Tim. 6.20-24). He also warned of deceptions, of a great falling away from the faith before the Man of Sin, the mystery of iniquity that would usurp the place of God in the Temple of worship. The world has not been won for Christ. The present state of man is as far removed from the ideal state of Christian love as ever it was in the days of its paganism. Christian influence is unlikely to set the world on fire at this late hour to bring it to repentance or save it from its fierce hatred and burning animosities.

The Church of God is but a handful of faithful hearts out of all earth's teeming millions, holding fast to their trust; a wavering light in a world of darkness whose peoples still walk in sin and the shadow of death. Even that small light is being assailed by the winds of doubt blown in by clever intellectuals who think they can create a new and better world without God. A society raised upon a denial of God is a monstrous deception long foreseen. Warnings have been given in plenty and it is up to those who received the faith, who have the sacred flame of the love of God and Christ in their hearts, to guard it well, it is a precious heritage, handed on at great cost from one generation to another. During the centuries God has been selecting living stones out of all nations, kindred and tongues, to build one Church, one Temple, whose chief foundation stone is Christ. Such have been few, a 'little flock'. Christ said "*my kingdom is not of this world*". While it is true that nothing can happen without His knowledge or permission, the kingdoms of this world are not in His hands.

The present system is evil, ruled by the prince of darkness whose deceptions blind the minds of men to the gospel of Christ, to the character of God and his ultimate purpose to refashion man into His own image. There is a force of evil at work in the earth, a mystery of iniquity, which is set to deny and thwart every good thing. The god of this world

is not the God of Heaven, the living, holy Divine Being who created and upholds all things by the Word of His power, who watches and cares for His own but allows the rest to go their own way until He calls a halt of "thus far and no further".

(To be concluded)

FAS

TRY THIS

This took place at a conference when we were studying an epistle. Paul's words were read out to the group, one section at a time, and each member quickly wrote down what the passage was saying. Straight away the next section was read, and so on, it was a good exercise. Afterwards, reading through what we had each written, although various points were missing, we had a summary of Paul's message.

Here is what one member of the group wrote. It is an exercise some readers may care to try. It helped us to concentrate, and gave us an overview. Since many translations are marked in paragraphs or sections it is possible to perform the exercise on your own, though we found a benefit in listening to the reader.

From Paul, authorised by God, to the called and faithful – peace! (1.1, 2). We bless God, God blesses us, calls us, adopts us, gives us grace, accepts us, in Christ (1.3-6). He frees us, forgives us, showers us with rich grace, wisdom and insight (1.7-8).

We are shown His eternal purpose, to unite everything everywhere in Christ (1.9-10). We were chosen, from eternity, to be His special people, each one of us sealed with His Spirit, for His glory (1.11-14).

For this reason, Paul always prays for the believers to be spiritually enlightened, and to know the power available to us all, through the exalted Christ, to God's glory (1.15-23). The dead state of the world, and under God's anger. We have been saved and raised to heavenly places, by grace (2.1-6). We are an example of grace for future ages – God's work of art, as He meant us to be from the beginning (2.7-10).

The gentiles had no part in God's plan, no hope, but now have been included because of Christ's sacrifice (2.11-13).

Peace through Christ has brought unity, one body, reconciled to God. The Spirit opens up one way to the Father. One building, on the foundation

of Christ. A Temple (2.14-22). The mystery of God's call to the gentiles has been kept secret, but now revealed by God through Paul, who explains it. How comprehensive God's wisdom is. Paul's sufferings are for the sake of the gentiles (3.1-13).

Paul's prayer for believers: that we should have a full comprehension of all God's love, grace and gifts, Christ in us, to God's glory (3.14-21).

Paul, in prison, prays for loving peaceful relationships (4.1-3). Unity in God (4.4-6). We each have our own share of grace, given by Christ, who came down to establish his redeemed church. Our gifts must build the unity of the church, as a body, growing in love (4.7-16).

Abandon worldly living. Spiritual revolution must regenerate our hearts (4.17-24). No more lies, stealing or anger, foul talk which grieves God's spirit. Be kind and forgiving (4.25-32). Follow Christ and His Father. Forsake sexual impurity, loose living makes God angry (5.1-7).

Live in light and expose the works of darkness. Awake to Christ's light (5.8-14). Be thoughtful and clear headed. Sing hymns and songs, in the Spirit to God's glory (5.15-20). Give way to others (5.21). Husbands – love. Wives – submission, respect as to Christ (5.22-27). Husbands, picture of Christ (5.28-33). Children – obedience/honour. Good parenting (6.1-4). Slaves – obedience and respect. "Slaves of Christ". Employers – treat slaves well, they are your brothers in Christ (6.5-9). Strong in the strength of God (6.10). Armour for the fight against evil with prayer in the Spirit (6.11-18). Pray for Paul in his opportunities to witness to his captors, and for Tichicus. Prayer for all (6.19-24).

Yes, this epistle was Ephesians. We do not claim the above as a perfect summary. It was done in haste under pressure, and our readers could possibly do better. But when Paul's letter was first read aloud to the churches, their first impression may have been something not unlike this.

GC

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

A Meditation

"Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Philippians 4.8, 9)

"And we know that he works all things together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8.28)

"If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8.31-32, 35-39)

Be thankful. Gratitude produces contentment in all conditions and it places a bridle on all one's desires. It checks gloom, destroys envy and it returns with blessings on the head. We taste sweetness of a gift twice over when we are grateful for it. — *Dr. H. Lockyer*

"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearances of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly ... Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5.18-24)

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting to one another in the fear of God." (Ephesians 5.20-21)

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." (Genesis 50.20)

"Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return: the Lord gave, and

the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1.20, 21)

If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and to all perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to yourself, to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you. For whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank for it, you turn it into a blessing. — *William Law*

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;

Take my eyes and let them see everything as seen by thee.

Take my ears and let them hear thy voice speaking everywhere

Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love;

Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my king;

Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold

Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine:

Take my heart, it is thine own, it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store

Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

F.R. Havergal (extended in line 2.)

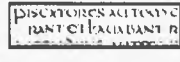
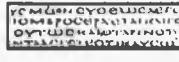
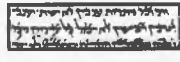
Love absorbs trouble and distills kindness, is contented, lowly, self-effacing, well-behaved, outgoing, self-controlled, forgiving and forgetting, enjoying goodness, covering up for any and all, taking everyone at face value, always optimistic, willing to be on the bottom rung, persevering to the last, always succeeds. *After Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.4-8*

"Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations of the age of the ages". Ephesians 3.20, 21

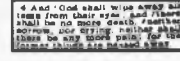
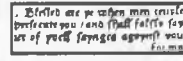
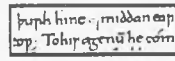
"Jesus Christ yesterday and today the same, and forever." (Hebrews 13.8)

Teach me, O God, so to use all the circumstances of life that they may bring forth in me the fruits of holiness rather than the fruits of sin.

JT



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY



Vol. 82, No. 6

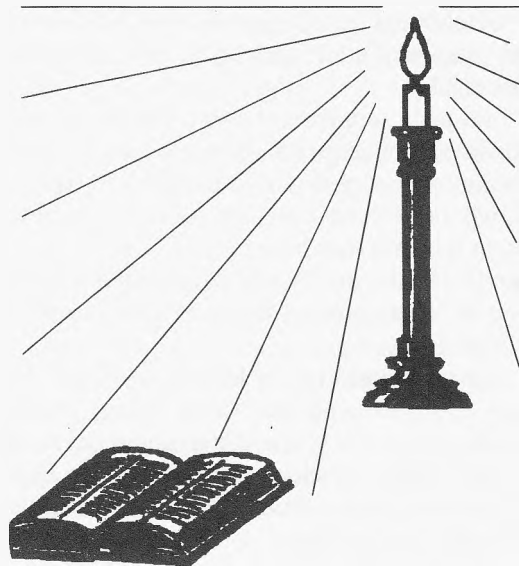
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NOTICES

RENEWAL TIME. This issue of the Bible Study Monthly has a four-page pull out supplement as last year. Please fill in the Renewal Form, 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 reader has difficulty in returning the renewal form or forgets it, none need worry. We do not cancel a copy of the magazine until we have reason to believe it is no longer wanted. Please tell us of any change of address or correction needed on the address label.

The two-page supplement also contains an order form for literature requests. Please do not request more literature than you can usefully use. To new readers we only send one copy of any booklet ordered, in the first instance.

Some BFU titles are missing due to being out of stock but at least some of them will be reprinted during 2006 DV.

If you pay income tax in Britain and have not filled in the form on the back page of the supplement, please fill it in and sign and return with your renewal form. Readers who do this help BFU who can reclaim the tax from the Inland Revenue.

BFU still has a stock of the book 'Sword Against All Nations' and readers are invited to send for a copy.

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. 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.

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

GAINSBOROUGH HOUSE is in Milborne Port on the border of Dorset and Somerset near the ancient town of Sherborne. This Christian Retirement Centre currently has eight residents and accommodation for short-term visitors. All flats are self-contained with shower and kitchen units. The modest fee includes council tax, insurance, heating and lighting, TV licence and a hot mid-day meal. The residential centre does not have full time nursing but the resident housekeeper keeps a very watchful eye and gives all kinds of extra help especially in times of emergency.

Gone from us

Brother Jim Callaghan (Wirral)

Sister Alice Cooper (Rugby)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

CHRISTMAS MORNING

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder" (Isa. 9.6).

On Christmas morning it is natural that thoughts should be about Jesus, born a baby, but born to be King. Looking at the story, it strikes us how Mary had this necessity of journeying to pay taxes thrust upon her, when she was so near to having her baby.

In most homes, in our society, the 'mother-to-be' is fussed over and she is forbidden to do anything energetic, she has to have plenty of rest and generally prepare herself as well as possible for the forthcoming event. Fathers no doubt take over the necessary chores; children have it impressed upon them that they have to be good. Grandmas and Grandads are usually in attendance to offer advice and speculative comment, and generally everyone tries to keep the 'mother-to-be' cool, calm and collected.

One may ask – why at this of all times should it be that Mary had to go, with Joseph her husband, to the city of David, Bethlehem? It was God's will, it had been foretold in Micah 5.2. *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting".*

The hand of God was leading them on. He overrules the purposes of Emperors and Kings, of statesmen and Parliaments, for the accomplishment of His designs (though they know them not). He hardened the heart of Pharaoh, called Cyrus King of Persia like a slave to his foot, made the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar his servant; this God was now using Augustus, through his decree for taxes, to bring Joseph and Mary to the significant town of Bethlehem.

Mary neither argued or grumbled; she just packed her bags and accompanied Joseph her husband to Bethlehem, the city of David, because being of the lineage of David this was where he had to be enrolled.

One can imagine her ordeal, for there were no modern comforts in those days, no motors, ambulances or buses. She would no doubt ride on an animal's back and there would be personal possessions to look after, money for the taxes, the things she had no doubt prepared in readiness for

the arrival of her baby, and among these the swaddling clothes.

The distance between Nazareth in Galilee and Bethlehem in Judah is some sixty-eight miles as the crow flies, but on the way they had to pass Mt. Ebal, Mt. Gerizim and the Mt. of Olives. So it seems safe to assume that by the time they had followed the winding path, they would have trekked some 80 or 90 miles. And this was not the end of things: another ordeal awaited her, because there was no room for them at the inn.

Imagine for a moment how tired and weary Mary must have felt after such a long journey and then to be confronted with *"no room at the inn"*. Imagine how we would feel in similar circumstances, and a birth imminent. We would no doubt be at "panic stations", feeling hot under the collar and exceedingly bothered for the comfort of the mother and the safety and well being of the child. But the Gospel bears no mention of Mary being worked up and anxious; we are merely informed that she brought forth her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger. What an example of trust, of humility, of confidence in her God!

As we consider the baby Jesus, it had been uttered by the mouths of the holy prophets since the world began, that He would come to be the Deliverer, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, the Government to be upon his shoulder, and of the increase of his Government and Peace to be no end. A Prince indeed! And yet He was born in such a humble manner and in such humble surroundings.

All know the excitement nowadays that takes place when a royal birth is in the offing. The papers are full of the events leading up to the great day, speculation is rife as to whether it will be a girl or a boy child, a Prince or a Princess, what they will be in line for succession to the throne, what they will be called. Television, radio, all take up the theme and the whole event is at the forefront of people's minds and is the talking point of the day. They are born to live in a palace, with everything they need for comfort and security. Yet here is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords being born in a stable in a manger, with little light by which to see, and with the smell of animals and sweat in the atmosphere. Did Jesus mind? There is absolutely

no doubt, He lay there without a care in the world, unaware of all this, a very happy, loveable little baby.

The Bible teaches us to be humble and in both Mary and Jesus there is the perfect example. No wonder Jesus could say, some thirty years later, "Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".

But in spite of all Mary's humility, this event was not to pass unnoticed. She would never have gone round bragging that she had given birth to the Holy Child, Jesus; she was no doubt content to give the child all the love she had. But God had other plans. Although Jesus made his entry on the stage of life so humbly and silently, although the citizens of Bethlehem dreamed not what had happened in their midst, although the Emperor at Rome knew not that his decree had influenced the nativity of a King who was yet to bear rule, not only over the Roman world, but over many a land where Roman eagles never flew, although the history of mankind went thundering forward next morning quite unconscious of the event which had happened, yet it did not altogether escape notice.

This was a great day, a day for rejoicing, and for rejoicing even now that this day took place. This was a day and an event that had to be made known. To whom did God choose to send his mighty angels to make it known? The humble, trusty shepherds in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. That which was unnoticed by kings and the great ones of this world was so absorbing a theme to the princes of Heaven that they burst the bounds of invisibility in which they shroud themselves in order to express their joy and explain the significance of the great event. Seeking the most worthy hearts to which they might communicate it, they found them in these simple trusting shepherds, living the life of contemplation and prayer, in the fields where Jacob had kept his flocks, where Boaz and Ruth had wedded, and where David the great King had spent his youth.

One can imagine in the stillness of the night, with the peaceful atmosphere and the stars shining overhead, the amazement of the shepherds when the angel appeared and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. The good tidings to the humble-hearted shepherds were that the long expected Saviour had been born this day, in the city of David, none other than Jesus Christ the Lord. None may forget the wonderful implied and outspoken

promise that these good tidings of great joy shall be to all people.

At this season of the year, many will refer to their experiences as being of great joy. Gifts and the giving and receiving of them all add to the occasion, but the greatest joy will be found by those, who in simple faith, receive this message and ask Jesus into their hearts and lives, as their Saviour. Recall the familiar words of the well known Christmas hymn 'O little town of Bethlehem' (3rd verse).

"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given,
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven,
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in"

And as Jesus enters into our lives, is it not a fact that the words "*I bring you good tidings of great joy*" have a much greater depth of meaning. It is as Jesus reveals himself to us, that we begin to know something of "God's Peace on Earth" and experience a foretaste of His "goodwill toward men".

The wonder of it is, that that baby born in the stable at Bethlehem nearly two thousand years ago, can be born again in the "stable" of our hearts, and we are "born again" into the family of God, to receive His Spirit as sons and daughters, and to ultimately share His glory, if we remain faithful. It can be our privilege to share in God's plan of salvation for all mankind.

The time of the restitution of all things is at the Second Advent of Christ. It is then that the words of Isaiah 9.6-7 and Luke 2.10-11 and 14 will be fulfilled, "*For unto us a Son is given, and the Government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his Government and Peace there shall be no end. Upon the Throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.*"

At this time the good tidings of great joy shall be to all people. Then all will know the Saviour who is Christ the Lord. Then all will give "glory to God in the Highest" as there is on earth "Peace and Goodwill to all men".

GOD'S LOVE – THE MACRO AND THE MICRO

Scientists every day report their discoveries of the unimaginably vast and the unimaginably small. We become accustomed on the one hand to the enigmas of space, and on the other to the investigation of DNA and the secrets of human life. Can God's love be less all-encompassing?

Macro and micro are terms in modern language which derive from the Greek – *makros* (long, large) and *mikros* (small). They creep into our daily speech – the microwave, the microphone, the microscope, the micro-processor ... and in gardening catalogues, the cupressus macrocarpa – a Californian cypress with a crown of large spreading branches. As part of a compound word, macro denotes something "which is long lasting or large scale. For example, 'macroeconomics' is the study of large scale and general factors such as interest rates (as manipulated by the Bank of England to control inflation). Micro means very small or of reduced size, even one millionth. 'Microeconomics' considers the effects of single factors and individual decisions, what the businessman does down our street. The extent of God's love can similarly be seen as macro or micro – His great over-arching plans of creation and salvation on the one hand, on the other His personal concern for the daily problems of 'little ones' or even 'sparrows'.

Makros in Greek can be combined with *thumos* to create a term which expresses one aspect of God's love, *makrothumia* – being long-tempered, long suffering, having a 'long fuse'. God endures the existence of evil because by so doing He gives an opportunity for repentance. *"Do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"* (Romans 2.4). God is not slow about His promise that our Lord will return, *"not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance"* (2 Peter 3.9). *Makrothumia* is looked for in Christians. It shows itself as the steadfast spirit that will never give in. The Christian watches with *makrothumia* for the Lord's return, just as a farmer watches for his crops to grow and mature (James 5.7-10). *Makrothumia* involves a refusal to hit back in anger, a quality needed in the minister and the preacher (2 Cor. 6.6; Titus 2.2). It is a constituent of love, and a fruit of the spirit. It comes from God, who Himself bears with the sins and follies and disobedience of men.

It was a patient love like this which welcomed back the Prodigal Son when he was yet a long way off (*makran*).

God's great love extends to little people. There are the little ones who believe in Jesus (Matthew 18.6; 11.25). His disciples were simple people, not specially wise or well versed in scripture, not students. But they had that quality that they really trusted Jesus, like thousands of ordinary believers since. He had a special love and concern for these little ones who believed in Him. His Father had revealed these things to babes, not the clever and calculating. Their love rose up in response to His love.

These simple disciples Jesus termed a little flock. They should not be afraid. God in His love had given them the kingdom. This was not necessarily to make them great rulers in the kingdom as James and John and their mother expected, but rather that the kingdom belonged to them. They owned it, like the poor in spirit, as assured beneficiaries, nurtured by the King's love, having peace, receiving blessings from the King of love who was their shepherd. It is those who receive Jesus as a little child who belong to the kingdom, whether then or now or in the age to come.

In Revelation 3.8 the Lord speaks to those who have little strength. In spite of weakness they have obeyed his teaching, and they did not deny Him when they were threatened or attacked. Their hearts belonged to the King whatever betide. The promise to them was continuing opportunities to serve Him – an unshuttable door! Their enemies would come to acknowledge that God loves them. They would be kept from the trials and tests coming upon the world. But they must 'hang on' till the Lord comes. Then they will be permanent parts of God's temple, identified by His name 'written' upon them, identified as belonging to the new Jerusalem, identified by Christ's own new name. These little people are part of the Lord's universal purpose.

It is heart warming to go through scripture and pick out the references to God's universal love, and so often the micro is blended with the macro. Think for example of Psalm 102.25-27. *"Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They will perish, but thou dost endure ... thou art the same and thy years have no end. The children of thy servants shall dwell*

secure..." Our personal security is linked to the Creator who lives into eternity.

Or Ephesians 2.4-7: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive with Christ ... and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*

Or even John 3.16: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" – the macro – "that whoever believes in him" – the micro – "should not perish but have eternal life".*

God's personal love at the micro level is astounding when we consider the sweep of His vast purposes in creation. How is it possible for Him to care about us individually, personally? Yet we have the statements in scripture: *"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him, for he knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust."* (Psalm 103.13, 14). *"Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb... Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the day that were formed for me,*

when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139.13,16) *"Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you"* (1 Peter 5.7).

"For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every, son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12.6).

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5.17).

"You are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10.31)

"I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14.21).

In our amazement we might feel that these aspects of God's love are incompatible - the universal sweep of the macro, the intimacy of the micro. But it is not so. Our enquiring minds cannot dissect the mind of the Creator. We simply have to accept what He has done and will do.

"For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. 'I dwell in the high and holy place..' and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57.15)

GC

GOODWILL TO MEN

A Christmas Message

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men'." (Luke 2.14).

That was the song of the celestial choir at the Nativity. It came to the wondering shepherds in its fresh simplicity and they accepted it with child-like faith. Perhaps they thought that the promise was to be fulfilled almost at once or at least in their own lifetime; it must have been a source of perplexity to them all during the next thirty years that nothing of the glorious word had come to pass.

The purpose of God in Christ is still a mystery to all except those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit in consequence of their acceptance into the High Calling, and their walk in the way of consecration. Only to such is it given at this present time to enter into a knowledge of the "deep things of God". And in order to understand how and when it will be true that there is peace on earth and goodwill amongst men, it is essential to understand our Lord's relation to the continuing reign of evil, and the place in this that is occupied by the "Church which is his Body".

These shepherds must have listened to the message with an especial intensity because their land had not known true peace for many years. The background of the people of Judea was one of warfare, captivity, rebellion and severe suffering. Six hundred years earlier they had endured the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the national disintegration which followed that calamitous event. Even although seventy years later they found themselves restored to their own land, it was only as a tributary nation, first under the Persians, later the Greeks, and finally Rome. The attempts of the Greeks to Hellenise them led to revolt after revolt, interspersed with dreadful persecutions. Their temporary success during the Maccabean period, while due largely to the prowess of Judas Maccabeus, was also contributed to by the decay of Greek power before the growing influence of Rome. The brief period of Jewish independence ended abruptly in the year 63 BC when the Roman, Pompey, marched his legions into Jerusalem. From then until the year AD 70 there was almost continual rebellion against the invaders. It is little wonder that, despairingly

seeking some relief from their sufferings, "*All men were in expectation*" of the long-promised Messianic deliverer. The terrible consequences of the struggle for independence led by Judas of Galilee, during the childhood of Jesus, culminating in the death of Judas and the crucifixion of four thousand of his followers by the Romans, was only one of those dark happenings which made men long for true peace.

In the midst of these conditions Jesus grew to manhood's estate. Standing head and shoulders above His fellows, men at the first must have looked to Him for leadership, in confidence that He would be able to deliver them from the Roman yoke. They expected, as do so many today, that "*peace on earth, goodwill to men*" would come by the use of armed force, by means of which their enemies would be crushed in the same way as they themselves had been subjugated. Great must have been their disappointment when at length the One on whom they had pinned their hopes came back from the wilderness to preach an entirely different message from what they had expected. They were trained in the Mosaic Law that called for "*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*". It encouraged them to go forth to slay the enemies of the Lord and they utterly failed to understand this new gospel of non-resistance, of love for enemies, of turning the other cheek, of doing good to those who were inflicting evil. In their disappointment and chagrin they turned away and rejected the only One who could have brought them the peace they so much desired.

Many there are today who understand no more clearly. The majority still uphold the principle of fighting the forces of evil with the weapons of evil. There is no real comprehension of the true purpose and power of God except in the hearts of the few. Not many appreciate the meaning of Jesus' words "*If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me*". Yet in no other way could the Father pave the way for the Son to take up His destined work as the anointed Priest-King, made "*higher than the heavens*". Christ defeated the sin of the world by accepting it into His love, and at the same time, says the writer to the Hebrews, "*learned obedience through the things that he suffered*". So He became, again as Hebrews declares, a merciful and compassionate High Priest, able to "*have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way*" and, praise God, thus to save to the

utmost all that come unto God by him.

Men and women at the time of the First Advent could not understand how such a method could avail. Even Jesus' closest associates, the twelve disciples, failed to follow this "*more excellent way*". There was a strife amongst them, which should be the greatest in the Kingdom. They wanted to call down fire from heaven in the fashion of Elijah of old to destroy the inhospitable Samaritans. Peter, defending his Master, drew his sword and struck off the ear of the High Priest's servant. The old training and beliefs died hard; it was not until after Pentecost that they began to see the why and the wherefore of the pattern Jesus set for them. Here it was that the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus was first discerned and first made known. It could not have been so proclaimed earlier, for it was at this point that atonement had been made by Christ Jesus entering into the presence of God and the Holy Spirit sent to the waiting disciples with creative power to transform them into His likeness. That is why their writings afterward gave such clear instruction concerning the meeting of evil and the overcoming of evil by the force of love alone. That was henceforth to be the guiding principle in the lives of true Christians, necessary preparation for their future work in the next Age, when the work of conversion and reconciliation will depend upon the power of the love of God and on that alone. So in this Age that same principle is to be adopted by the Sons of God, both collectively and as individuals.

Collectively – yes, for the members of the true Church in the flesh are to be the salt of the earth; they are to be as lights in the world. It is a grievous thing that no matter how much we may succeed in measuring up to this ideal individually, in our personal lives before God, we so often utterly fail to do it collectively, as a community or as a group. And it is as a community that we are judged by them. No small part of our failure to give an effective witness in the world and win men and women for Christ must be put down to our lamentable failure to manifest among ourselves the standards we preach.

The Apostle Paul was one who well learned the way of Christ. His object lesson at the first was the non-violent resistance of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. He was falsely accused, but he refused to meet evil with the weapons of his persecutors. "*All that sat in the council, gazing steadfastly upon him,*

saw his face as it had been the face of an angel". How could it have been otherwise, lighted as it was with the indwelling radiance of the Holy Spirit? At his stoning he retained the same disposition and died praying the Lord that He would not lay their great sin to their charge. From the point of view of those around at the time it could be argued that Stephen's death was pointless, unavailing, powerless to accomplish any good. From the standpoint of history that argument is futile and valueless.

The power and effect of Stephen's death was seen a few years later when a bright light blinded with its glare a traveller on the Damascus road, and a voice broke through that proud man's reserve with the fearful question "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" Had Saul not stood by and witnessed the death of the man whom he helped to condemn, he may never have come to that later experience and become a man utterly broken and humbled, moulded into a chosen vessel to do and suffer great things in and for the name of Jesus. It may well be that we owe the superb power of the Pauline Epistles, and the tremendous legacy Paul left to the Church of after ages, to the faithfulness of the first martyr Stephen.

Little wonder, then, is it that we find Paul clearly defining Christ's terms in the words "*Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12.21). These are the terms of the One who "loved righteousness and hated iniquity", realising that it was not yet God's time to restrain evil in the world at large. This Gospel Age is a time in which Christ the Head, and the Church which is His Body, are called to resist evil by non-violent methods, and so receive their training for the work of that coming Day when all evil everywhere is to be removed and banished.

It is a costly way when measured by human standards. It entails sacrificial death, as it did in the case of Jesus, but if we are faithful unto death we shall be raised in the power of the First Resurrection into the glory of the Kingdom. Then, and then only, will it be possible to bring about what so many well-intentioned men are striving by

their own efforts to accomplish now - peace on earth, goodwill towards men. The ordinary man, desiring to help his fellows, feels it little less than criminal to stand idle in the present chaos. He is impelled to do all that lies in his power to crush collective evil, whatever the means he employs. That is because he does not understand God's plan of the ages. The Kingdom of peace and righteousness will never and can never come by man's efforts, but only by the power of God in the person of Christ, the great Mediator, the One who has resisted evil by non-violence. Men will never cause wars to cease; it is only God who can and will do this in His own time and way, making "*wars to cease to the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder. He burneth the chariot in the fire*".

The ministry of affliction plays a very important part in the development of the Church. The example is set before us in 1 Pet. 2.23 "*When he was reviled, reviled not again, when he was threatened, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*". It is no use asserting, as some do, that the case of Jesus was different, and that we are called upon to fight evil with weapons He did not and would not use. The Apostle Paul also says "*Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer, being defamed, we intreat; we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day*" (1 Cor. 4.12-13). This line of conduct is no sign of weakness; it savours not of compromise and its practical outworking savours both strength and beauty of character.

So peace will come at last. In the meantime it is for us to continue along the narrow pathway, faithful to the increasing light of truth as we endeavour to make our calling and election sure. Always remember that "*there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10.13).

AOH

"Well, then, by our baptism we were buried with Him in death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we also lived an entirely new life. For if we have become one with Him by sharing in His death, we shall also be one with Him by sharing in His

resurrection. This we know - that our old self was nailed to the cross with Him, in order that our sinful nature might be neutralised, so that we should no longer be the slaves of sin; for he who has died is absolved from sin."

Romans 6.4-7 Weymouth's translation

SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

3 - Visions and Dreams

The greatest prophecies have been given through visions and dreams. We do not know how many of the Millennial descriptions of Isaiah and others owe their vividness of details to this fact, but we do know that such prophecies stand out the more clearly and linger longest in the memory. It may be that God chose the sense of sight rather than that of sound as His first medium of communication with man, and spoke to "holy men of old" in vision rather than sound. The oldest words for 'prophet', *roeh* and *chozeh*, seem to indicate this, for they both mean 'one who sees' and are often translated 'seer'. After about 1000 BC, however, the word *nabi*, meaning one who speaks ecstatically and fervently, began to supplant the older words. It may well be that this change of word indicates a development in the status of the prophets. Whereas at the first they could do no more than relate the visions that they had seen, the later prophets could, and did, explain their visions in part to the people. Perhaps now they could tell them in glowing terms of those glories of the Divine Plan that they had been permitted to see. Such a conclusion is in harmony with the view that Divine truth progressively unfolds as century succeeds century. An interesting note in this connection is found in 1 Sam. 9.9. The narrator, explaining Saul's servant's reference to the 'man of God', says, *"Formerly in Israel anyone who went to enquire of God would say, 'Come, let us go to the seer, for the one who is now called a prophet (nabi) was formerly called a seer (roeh).'*" This verse is evidently an editorial note added to the account at some later date to explain the change of term to a generation that was not familiar with the more primitive meaning.

It is noteworthy that visions and dreams were not used to convey knowledge of God's future plans to men until the time of Isaiah. From then to that of John the Revelator, a period of eight hundred years, they formed the principal means of prophetic revelation. It is probable that visions as such go right back to the time of Eden. The sight of the Cherubim with the flaming sword, stationed at the entrance to Eden to keep the way of the Tree of Life (Gen. 3.24) must have been a vision, for the cherubim, symbolic four-headed and six-winged creatures, have no existence in reality. Then Moses

saw the vision of God on the Mount and talked with Him, at the time when the Law was written there by the finger of God (Exodus 31.18). Moses of course, was that finger, for the Law proved to be well and solidly graven on stone slabs, and human instrumentality of some kind manifestly was employed.

Apart from the problematical case of Balaam (Num. 24.16) there is no instance of "Kingdom prophecy" by vision or dream prior to the time of Isaiah. This is in keeping with the fact that Israel's own understanding of the Messianic Kingdom began to assume definite shape in Isaiah's day. Even although David sang about it in his Psalms, the idea was not clearly formulated in Israel at that time. It required the revelations of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, positively to define the nature of the Kingdom, and appropriately enough these four, together with Zechariah, who lived last of the five, were those to whom the greatest and most detailed of Messianic visions were granted.

Isaiah's first vision was that of the Lord in His Temple (Isa. 6.1). Although he does not explicitly state which of his further revelations were given by vision the nature of some of them, particularly chaps. 13, 21, 35 and 63, is such as to leave little room for doubt that they are descriptions of scenes that he did actually see. In some cases the visual impression was merely a symbolic picture, symbolizing to his mind the reality that was intended. For example, in chap. 21 he perceived the dreaded *simoom*, a cyclonic wind, sweeping up from the Persian Gulf to destroy the land followed by a motley procession of chariots drawn by ill-assorted beasts of burden making all haste to get away. He knew this to be symbolic of the fall of Babylon and the over-running of the country by Cyrus of Persia. In chapters 44 and 45 he associates this victory of Cyrus with the assumption of regal power by the destined 'Servant of Jehovah', the Lord Jesus Christ in His Millennial Kingdom, and so makes chapter 21 a prophecy of that also. In chapter 35, however, he describes a scene that will certainly be literally fulfilled in the Millennial Age and like Paul in after days (2 Cor. 12.2) he might well have viewed in vision an actual scene of earth, three millenniums before that scene can be enacted

in reality.

Jeremiah saw an almond twig suddenly and miraculously burst into blossom, and then a boiling cauldron overturned so that its seething contents were precipitated all over the ground. (Jer. 1.11-14). Those symbols told him of the coming fulfilment of Divine promise, but that there must first be a visitation in judgment at the hand of the Chaldeans, spreading death and destruction over the land. A later vision showed him two baskets of figs, symbolic of his own nation. One basket contained good figs and the other, bad ones, telling him of the two sections into which that nation had divided itself, the one part heeding the Divine word and resting quietly in Babylon, the other chafing under God's judgment and looking still to Egypt for salvation (Jer. 24.1-10). The prophecy represented by this vision was fulfilled to the letter eighteen years later, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple and brought the national existence of Judea to an end.

Twelve years after Jeremiah had seen his blossoming almond rod, Ezekiel, far away in Babylonia, beheld a series of visions which for sheer grandeur have no equal in the Old Testament. Like his predecessor Isaiah, he saw first of all a vision of the majesty of God, riding on the heavens, His throne supported by the cherubim (Ezek. 1). Later on he received visions relating to events imminent in his own time, a roll of a book containing an intimation of the coming downfall of Jerusalem (chapters 2-7), a vision of the Temple with its idolatrous worship and the destruction of both city and Temple at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers (chapters 8-11); all this some twelve years before the events took place. Later in his ministry he saw the final re-gathering of Israel (the valley of dry bones). This was their last trial of faith (the onslaught of Gog), and the Millennial reign, under the symbol of a new Temple and city, chapters 37-48 of his prophecy. It comprised a detailed symbolic account of history from the Jewish viewpoint extending from their national awakening at the end of the Gospel age to the final establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth. This is a series of events that in Ezekiel's day was something like twenty-five centuries future.

The visions and dreams of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar belong to this same period but whereas Ezekiel viewed the Divine Plan from

heaven's standpoint, Daniel saw these things from the standpoint of an observer upon earth. Ezekiel saw his vision on the plains of Tel-Abib, the Jewish colony in southern Babylonia; Daniel saw his, in the main, at Babylon, the centre of the Gentile power. The symbols in which the visions of the Book of Daniel were expressed were in keeping with this environment, expressive of the might of material things; a great image, a great tree, powerful wild beasts, and a heavenly Judge come down to make an end to them all. And here is a case where a completely unregenerate man is used as the vehicle of Divine revelation. Nebuchadnezzar was not a worshipper of God, yet his two dreams were as strictly and accurately prophetic as were Daniel's, although it was necessary for Daniel, the God-directed man, to explain them. At the same time it must be remembered that Nebuchadnezzar was a deeply religious man and served his gods with an ardour worthy of a better cause. Like Saul of Tarsus, he verily thought he did God service. Is it possible that this piety of his, even although applied to unworthy objects, did make it possible for the prophetic vision to come to him where it could not come to a less worthy man?

The Book of Daniel has often been called the 'Revelation' of the Old Testament, but the description is probably more true of the Book of Zechariah. The visions of this, the Restoration prophet, embrace a greater span of time and a wider range of symbols than any other of the Old Testament prophecies. They commence with the Captivities of Israel and the Restoration going on to the history of the Church, merging into the coming to power of the Ancient Worthies and concluding with the establishment of the Kingdom. The imagery of Zechariah is more like that of John the Revelator than is that of any other prophet.

Now the significant thing about all these prophetic visions and dreams is that the later prophets saw more deeply, farther into the future, and clothed their prophecies in more grandly symbolic language, than did the earlier ones. There seems to be a kind of progressive revelation at work that enabled the later prophets to see more clearly into the mysteries of the spiritual world. Amos and Nahum, and to some extent Isaiah and Jeremiah, spoke only of things that were fulfilled within a century or so of their own time; and the visions were largely of mundane things, the city of Nineveh, the everyday implements of husbandry,

armies of Babylon, and so on.

The later visions of Isaiah and Jeremiah and all those of Daniel, reach farther forward, to the threshold of the Millennial Kingdom. They employ symbols in which the powers of heaven begin to be introduced - the stone cut out without hands, the Ancient of Days come down to judgment, the new covenant written in men's hearts and the new heavens and new earth. Ezekiel and Zechariah, and John the Revelator, the last of the 'vision' prophets, take their predictions into or to the end of the Millennial Age. They use symbols which only the spiritually minded can hope to understand; the Temple and the River of Life, the High Priest raised to royal power, the olive trees and the golden candlesticks, the Lamb on Mount Zion and the marriage of the Lamb. In all of this there seems to be a gradual but a definite leading away from the plain unvarnished literal acceptance of what is seen in the vision to its spiritual interpretation along lines of accepted symbolism. And this in its turn is but another aspect of our turning away from that which the natural eye perceives to that which is discerned spiritually, by mental sight, that we might thus be instructed in the things of God.

To us, then, the visions and dreams of the prophets should be looked at in their structure as akin to our own dreams, strange composite

pictures, flickering across the consciousness. They are not necessarily to be taken as literal images of the things with which they deal, but as representations in which every symbol has a meaning alluding back to some event or thing in the Old Testament or in the world of the Old Testament. Thus it is that only those who are thoroughly conversant with that rich storehouse which is God's Word, can hope to understand and interpret prophecy.

How do the visions come? By what power are these symbolic fore views of events that have not yet happened produced upon the screen of the human mind? And, once produced, is there no power that can divert the current events so that the predicted happenings never materialize in fact? And if there is no such power, and the event must follow the prophecy as surely as night follows day, and if the lives and destinies of men are bound up in such prophecies - as indeed they are - what becomes of the boasted free-will of the individual? Is there is no escape from the fulfilment predicted, it may be, long ages before those men were born. The answers to such questions, insofar as there can be answers in the present limited state of our knowledge, must form the subject of a separate article.

(To be continued) AOH

OWNERSHIP

6 - Highway to Zion

Part of the tragedy of mankind is that their kingdoms are neither their own nor Christ's. However much they strive for freedom, for perfection, for a Utopian ideal of society, they cannot achieve it but fall back defeated. If the nations had practised the Christian gospel of peace and goodwill to all men, they would never have experienced the horrors of war, of concentration camps or the cruelty by which men of power sought to solve their problems. They try to silence their critics and force everyone into a common mould of thought and action. The Twentieth century was much that is horrible and destructive. It was a time of dangerous apostasy in which God was denied, the Bible rejected and the technical skills of man exalted into an egotistic mastery of the elements.

Society has never presented a very pleasant picture to the thoughtful observer. Behind glittering facades has lain the ugly evidence of

ruthlessness, selfishness and pride. Today it does not look any better. Those that love all things beautiful, noble and good must turn away with loathing and amazement at the readiness of men and women to fall for that evil one who leads the world captive at his will.

The world of men reflects little credit for all the skills, gifts and opportunities that have come its way. Where much is given much is expected. Some have done their best with highest motives. There is at the heart of mankind a love of goodness, a strong desire for better things; a battered rope of faith to which some still cling, hoping that it will bring them to their desired haven. While others have broken every rule in the book and defied Divine authority there is something about them that moves the compassion of God to save them in their extremity. They have been unwilling victims of evil, snared, deceived and half destroyed by foes

too strong for them.

Looking upon the great scenario of human history as it unrolls from its idyllic beginning to its dramatic end, the spectator may be forgiven for asking 'why'? It was a question put by Israel to their prophet Isaiah. They too had cause to question their destiny in the roughness of their experiences, often forgetting that they brought about a lot of their troubles by ignoring the laws given to them, finding other gods and seeking more enticing pleasures in their worship. To them came the answer and the caution *"Will the pot contend with the potter or the earthenware with him that shapes it? Will the clay ask the potter what he is making or his handiwork say to him, you have no skill?"* (Isaiah. 45.9 REB). The illustration of the potter's power over the clay is more than a question of ownership. It is utter dependence upon the will of another and submission to his choice. Either the vessel is to His liking and remains whole, useful and treasured, or it is flawed, broken down and remade into a better thing. Through the last of the prophets comes a rebuke, *"You have spoken harsh words against me. Yet you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said 'It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the Lord of Hosts?'"* (Malachi 3.13, 14 NRSV). They saw the proud, happily enjoying the seats of the mighty, arrogant, high-minded and self-righteous. The criminal got away with his crime and the religious hypocrite prospered. Times change but human nature does not, nor will until that time is reached when all will be reversed. The same prophet saw evil and the consequences of evil consumed as stubble. Then would be seen the difference between the righteous and the wicked, for both would reap what they had sown. The just rewards of both would be seen as evidences that in the long run God has the final word. This last messenger had a word for the faithful remnant who do not waver but speak to one another of the things which warmed their hearts. They love God-honouring things which so delight His ear that he had a book of remembrance written before him, their names recorded, their lives precious to him were always before him. *"They shall be mine says the Lord of Hosts in the day that I make up my jewels"* (Mal. 3.17). It is a dazzling prospect for the few, men and women more precious than rubies, unwaveringly faithful, polished and transformed by

Divine wisdom in the harsh world of experience. They will shine like the sun, bright gems to be worn on the heart or the head of the all-glorious Majesty that created, owns and directs the destiny of man to His own appointed climax and conclusion.

Man cannot always fight with God nor will he want to continue his own way when at last the obscuring veils of ignorance are removed, when the scales are fallen from blind eyes and the goodness of God is seen in all its richness and benevolence. The real peace and happiness of man, his total wellbeing, lie in unity, harmony and appreciation of all that God is and does. Sooner or later, the lesson not learned readily, will be forced upon the nations by a humiliation and defeat that will never be forgotten. He who will not be ruled by the rudder must be taught by the rock. God is Master, Maker and Owner and not man. *"I am the Lord. There is no other God beside Me. I have made the earth and created man upon it."*

The statement is written in rocks, seas and stars, in the changing seasons, in the adaptation of man to the Earth and the Earth to man. Those who have already learned to trust their Maker, have ceased to question. They lean on His almighty strength. They love Him with all their heart, mind and strength. Their expansive love like His takes in all Creation. Reverence, respect, tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation are the hallmarks of the children of God; the credentials of those who have been made ambassadors for Christ. They must go on to the end of this world, deploring its conditions and the inevitability of its crash. They must go on to the end of this life, however long or short it is, yielding themselves to God as those that are alive from the dead. Their outlook, thought, purpose, words and actions are under the control of the love and Spirit of God. He has begun the good work in the yielded life and will never let go until He has finished the work to the mutual satisfaction of both. It is a life of separation, of isolation from the world and ways of the world. The command is to *"Come out of her and be separate"*. Paul also exhorted *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them."* (Eph. 5.11). The open, honest, healthy life lived in opposition to the evils in the world is a wholesome contrast. To shun its brutalities, to avoid its intrigues, to make no compromise with its trickery, to maintain a moral soundness in the contagion of its sensual pestilence and the plague of its money-hunting, pleasure

loving society is a silent rebuke to the self-seeker.

That has not always been enough. From time to time men of God have arisen to administer a strong rebuke to the wayward, to call a halt to the lack of justice, to censure bad behaviour, to hold a mirror before the false face displayed for truth. For lack of the moral courage to speak out many heedless young lives have been thrown away. So long as those who have knowledge and love, to instruct, to warn and to win, they have the responsibility not only to live it but to preach the life-saving word. *"Not with eye service as men pleasers but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart".*

The end product of all experience is the will of God for man. The selection of the saints or the elevation of a chosen few from terrestrial life to a celestial inheritance is not all there is of God's Plan of the Ages. It takes in the whole race of man, erring and unworthy though they be. Jesus Christ gave his life a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. That clause makes provision for life, the continued life of man on the earth under better conditions and new management. The law will still be in operation, no longer in weighty tomes of judicial science, or graven on tables of stone but written on the tablets of the heart. It will be an essential part of his being, as close as breathing, as natural as any other of his senses, needing not the offices of priest or interpreter. The simplest will not be able to make a mistake, for *"I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their God and they shall be my people. They shall teach no man his neighbour or every man his*

brother saying 'Know ye the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least unto the greatest. I will be their God and they shall be my people. I will forgive and they will sin no more.'" (Jer. 31.33-36). *"Then will I turn to the people a pure language that they may call upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent."* (Zeph. 3.9). Originally a forecast for unfaithful Israel the words apply to all people, since all nations, kindred and tongues will have been brought within the boundaries of the kingdom of God. The forecast implies a set time for such a change in the heart and mind of all peoples. Quoting these words the writer to the Hebrews gives the reason, *"Now that which is decayed and waxes old is ready to vanish away."* He saw the end of an era of tuition and the beginning of a new Age which is now itself in a state of decline, ready for removal that a better and nobler way of life may succeed the failures of the past.

Man sets out with a clean sheet, with everything to learn. Spotted, stained, torn, crumpled, written in blood and tears as that history book has been, it has been a story of increasing knowledge and maturity. The Earth will be filled with the knowledge and glory of God and every critical voice will be silenced and all tumults stilled. It will be the final triumph of love, the brimming fulfilment of the law to which all people will sing with heartfelt praise from the outermost bounds of heaven and earth. Then will the *"kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."* (Rev. 11.15).

FAS

THE END

On the word 'Elder'. In the Septugint version the word for Elder is 'presbuteros' – 'chief men', and was differentiated from 'presbutoi' – 'old men'. We still retain this term in our modern official title 'Alderman', which carries with it a special precedence over other members of our

municipal councils. The word 'Elder' does not therefore in itself indicate a 'priestly-prince' but its association with the number 'twenty-four' most certainly does. This official class among the priests is referred to in Isa. 37.2 as *"Elders of the Priests"*, and in Jer. 19.1 as *"the Ancient of the Priests."*

This business of Christianity would be fairly straightforward if all that was required was to preach the death of Jesus not to live His life. But the Lord presumably knew best how His Gospel might be made understandable and it was He who said men would know His disciples by their love

for one another; talked about a light which was to shine before men and an unhidden city. Writing about Him, speaking about Him, it would all be so much easier. It is living like Him that He required. And there's the rub.

(Reconciliation)

"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock, and my

salvation, he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken." (Psa. 62.1 NIV)

AFTER THE FLOOD

7 - The Beginning of Empires

Between the dispersal of the tribes at Babel and the beginnings of recognisable history there lie two or three centuries of which Genesis tells us nothing, and archaeology only a score of semi-mythical legends behind which lurks some basis of fact. Genesis 10 shows the peoples, sons of Shem and Ham and Japheth, making their way from the common centre at Babel into the surrounding lands and creating their village-settlements wherever each party came to a stop and forming the nucleus of future nations. Two centuries later, these villages had grown into cities; not cities in the modern sense of the term but at least built-up towns of anything up to twenty thousand inhabitants living an orderly and civilised communal life. This is where ancient secular history begins to take definite shape and it is at this point that the first written records begin to appear and yield some definite information as to what life was like in those far-off days. Set against the Old Testament background this period is probably that of the early lifetime of the patriarch Eber, fifth in descent from Noah (Gen. 11.14 Sept.) about the time of the death of Shem, Noah's eldest son. Shem must certainly have witnessed the developments that led to the first abortive attempt to build the Tower of Babel, and the separation of the peoples as they began to migrate in various directions to distant lands. He would perceive in this the hand of the Lord moving to the fulfilment of the injunction laid upon them when they came out of the Ark *"be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth ... and bring forth abundantly therein"* (Gen. 9.1, 7). Although from this point of time the affairs and histories of each emerging nation began to run in separate tracks, the background of Genesis and the story of the patriarchal line from Noah to Christ remains in the land of Babel, the Plain of Shinar, until the days of Abraham. That was a thousand years in the future. It may come as a surprise to realise that this is the period of time that separates Gen. 11.1 from Gen. 12.1. Throughout all this time the only records of events are those preserved in very imperfect form, in the inscriptions which have been recovered by painstaking investigators from the sands of Iraq. But the only lucid and reliable history of man from the very beginning up to the time of the Flood is that which was preserved through those years by

the forebears of Abraham; when he left Ur of the Chaldees. The sacred records must have come with him giving the dated line of his ancestors back to the first man and this gives us the earliest chapters of the Bible we know. If the confused and mutually contradictory accounts of the period between the Flood and Abraham which are all that the Sumerian and Babylonian tablets give us can be taken by experts as a guide to the events of those days, then certainly the much more precise and definite account in the Bible should be accepted as authoritative. But before tracing out the history and developments of those days in the land of Babel with which the descendants of Noah were to be so intimately involved, a glance at the progress and welfare of at least two of the peoples who migrated over the earth is necessary. The nation that made the most rapid advance at this time was Egypt, the children of Mizraim or Misr, son of Ham. They may well have been the largest body of migrants to separate at Babel and seek for themselves a home in the far west. So they set out. Climbing steadily, from the pleasant valley in which stood the half-built Tower, ascending the three thousand feet slopes to the highlands of the present Syrian desert, they faced a long and arduous journey. Egypt is nearly a thousand miles from Babylon, and it may be conjectured that the migrants were unlikely to have got so far in so short a time. The answer probably lies in the nature of the intervening terrain. Between Babylon and Egypt lies the great Syrian desert, an elevated rocky plateau having no rivers and on which nothing grows. Braidwood and Howe, in *"Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan"*, have stated that in ancient times this whole area was covered with luxuriant oak forests, but even so it was no place for permanent settlement. The scouts must have been out in front and eventually reported the discovery of a fertile arable land with a mighty river, (the Nile), adequate for all their needs for generations to come. Unlike the sons of Shem and of Cush, they left no settlements in their passage, but attained and colonised the land of Egypt as one body. To this day that Syrian desert contains no relics of ancient cities and habitations as do the countries round about.

Here, in this fertile territory, watered by the

Nile, they found a home every bit as desirable as the one they had left. Here they rapidly built up the second great civilisation of the ancient world, that of Egypt. They entered Egypt, a neolithic (stone-using) people, having nothing in the way of metals or tools; within a few centuries they were building the Pyramids. Casson, in "Ancient Egypt" (1969) says "Within a century after the first Pharaoh of the Old Kingdom had ascended his throne, Egyptian builders had graduated from sun-dried bricks to highly sophisticated construction in stone within two hundred years or so Egypt's builders had so mastered the new material that they had finished the Pyramids at Gizeh". This means that technical progress was, extremely rapid, much more so than the scholars and experts of today care to admit.

The usual view of Egyptian history, shared by most scholars, considers that human settlement commenced at an extremely distant date and that men evolved only slowly from a state of primitive savagery to the highly civilised position which is revealed by the extant remains. Thus the periods of development before the first Pharaoh, which are known as the Tasian and Badarian eras, (from the names of villages where remains were first found) is pictured as being immeasurably long. If in fact, as indicated in Genesis, the first Egyptians were already civilised when they entered Egypt, this hypothesis is unnecessary. From the entry into Egypt to the first Pharaohs need only have been a matter of two or three generations, say a century, and this would bring the early history of Egypt into line with that of Sumer. After all, if one compares the fantastic progress of human achievement during the last hundred years, in science, invention, technology and exploration, there is nothing unreasonable in thinking that the first civilisations; Egypt and Sumer, should have developed in something like two or three centuries.

One factor which led to exaggerated ideas of the antiquity of Egyptian history was the 19th century scholars habit of taking the records of kings' reigns and dynasties as strictly consecutive, and stringing them all in succession, failing to recognise that ancient men, like modern ones, are only human and apt to exaggerate their terms of years to increase their own importance. It has been realised in the 20th century that many of these dynasties overlapped so that sometimes two or more kings reigned simultaneously in different places. Hence

the scale of Egyptian history has been considerably reduced in more recent years. The accession of Menes, the first Egyptian Pharaoh. In 1867 Breckh gave it as 5702 BC but in 1967 a Biblical archaeologist established it at 2850 BC. The latest dates arrived at by the experts line up very well with the chronology of Genesis as given in the Septuagint. They support the view that the story of the Tower of Babel recounted in Gen. 11 should be placed at about 3000 BC and the accession of Menes about 2800 BC.

They arrived in Egypt a civilised, knowledgeable and God-fearing people but they arrived with nothing beyond a few flocks and herds and seed for their hoped-for crops. This latter is known because wheat grain found in ancient tombs of this period has been analysed and found to be of a type which is native only in Euphrates territory. But with their boundless energy it could well have been no more than a century before their first primitive culture had developed into one in which towns were being built with permanent houses and temples. Egypt's first Pharaoh, Menes, was on the throne at a little settlement that later on became the famous Memphis, capital city of Egypt in after times. Within another century they had devised a calendar and begun to devise the famous hieroglyphic writing, and had even produced a treatise on surgery. A further hundred years and they were mining copper and precious stones in Sinai, near the mountain afterwards made famous as the place of the Mosaic Law, getting gold from Sinai and East Africa, and cultivating the native river-reeds to produce papyrus for writing material - the plant name from which we have our modern word "paper". Not long after that, about 2600 BC they were building the Pyramids.

The early Egyptians were deeply religious and at this time had not developed the pantheon of gods for which Egypt afterwards became notorious. They brought with them from Babel the original worship of the God of heaven. Some of the sacred texts, recovered from tombs of a not much-later time, testify to this. They speak of the Most High as "the only true living God, self-originated, who exists from the beginning, who has made all things, but himself was not made". He is "the God who has existed from old time; there is no God without Him. He is not visible, nor carved in marble. There is no shrine with painted figures of Him; there is no building that can contain Him. He does not

manifest His form". There is nothing in this from which any Christian or Jew would dissent; here, clearly, is a written expression of the faith which the sons of Noah must have brought with them from the antediluvian world and planted in this new world they were building. At this point the Egyptians pass out of Bible history, not again to be noticed until a thousand years later when Abraham, followed by Jacob and Joseph, came to sojourn in that land. After that the destinies of Israel and Egypt were intertwined but by then the Egyptians had a thousand gods to worship and temples in the land innumerable.

The other party to depart from Babel whose going was to have significant consequences for Israel in later days was that of Asshur, grandson of Shem, and the ancestor of the Assyrians ("Assyria" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Asshur"; the nation was named after its founder). The origin of the Assyrian is accorded a brief notice in Gen. 10 when Asshur is said to have left Babel and built Nineveh and other cities. Gen. 10.11-12 says "Out of that land" (i.e. Babel) "went forth Asshur, and built Nineveh and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; the same is a great city". One immediately has visions of a mighty concourse of people armed with all the necessary implements and materials to set about the building of those magnificent cities for which Assyria afterwards became famous, but in fact there was nothing of the kind. Many generations had to pass before the sons of Asshur got around to building permanent cities: at the start they were nothing more than herdsmen living in tents. In the advance of technical progress the Assyrians lagged well behind the Sumerians and Egyptians and it was getting on for a thousand years before they had any real cities. At this time it was more like a migration of perhaps twenty or thirty thousand people under the leadership of their patriarch Asshur making their way three hundred miles northward along the course of the river Tigris until they came upon the rolling grass lands and low foothills of Northern Mesopotamia and here they called a halt and began to erect their tents and a little later on mud-brick houses in little villages around which stretched their farmsteads and pastures. All over this land that eventually became the Assyria of the Old Testament there are the remains of literally hundreds of these settlements bearing evidences of habitation at this early date.

They were much more primitive than their neighbours the Sumerians in the south and the land they occupied was not so congenial. The summer there is not so long and the winters are often bitterly cold. But there they settled and there, in the course of time, they built their cities and at last Nineveh was their capital and for a time the world's most magnificent city. They increased in military might and became the scourge of the nations.

But when Asshur led his people into that grassy plain all these glories were in the distant future. It is known that Nineveh was founded at this early date. One of the greatest of 20th century archaeologists, Sir Max Mallowan, conducted extensive researches on the site of the ancient city and probed its past right back to the time when it was no more than a village settlement of mud huts. That could well have been when Asshur entered the land. Calah, the Assyrian name of which was Kal-hu, is about twenty miles from Nineveh, and was in Asshur's time doubtless a similar village. Resen is still unknown and undiscovered; it may never have attained city status or it may have survived into history under another name. Various suggestions emanating from early medieval writers hazard the idea that it is represented today by a 'village near' Nineveh called Rash-al-am, meaning 'the fountainhead' but since this Arabic name is fairly common over all Mesopotamia there is not much reliance to be placed on that. Resen is defined in this verse "a great city"; more properly it should be rendered "a strong city", as though it was some kind of fortress offering protection. A modern suggestion is that it may have been the notable city a few miles to the south of Calah called Asshur, which itself was the capital before Nineveh. This was in later times a fortress city guarding the Assyrian dominions from the incursions of invaders from the south. No one really knows for the name Resen has not survived.

The general picture then is that of a group of villages comprising Nineveh in the centre, Rehoboth, "the suburbs of the city", the open spaces around and Calah a little way off. Surrounding these main centres were the smaller settlements and farmlands that ultimately grew into the sovereign State of Assyria. There has been preserved lists of the kings who ruled from the first but it is known that the early so-called "kings" were in actual fact petty tribal sheikhs living in tents; the days of palaces and royal thrones came much later.

The AV margin has an alternative reading; "out of that land he went forth into Assyria" implying that it was the great hero of Gen. 10, Nimrod, who built the northern cities as well as his own, not Asshur the Semite. It is not likely that this is correct; it is based on the existence of a personal pronoun in the phrase, so that the expression runs "*from this land he went Asshur*" but there is no preposition of motion governing Asshur and the pronoun could equally well be masculine or neither so that the phrase could well be "*Out of that land one went forth Asshur*" and so refer to Asshur anyway. Nimrod as a Cushite is hardly likely to have gone north into Assyria which was a Semitic stronghold. The verse is much more likely to indicate that Nimrod went south and Asshur went north in this matter of city building and took the lead in setting up the separate Sumerian and Semitic communities.

The narrative was not written in Hebrew; it first

saw the light at the very beginning of writing, in the early Sumerian pictographic script of which few examples are as yet discovered. What is known of the language, however, shows that the grammatical forms are very elementary; there were no pronouns or conjunctions and a literal representation of what is likely to have been the original account would run something like "from land went Asshur built Nineveh". All things considered, it seems that Gen. 10 is telling us that Asshur went north and Nimrod went south.

This latter name is that which has next to engage attention. Nimrod, the "mighty hunter before the Lord" who is credited in legend and folklore from that day to this in the doing of great deeds and the execution of mighty works. Who was this man, mentioned only by name in Genesis but remembered in the Arab world to this day?

(To be continued)

AOH

LIFTED UP BY GRACE DIVINE

Lifted up by Love Divine
Darkness and despair depart.
Evermore entirely Thine
Called to be where now Thou art.

Chorus -

Rescued from the miry clay
Gathered from the noisome pit
I will praise Thee every day
For the flame Thy love hath lit.

In the Volume of Thy Book
There Thy will I clearly see,
And no interference brook
In obedience Lord to Thee.

Sum of all Thy sacred thought
Object of my fond desire,
In my heart Thy love inwrought
Thought Thy holy purging fire.

Placed by mighty saving power
On the road the Master trod,
Keep my stumbling steps each hour
Till I dwell with Thee my God.

T. W. Watson

The above hymn may be sung to Aberystwyth

OTHERS

Lord, help me to live from day to day
In such a self forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for others.

Help me in all the work I do
To ever be sincere and true
And know that all I'll do for you
Must needs be done for others.

Let self be crucified and slain
And buried deep - and all in vain
May efforts be to rise again
Unless to live for others.

And when my work on Earth is done
And my new work in Heaven begun
May I forget the crown I've won
While thinking still of others.

Others, Lord, others
Let this my motto be.
Help me to live for others,
That I may live like Thee.

Anon

DO NOT TELL

At that moment in time God's purpose for mankind depended on one man – one man among all the millions of people on the earth. So fragile a thread – just one man with a message and a destiny.

But the man was the Son of God. And the situation into which He had been placed as an embryo was well prepared. For He was born into a nation – Israel – which, for all its faults, had through a thousand years inherited a faith in God. At this moment the nation was under the control of an empire whose networks of trade and control carried news across the known world. A parent for Him was ready and willing, one of a family whose ancestry was notable and whose faith in God was strong. Devout Israelites had longed for the arrival of this child, whose arrival had been prophesied in mysterious terms for hundreds of years.

He was born, and He grew to be ready for His mission. The way had been prepared by a campaign of pre-publicity, awaking Israelite hearts and minds. His work began, a work of teaching and healing, drawing excited crowds, making an impact in the target nation. The mission was succeeding, bringing God's love and God's discipline to each and every man, woman and child. It was a triumph of communication.

Then, on various occasions Jesus seemed to draw back. When He had cured a leper, a blind man, a man who was deaf and dumb, He told them to keep it a secret and say nothing. At that phase in His ministry we might have expected Him to seek maximum impact, maximum publicity. He urged others to tell all about their healing. The demon-possessed lunatic of Gerasa was told, *"Go home, and describe what great things God has done for you."* (Luke 5.39) *"And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him."*

Why was it that Jesus on these three occasions asked the person cured to say nothing about it? Was it for the sake of the person cured? These were semi-private miracles. The leper, riddled with his disease, falls on his face before Jesus. *"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean!"* Jesus defies hygiene regulations and actually touches the leper. *"I am willing. Be cleansed."* The leprosy leaves him, and Jesus tells him to show himself to the priest in the prescribed way for the healed leper (Luke 5.12-15).

The deaf man who spoke with difficulty, was brought by his friends to Jesus, who touched the man's ears, touched his tongue with His own saliva. With a deep sigh, Jesus looked up to heaven. *"Be opened."* The man could hear. He could speak clearly. *"Don't go telling everybody."* (Mark 7.3 1-3 7). This was a time consuming and emotionally draining miracle for Jesus to perform. It also would bring problems of adjustment to the man who could now talk.

The blind man at Bethsaida was also brought by his friends (Mark 8.22-26). Jesus takes him by the hand, leads him out of the village. He uses saliva on the man's eyes, touches them. *"Do you see anything?"* *"Men. They look like trees walking."* Jesus lays his hands on the man's eyes – success. *"Don't even go back to the village. Go home."*

It may be that a period of quietness was beneficial to these individuals, newly healed, and recovering from the stress of anticipation. The cures had been performed not without difficulty and required an inner change in themselves.

Or was it that Jesus asked their discretion for His own sake? He was overburdened with excited crowds coming to him with their needs. No time to eat, or talk with His disciples. Time for prayer only to be found by mortgaging the hours of rest and darkness to seek intense fellowship with His Father. Their silence about their healing was a means of keeping the situation under control – but not very effective at that. Jesus was launched into the maelstrom of meeting human need, and what could this one man do? *"He has done all things well!"* the people said in their astonishment. Jesus knew there were more, and harder, things to be done.

The people's wonder and excitement would have been even greater if they had known of another miracle done privately. Only the three disciples of the inner circle and the parents of the child concerned were allowed to be present. Jesus had come in response to their urgent despairing message. A child dying. No, a child dead. But still He came and turned away the gathering mourners and entered the room. *"She is only asleep."* He takes her by the hand. *"Child, arise."* Her spirit returned and she rose immediately. *"Give her some food."* The parents were amazed. *"Don't tell anyone what has happened."*

How could this event be kept a secret? The message had been publicly given – *"Don't trouble the Master. She's dead."* The process of public mourning had begun. But Jesus passed it off as their misunderstanding – he would wake the child from a sleep which looked like death.

The secret was that her death was genuine. The few moments in which resuscitation is normally possible had passed. From Jesus' perspective, we can see, death is like a sleep. Not a permanent state, just a stage to be followed by a 'waking' from death. It is a cause of grief, none the less, and Jesus felt it keenly. His love for Jairus was like His love for the widow at Nain and like His love for Mary and Martha at Bethany. In each case He acted. One resuscitation was this private 'wakening'. The next was a spontaneous reaction to a situation met by chance along the road. On the other hand, the raising of Lazarus was planned, public, the climax and the final statement of Jesus' healing work.

To have publicised the raising of Jairus' daughter would have been premature. Imagine Jesus being mobbed not just by the friends of all the sick but also by the relatives of all the newly dead. All clamouring for a resurrection. His ultimate aim was to swallow up death in victory, of course. But to what sort of life would these people be raised, without a basis being laid for forgiveness and a new quality of life? He had to provide that basis.

There was another discussion with His disciples which was private, and had to remain so. It concerned His identity and His future plans. The disciples had been out two by two, extending the work of preaching repentance and healing the sick. The crowd of five thousand had been fed, and some people attempted to make Jesus a king. Now he consults the twelve quietly. *"Who are people saying that I am?"* John the Baptist! Elijah! The prophet who was to come! *"But you, who do you say that I am?"* Peter comes out with it. *"You are the Christ, Son of the Living God."* *"This is not what people are saying – this is what my Father in heaven has shown you."* (Matthew 16.13-28)

So this one man among all the millions has now been identified by His followers. He goes on to tell them how the mission must proceed. He must go to Jerusalem. He must be rejected and humiliated by the authorities. He must be killed ... and be raised to life on the third day. And anyone who wants to follow Him must be ready to lose his life in the

same way. The kingdom is not yet. But they would see Him coming in His kingdom – in the glory of the Father, with the armies of heaven, as the judge who would recognise their faithfulness to Him.

When would they see this? A week later, Peter, James and John were with Jesus on a mountain top. They saw Jesus, His appearance changed, speaking with two men about how He would move on from Jerusalem to the next phase of His intended purpose. And they heard a voice speaking from a bright cloud, *"This is my beloved Son. I am pleased with Him. Listen to him."* (Luke 9.28-36)

But this greatest revelation was another matter that Jesus forbade them to speak about publicly. Not until ... not until He Himself had risen from the dead and was moving on. Before that, He must suffer. His death must complete the episode of His life as a man on planet earth. His giving of Himself was not to be evaded, for it was the purpose of the mission, the way for one man to redeem the countless millions.

GC

I WISH THEE PEACE - J. DANSON SMITH

I wish thee peace! the Earth is full of trouble,
And days are marked by rash and strain and test;
And life grows one unceasing round and struggle;
I wish thee peace! God's peace - thy heart's deep rest

I wish thee peace! the peace of sins all taken,
All cleansed away through Christ's atoning blood;
The peace that rests, untroubled and unshaken,
Since God's redeeming grace is understood.

I wish thee peace! the peace of His near presence;
The peace of glad abandon to His will;
The peace which is of God's own heart the essence;
The peace which reigns, serene and strong and still.

I wish thee peace! Peace past all understanding,
Which comes through prayer and loving God's dear
Word;
So shall thy life be fruitful, strong, outstanding,
And thou shalt be of service to thy Lord

Acknowledged to B. McCall Barbour

BAPTISED FOR THE DEAD?

"Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are they baptised on their behalf?" (1 Corinthians 15.29)

This verse in 1 Corinthians 15 comes to us unexpectedly. Paul has been explaining about the order of events when all mankind rise from the dead. Christ has already been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep. In Christ all shall be made alive, those who are Christ's at His coming. Christ reigns until all enemies are subdued. *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* Then the Son surrenders the kingdom to the Father, so *"that God may be everything to everyone"*. These great themes are a study in themselves, but immediately we are brought up with Paul's next words, *"Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptised for the dead?"* What is baptism for the dead? Why does Paul mention it?

The resurrection is the theme of the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15. The stimulus for writing it, as with so much of Paul's letter, is what he has heard about the infant church at Corinth – from Chloe's people (1.11), in reports (5.1), in letters (7.1). It appears that some of those in the church at Corinth say there is no resurrection of the dead (v.12).

Paul addresses this opinion. He lays the foundation by going over all his teaching concerning the resurrection of Christ Himself. Christ being raised set the precedent that resurrection is possible (#1). If that had not happened, the whole message that Paul preached would be invalidated (#2). Consequently, the Corinthians would still be unforgiven sinners (#3). There would be no prospects for those of them who had died (#4). Their hope in Christ, if limited to this life, would be illusory and would make them objects of pity (#5).

By contrast, an acceptance that resurrection is possible opens up the glorious vista of an unimaginable future described by Paul in vv.20-28.

In verses 29-30 Paul turns back to the Corinthians themselves with two questions. If this glorious vista does not apply, what is the point in Paul's own sufferings? (#7) They only make sense in the context of a future hope. And, so far as the Corinthian church is concerned, if the dead are extinct, what is the point of being baptised for

them? (#6)

"Baptised for the dead" is a concept which raises problems. It has been remarked that 'the idea of vicarious baptism is obnoxious to thinking Christians When one looks at the whole Christian experience and the need to nurture and maintain a personal commitment to God and Jesus Christ, the idea of baptism by proxy becomes absurd.' If we believe that to accept baptism is essentially a personal conscious act, the practice of infant baptism might also be questioned. What personal commitment does a baby make when he is the subject of a baptismal ceremony? Again, in ancient times when the head of a household became a Christian, all his family and slaves would be baptised, like it or not. These two cases, however, are of baptising someone living, and baptism may be a stage in their subsequent spiritual development.

Another has written, "The custom sprang from what is really a superstitious and magical view of baptism, the view that unless a person was baptised, he was excluded from the bliss of the faithful and of heaven." In our day, the Mormons have similar concerns.

In view of such reservations, we may look for alternative explanations of the text. It cannot be dismissed as spurious, for it appears in all the manuscripts. What was Paul referring to? The obvious reference is to some one being baptised on behalf of and in the place of someone else, who by reason of death is unable to be baptised in person. But could it have some other meaning?

Various suggestions have been made, based on different ideas of who 'the dead' referred to might be, and on alternative translations of the Greek 'huper' which can mean, among other things, 'instead of' and 'on behalf of'. One suggestion is that the reference is to Christians being baptised to take the place as Christians of those who have died - that is, as replacements for the dead, following on in the noble tradition of believers. Another suggestion is of Christians getting baptised out of fear, because of God's punishment on unworthy or unfaithful members of the church who have died. A third suggestion is that it refers to ones who get baptised out of respect and affection for loved ones who have died. However, it is difficult to see how such cases as these would be relevant to Paul's argument. He is referring to baptism as it relates to

the state of the dead.

The custom of proxy baptism was known in New Testament times. The Marcionites and possibly the Essenes are thought to have held vicarious baptism ceremonies. Barclay describes the rationale for the custom in the early church: "If a person who had intended to become a member of the church, who was actually under instruction ... died, sometimes someone else underwent baptism for him after he had died ... to safeguard from exclusion from the bliss of heaven." This custom must be what Paul refers to.

Was proxy baptism necessary? They must have thought so at the time. Mark 16.16 states *"he who has believed and has been baptised shall be saved"* – so was the baptism equally as necessary as the believing? Admittedly, the end of Mark's Gospel as we have it (vv.9-20) does not appear in some of the oldest manuscripts. Whether these words were part of the original Gospel or not, they show that those who copied or edited the text believed baptism was essential.

Or, there are the words of Jesus in John 3.5, *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Whatever being 'born of water' means, and whatever the precise significance of 'entering the kingdom of God' (which are topics for study in themselves), Jesus is obviously talking about something which is personal. This is a very different thing from a posthumous service of baptism. Perhaps some Corinthians did not see the difference. They may have believed that only the church, drawn out from the rest of mankind, would be saved, so to observe the proper membership procedures was essential. They may have thought that there was no hope at all for those outside. So proxy baptism was a way to become a Christian after one's death.

The early church gave up the practice of baptism by proxy. Did they realise that conversion is a matter of heart and mind, not of observing customs and rituals? Salvation, whether in the present day of salvation or in a future time, is God's gift. It is in His mercy that we must trust for life beyond the grave. It is He who gives the

opportunity to respond to Christ (who died for all) as He really is, and not just as we imperfectly present Him. Paul linked all hope for the future to being raised from the dead.

Paul distances himself from the practice of baptism by proxy. He says, 'what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead?', not what do I mean. He does not use the custom to 'prove' the resurrection, rather to point out to those in Corinth who observed the custom that they were being inconsistent if they denied the resurrection. (Paul was always ready to quote others' own words in favour of his argument, for example quoting a Greek poet to the Athenians on Mars Hill. This did not mean he thought the Greek poets were inspired by God!) Whether baptism for the dead is acceptable or not does not affect his main argument. It was an afterthought in Paul's argument, an argumentum ad hominem. His main argument consisted of the details of Jesus' resurrection appearances; his exposition of Christ's reign and later in the chapter, his explanation of the resurrection body. These all build up the main thrust of his teaching. He supplies a true hope whose implications are amazing.

"Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." (vv.51-58).

GC

"Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he

will do this; He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." (Psalm 37.3-7 NIV)

A STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

*Notes to aid
personal
Bible Study*

27 - Chapter 22.40-23.56

The remaining studies are in parts of the Bible which are at once some of the most dramatic and important writings in history. The way in which this record is viewed varies tremendously. To the Christian this part of the Bible is particularly sacred because of the death and resurrection of their Lord and Master.

22.40-71 It was the custom when praying to stand looking toward heaven but this was a very solemn occasion; Jesus knelt. The cup was associated in the Jewish mind with suffering *Psa.* 11.6; *Isa.* 51.17; *Ezek.* 23.33. Jesus in His prayer was not opposing God's will but strongly affirming His willingness to do it. vv.43 & 44 are missing in the best manuscripts. Only Luke tells us of sweat that was like drops of blood, in size rather than colour. This is the only place in the NT that the Greek word for 'agony' or 'anguish' is used. The disciples were worn out from grief (v.45).

Only Jesus had prayed and He remained strong with loving concern for His disciples who slept instead of praying. Luke's description of the arrest seems shorter than the other Gospel writers.

It was not unusual for men to greet one another with a kiss but this was the disciple meeting his rabbi. Many have speculated on Judas' motives but we are left guessing, except for the brief note by John (12.6) that he was a thief. He had to find for the priests a time and place when the crowds, still enthusiastic for Jesus, were absent. John also tells us that it was Peter who struck Malchus with his sword in an effort to protect Jesus. But as Jesus told Pilate later, His Kingdom was not of this world and therefore His servants did not fight. The AV words "*suffer it thus far*" are "*no more of this*" in the NIV but is there a note of conciliation in them? or perhaps they mean 'let them have their own way now'.

The Jewish court 'hearing' was at the High Priest's house. Nine of the 'twelve' ran away. John was apparently acquainted with the household and gained entry. Peter was admitted as far as the courtyard and those warming themselves around the brazier stared at him and heard his northern accent. They were sure that he was a supporter of Jesus and Peter became cross. He denied knowing Jesus and was a rather pathetic figure. When He saw His Master's face he cried bitterly. Comparison

of all four Gospels gives a fuller picture of the event. We must ask 'Do our actions betray our protestation of loyalty?'

The scribes and elders, always spiritually blind and deaf to what Jesus said and did, now cross-questioned Him about the destruction of the Temple. He did not answer. Their examination was illegal and the Sanhedrin could not assemble till daybreak. They continued the questioning until the crucial indictment that He was Messiah, Son of God. All four Gospels need to be read and compared to obtain the full story. The procedure was a hypocritical mockery of genuine court of justice. Jesus was the only dignified and calm person throughout. The Jewish leaders had no authority to inflict the death sentence, they needed Pilate's judgment. The indictment of 'blasphemy' in the Jewish religious trial counted for nothing in the Roman court. So the charge was changed to treason. Rome suddenly found an ally in the rebellious Jews. Amid all the confusion and cruel treatment Jesus' eyes were fixed on the glory of His Father's presence and the joy that He would have in returning to Earth, but with roles changed.

23.1-25 The scene now shifts to the political trial under Pontius Pilate, procurator, governor and representative of Caesar. The Jewish leaders might give judgment in less important cases but they had no jurisdiction to pronounce the sentence of death. The proceedings were on the 'pavement' outside the governor's residence. The Jews were unwilling to enter beneath the roof of a pagan at any time and this was Passover time. The historians Josephus and Tacitus corroborate much of the Biblical account. Was Pilate convinced of Jesus' innocence? Why were the Jews so determined to have Jesus put to death? Luke is brief and appears to be limited by the length of his roll of parchment. But his facts are to the point and he alone tells us of the interlude in Herod's palace. Antipas had killed Jesus' cousin John. His interest seems to have been a mixture of curiosity and levity. The political charges against Jesus were different from the religious accusations. Roman officials regarded as superstitious nonsense the Jewish religion and they had no wish to be entangled with it. Pilate appears surprised at their bitter hatred and murderous intent. The political charges were so obviously false and contrary to

Jesus' words and actions. The priests now charged Him with treason and insurrection. Pilate the pagan ruler, was more honest and just than those who inherited the promises to Abraham; the recipients of God's Law. He tries every way possible to avoid passing the death sentence. It was normal to give a person declared 'not guilty' a 'caution' and a light beating such as a child might receive. The Jews preferred to release a murderer and the crowd were persuaded by their leaders to demand crucifixion. Jesus knew it was coming long before this and had warned the disciples yet they had not understood. Had the ordinary people changed their attitude toward Jesus and if so, why? Or was this a Jerusalem crowd as distinct from Galilean pilgrims?

Whoever it was that shouted outside the judgement hall, the women of the city had a different attitude for they wailed with grief and our Saviour, ever compassionate, told them in proverbial form that their suffering and that of their children would, in a sense, be worse. He saw national destruction on the horizon and they had 40 years to discover their sin. As Geldenhuys writes 'he wanted repentance not sympathy' but it is a remarkable testimony to those women and to Jesus ministry among them that they felt such anguish. Jesus had no self pity and soon His pain would be over for ever. Perhaps He was more conscious that prophecies concerning the suffering Messiah were being fulfilled – notably Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

At this time He must have been exhausted and suffering from blood loss. The soldiers foresaw the consequences of Jesus falling under the load that was probably the cross bar – the huge stake would already be in the ground. So they requisitioned the help of a by-stander who, at that moment, must have felt that his once in a lifetime visit to Jerusalem for Passover had been ruined. Yet in after days he might have looked back at that day as the greatest of his life for the evidence is that he and his family became Christians (Mark 15.21; Rom. 16.13).

Crucifixion is the most 'agonizing and shameful death' reserved for slaves and criminals; yet it was the spiritual suffering which must have been hardest for Him to bear. There was so much mocking – even the old temptation "If you are Son

of God

Why did Jesus tell the 'repentant thief' that he would be with Him 'today' in Paradise when He knew that He would be in the tomb awaiting resurrection for three days? Did Jesus mean that 'today', of all days in their lives, He was telling him that they would meet in Paradise?

The 'prayer for forgiveness' is doubted by some and is not in all good manuscripts but scholars are agreed that it is definitely in sufficient of the best manuscripts to be taken as a genuine part of Luke's record.

Why did He refuse the proffered wine? What happened when the sun stopped shining and darkness covered the whole land? An eclipse has been discounted. Was the whole of nature in convulsion at the death of One who had created all things on His Father's behalf? Who was that centurion who felt he had seen a righteous man die? And what about those two men of the Sanhedrin whose bravery secured a rich man's tomb from which Jesus would arise?

There can be so many questions left unanswered concerning this event and some will feel that it is irreverent to ask them, and we must try to respect that feeling born out of love for the Saviour. But this was surely the turning point in human history. Until then, men and women were bound by God's law to die in their sins. Yet He was the Lamb of God that was taking away the sin of the world, planned by God from the beginning. From that day the cross became the symbol of reconciliation between God and His creation (Col. 1.20). Three days later God would demonstrate that He had accepted the sacrifice in raising Jesus from the dead and the women would no longer need their spices to embalm the body. Jesus would be alive and His people would praise God.

For those who have never come to the foot of the cross in contrition and repentance to find new life – now is the time to come.

The following have been used in preparing these studies: commentaries of the Gospel of Luke – N. Geldenhuys; E. H. Plumptre, W. Barclay; L. Morris. also Vine's 'Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament' and Barclays' 'New Testament Words'.

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"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my saviour, and my hope is in you all day

long. Remember O Lord your great mercy and love, for they are from of old." (Psalm 25.4-6 NIV)

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