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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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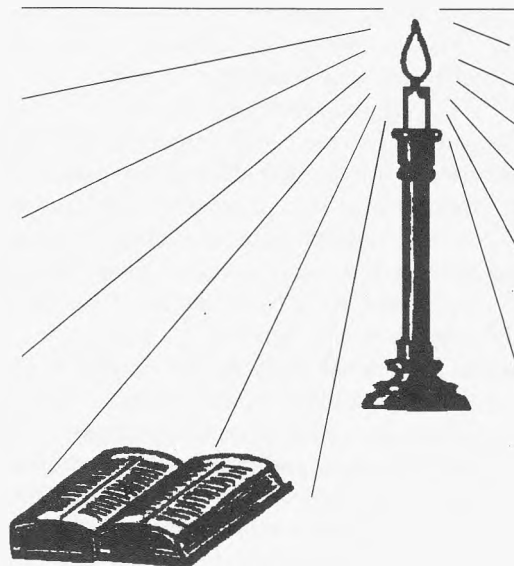
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NOTICES

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MAGAZINE AND BOOKLET CONTENT:

We try to make all publications as useful and helpful as possible to all readers who live in many lands with different Christian and cultural backgrounds. We are pleased to receive observations about BFU literature. Such comments may not make us change anything immediately but we will listen attentively. With the Lord's help and guidance we will try to maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication. In order to reach all ages, modern translations are often used. Articles are kept to moderate length with varied presentation. When reprinted material is updated we try to retain original viewpoints.

What is published is believed to have a wide interest but everything printed may not necessarily

be the opinion of the editor and his colleagues.

BFU is currently reprinting several booklets.

We already have a new stock of 'Three Stories of Salvation' which we will be pleased to send to any reader on request. The leaflet 'Salvation For All' is being reprinted now, as a pamphlet. We hope to follow these with 'Spirit of Prophecy', 'Samuel, Greatest of the Prophets' and 'Cup of the Lord' during 2006.

BFU changes in administration during the New Year are not likely to affect readers but if there are any problems we request your patience, please, while one or two younger brethren give their strong support to those who are slowing down. We are grateful for the work done in the last ten years by our retiring treasurer and give thanks that three other brethren are now giving considerable help to the whole BFU team. Some of the magazine and literature dispatch too changed hands a little in the last 12 months and again our thanks to those who have toiled so valiantly in recent years and to others who have taken up their tasks. Please join with us in prayer for God's guidance and blessing as we take each step of the way. We are sure that our readers will join with us in desiring to do His will.

THE FAMILY CORNER

It is not outward circumstances that form or give interest to a home or family, it is the living pulse of affection that is beating there. Neither earthly pomp nor earthly poverty can alter the real inward character of that little circle of human hearts that man calls the family. Bright skies and sunshine cannot weaken or sever the bond neither can they allure them away from rejoicing in each other's joy and love. Dark days and tempest cannot sunder them; they make them gather more closely together as being all in all to each other. So it is with the family of the Redeemed. It is not their

outward circumstances and prospects that give them the name, it is far deeper and more tender than these; the pulse of heavenly affection throbbing through every member and coming down from the

infinite heart above. It is this that makes them what they are. It is under this aspect that God delights to look upon them and it is for this reason especially that He has given to them the name they bear.

The Quiet Time reprinted from BSM Dec 1937

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH - "TWO MEN WENT UP"

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray." A story so well known that it needs no repetition. Yet how often do we stop to consider whether we ourselves are become like the man who, fasting twice in the week and giving tithes, of all he possessed, found cause for glory, not in his separateness to God, but in his separateness from his fellow-men. "I thank thee that I am not as other men." What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidences of evil. The reign of sin and death was a very real thing to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he carefully dissociated himself from it all and explained to the Almighty that, living perforce in an evil world and amidst sinful men, he was nevertheless not of them nor with them, and that he at least was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which rendered him a fit companion for the One Who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

We read the story and we smile pityingly at the vivid picture of this pompous Israelite, and mentally place ourselves with the publican standing afar off, as we continue our reading. But what of the lesson behind the parable? Is it not true that at times in the Christian life we find ourselves thanking God that we are not as other men. Does it not happen that this separateness to God which we call consecration can degenerate into a smug and self-satisfied separateness from the world. And worse still, at times the suggestion is made that in this latter day when the purpose of God in calling from the nations a people for His name seems to be on the brink of completion, a still more exclusive and narrow-minded outlook is called for – to wit, that our age-old mission as witnesses of Jesus and ministers one to the other must be abrogated in favour of an individual contemplation of the sacred mysteries and a refusal to extend the privilege of fellowship and the Word of Life to all but the favoured few who are accepted as being likewise

the "sealed of God". Alas; that the fruit of a one-time zealous response to be "not conformed to this world" should be, not a transforming by the renewing of the mind, with all the light of spiritual understanding that transformation can bring, but a gravitation to the lowest depths of bigotry, of self-delusion, of the spiritual blindness which separation from our fellows must mean when we are not separated to God. No matter how discouraging our experiences with those to whom we bear the Word of Life – no matter how disappointing our efforts to serve and strengthen our brethren – we must not become narrow or bigoted. We are exhorted to be sure of our foundation and to have a reason for the faith that is in us. We are expected to be rooted and grounded in the knowledge that has come our way and we are warned not to compromise our understanding of Divine Truth for the sake of outward harmony. But above all things we are impressed, time and again, with the necessity for continual progress and advancement in our personal understanding of Truth. There may be things upon which various disciples do not see eye to eye, and because of differences of thought there must upon occasion be a physical separation into groups for orderly worship and service. But that mystic common union which binds together all who truly name the Name of Christ transcends such temporary divisions and triumphantly demonstrates the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer "I will that they may be one." Stand upon this sure foundation, and we shall have cause to rejoice, not in works of righteousness that we have done, but in that common standing in Christ which is our privilege and seal of Divine sonship.

AOH

Gone from us

Sister Freda Tiemeyer (California USA)

Till the day break and the shadows flee away

SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

4 - Prediction and Revelation

"Behold, the days come, that..." How many stirring accounts of future happenings in the purposes of God commence with such words as these! We read the passages and sense the certainty of coming fulfilment in the prophet's passionate tones. But how did he come to be so certain himself? These plain, forthright descriptions of things to come are called predictions. The prophet "predicts" the future. His knowledge is not of himself; it must come from God, for God only knows the end from the beginning. The prophet receives it therefore by revelation; God "reveals" His purpose to the man of His choosing and that man is thereby enabled to impart his knowledge to others by word of mouth, or by the medium of writing, or both. Prediction and Revelation therefore are closely allied in the realm of prophecy.

The gift of prediction stands on a higher spiritual level than does that of prevision, that is prophecy in visions and dreams. It is a "seeing" with the mental sight rather than the physical sight, and therefore calls for a greater degree of spirituality; for the things that are thus discerned make no impression upon the natural senses of sight and hearing. Visions and dreams are, in a sense, "mechanical" revelations, in that the Holy Spirit produces an effect upon the physical visual organs, the eyes, and the mind receives that impression and interprets it along the lines of familiar everyday objects. The prophet, to whom is given the power of prediction by means of a spiritual-revelation entering into his mind, receives his consciousness of coming events, because of his being in direct communion with God attuned to the Divine Spirit. It is not in consequence of an intellectual knowledge of this world's affairs and their evident inevitable outcome, as in the case of "prophetic foreknowledge", nor is it as a result of visible appearances and dreams which appeal to his sense of sight and are understood by him in harmony with an already accepted symbolism. This was the highest level of spiritual experience to which any man could attain in Old Testament days, so to walk with God that the human mind, working as it were in parallel with the Divine mind, became able to receive knowledge from that Mind. Since God undeniably does see into the future, the mind

thus closely attuned with His, is able to share, to some limited degree, in that knowledge.

This thought is borne out by the fact that the majority of such revelations appear to have come to such men at times when they were more than usually in touch with the spiritual world, or by reason of outward circumstances were more than normally susceptible to spiritual influences. This is shown more clearly in the New Testament narratives, which perhaps is to be expected since men of God lived on a higher plane of spiritual experience than previously. Thus Zacharias, a righteous and godly man (Luke 1.5) received the great revelation of his life standing in the Holy of the Temple burning incense, and the whole multitude of the people were praying outside - the most solemn moment of the service. With his spirit thus lifted up to God, and being possessed of an intense longing for the coming of Messiah, his senses became receptive to things not normally glimpsed by men and he saw the angel of the Lord at the side of the altar, and heard his voice. It was in the power of that vision that later on, at the birth of his child, his mind came into tune with the mind of God and he uttered the notable prophecy recorded in Luke 1.68-79. Similarly Simeon, who was evidently already accustomed to the reception of Divine revelations (Luke 2.26) found himself led as it were by an irresistible spiritual force into the Temple (v.27). Then, his eyes falling upon the babe in Mary's arms, his mind in turn ranged itself in line with the Divine mind and he spoke of things yet to come.

The actual words in which such men clothed their predictions can be traced to the influence of their Messianic expectations. There is another class of prediction of which examples are found in the Scriptures where there is no such predisposing influence. An instance of this is the story, in 2 Kings 7 of the Syrian siege of Samaria in the days of Elisha. The prophet had announced to the famine-stricken citizens that upon the morrow food would be abundant. One of the king's lords replied sarcastically and unbelievably, whereupon Elisha told him that he would see the abundance with his own eyes but would never eat thereof. Upon the morrow that lord was appointed to have charge of

the city gate, and in the crush of citizens eager to share in the unexpected relief he was trampled to death. There could have been no human circumstance which might have indicated that man's imminent fate to Elisha; his untimely death a day later was clearly an accident. In a manner to be accounted for only by the laws which govern prophecy, the details of a circumstance still twenty-four hours in the future were impressed upon Elisha's mind and he was able to repeat them. In a similar fashion Agabus, a Christian prophet, foretold the great famine which Josephus confirms as having occurred some ten years later in the reign of Claudius (Acts 11.28). Agabus also foretold the coming arrest of Paul (Acts 21.11). Philip's four daughters were prophetesses (Acts 11.9), and others among the believers shared the same gift, the "gift of prophecy".

It seems though that this great power was not confined to the believers nor even to the early Church. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in France, at the end of the second century, says that the gift of prophecy was known in his time. There is a record of a prophet Quadratus, and a prophetess Ammia, in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-138). Josephus tells (Wars 6. 5, 3) of a man named Jesus Bar-Anan who began to go about the city, four years before the Jewish War, and hence only a few years after Paul's death, prophesying the destruction of the city, the temple and the people. He continued to do so in spite of the punishment meted out to him. For seven years and five months, says Josephus, he continued thus, never varying his cry in the slightest, until one day, during the siege, he mounted the wall, cried "Woe, woe to the city, and to the people, and to the holy house" and then, for the first time in seven years, changed the terms of his message, and cried out "Woe, woe, to myself also". Almost immediately a stone from one of the Romans' ballistae (giant catapults used to batter down the walls of besieged cities) struck him and killed him. Who shall say that that man was not possessed, in some degree, of prophetic insight?

That was at the fall of Jerusalem in AD70. One is led to wonder if at such times of national stress there is a sharpening of the prophetic consciousness, a closer approach to union with unseen spiritual influences, leading to such outbursts of prediction. It is noteworthy that in Scripture narratives the prophets are most active

and their prophecies most vivid at such times, and this situation appears to be repeated in subsequent history as shown by the narrative of Josephus just quoted. A later instance which reinforces this conclusion can be cited in connection with another time of stress, at an event which affected our own country three centuries ago, to wit, the Great Fire of London in 1666. For a number of years prior to the disaster a widespread conviction existed in certain religious circles that London was shortly to be destroyed on account of the sinfulness of its people. Thomas Reeve, a noted London minister, in 1657 published "God's Plea for Nineveh" in which he foretold both the Great Plague of 1665 and the Fire of the following year. He remained in London during the Plague and drew great congregations to his fervent preaching of repentance. Solomon Eccles, a noted Quaker who later in his life organised the Society of Friends in the West Indies, stalked through London during the Plague with a brazier of burning coals on his head, prophesying the coming Fire with considerable exactitude of detail. Walter Costello, in a treatise printed in 1658, said "London, go on still in thy presumptuous wickedness. Put the evil day far from thee and repent not. Do so, London. But if the fire make not ashes of thy city, and thy bones also, conclude me a liar forever. Oh, London, London, sinful as Sodom and Gomorrah, the decree has gone out, repent, or burn." Humphrey Smith, a Quaker, in his "Vision, which I saw concerning London" printed in 1660, six years before the event, described the coming Fire, it runs in part "... and as for the city, herself and her suburbs, all, that belonged to her, a fire was kindled therein; but she knew not how, even in all her goodly places, and the kindling of it was in the foundation of all her buildings, and there was none could quench it. And the burning thereof was exceeding great, and it burned inward in a hidden manner which cannot be described. All the tall buildings fell, and it consumed all the lofty things therein, and the fire searched out all the hidden places and burned most of the secret places. And as I passed through her streets I beheld her state to be very miserable and the fire continued, for, though all the lofty part was brought down, yet there was much old stuff, and parts of broken down desolate walls, which the fire continued burning against. And the vision thereof remained with me as a thing that was showed me of the Lord." Pepys,

the famous diarist, who lived at the time, alludes to this expectation in his entry for October 20th, 1666, after the event had justified the predictions.

In assessing the value of such facts relative to our subject, it may be observed that this period was a time of intense spiritual stress for earnest Christian people, and witnessed the virtual rise of the Non-conformist churches in this country. The Ejectionment, which deprived two thousand ministers of their positions in consequence of their stand for religious liberty, took place in 1662, four years before the Fire. We have here, therefore, all the necessary conditions for an uprising of the prophetic gift just as on similar occasions it is recorded in the Bible.

The scope of this treatise does not permit the citing of further similar instances. Perhaps sufficient has been said to show that at times of stress men are found whose minds, closely attuned to spiritual things, are made receptive to the imparting of Divine knowledge regarding *"things that must shortly come to pass"*. The foretelling of imminent events is not confined to occasions belonging to Biblical days and to men who are Biblical characters, but has happened and continues to happen from time to time as the history of man unfolds. More recently there has been a considerable amount of philosophical discussion on the nature of Time and theories have been advanced purporting to demonstrate that Time as men know it, is a function only of the order of things in which we have our existence; that there can be, so to speak, more than one kind of Time and that in certain circumstances that much-beloved creature of the philosophers, the hypothetical observer can be projected into another "Time-stream" and receive a visual or mental impression of events which have not yet materialised in human Time but will do so at a later date. The exhaustive works of J. W. Dunne during the period between the two World Wars have treated this subject in considerable detail but the arguments advanced are too abstruse for the majority of people to follow. There are however a great many well-authenticated modern research projects which appear to establish the fact of some sort of perception of matters removed from the present in point of time, although the laws governing these phenomena are definitely not yet understood. And there may be some other explanation of this apparent ability to foresee future

events which does not involve the mind "travelling in time" in the manner so beloved of science fiction writers. Nevertheless, all the evidence goes to show that the reality of prophecy is not so fantastic a thing as men usually think.

There is one peculiarity about the examples that have been cited. They relate to events that were fulfilled within a very short time only a few years after the prophecy was given. These men – very ordinary men in the main – did not see ahead into the distant future; their prophetic consciousness was as it were restricted in its range. In the Bible, and in the Bible alone, we have cases of great men of God, such as Daniel, Zechariah, John, and above all, our Lord Himself, who did see, not a few years or centuries only, but thousands of years into the future. Their prophecies are all the more striking and important on that account. These predictions do not relate only to local matters and the affairs of a few individuals; they cover the whole world and the fortunes and fate of all mankind. For this reason they stand in the front rank of all prophecy. The reputation and the credibility of the entire Bible is involved in their accuracy; if they are not valid they cannot be removed or ignored without wrecking much of the fabric of Bible theology, for their themes interpenetrate every aspect of Scripture teaching and history. And if they are valid then they become of supreme importance to all Christians today. They deal with the manner in which the Most High will eventually break through into human history, for the realisation of His ideal for humanity and the process by which He will attain that ideal. It is to this aspect of the subject we must next turn our attention.

AOH

Keep in touch with Christ. Avoid the spirit of faultfinding, criticism, uncharitableness, and anything inconsistent with His perfect love. Go where He is most likely to be found, either where two or three of His children are gathered, or where the lost sheep is straying. Ask Him to wake you morning by morning for communion and Bible Study. Make other times in the day when you shall get alone with Him, telling Him all things, and reviewing the past under the gentle light that streams from His eyes.

(The Quiet Time reprinted from BSM Dec 1937)

AN AWESOME RELATIONSHIP

"Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." (Ps. 100.3)

"You are God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Pet. 2.9)

Awe has been defined as a feeling of great respect mixed with fear or wonder. Something that inspires us with awe is termed awesome. Like God. And to know that we belong to God and are called to worship and enjoy Him, to emulate His ways and do His bidding, is also awesome. An awesome responsibility. An awesome privilege.

The Israelites of old knew they belonged to God, and were under His hand. They rejoiced in Him, the Creator. *"Praise the Lord.... Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven."* (Ps. 148.1, 11-13).

This is not something only for the people of the past. God is always to be praised, not least because of the glorious world that we live in. Praise Him from the top of Everest! Praise Him from the satellites in space! Praise Him from the wonders sweeping across the face of our television screens! These things are all possible as part of an ordered world which He has set in place, stretching through all time and into eternity. All the natural world exists to His praise, orchards and forests, mammals and snakes and birds. World leaders are an example of His creative power, so are vigorous sportsmen, sturdy young mothers, as well as the elderly softly murmuring in hospital wards, and lusty newborn babes crying for life. So let all creation praise the name of God – it is the only name truly worth praising.

"Outstanding in His creation are His own people who love Him. They are His monument by which He is known" (Psalm 148, The Message). So it is an awesome thing to belong to the living God.

But who does belong to God? *"O Lord, all the world belongs to You"* – all people everywhere are His, in one sense, and His purpose extends ultimately to the last dregs of humankind. Israel have been His people. He has respect to those who in their religion are seeking after Him, however

misguided or partial their understanding. But the saints are specially His, who are called, chosen and faithful. Yet if you esteem yourself to be a saint, beware. Do not set yourself in front of the humblest of believers who trust in Jesus. *"Simply trusting every day, trusting through a stormy way, even though my store be small - Trusting Jesus, that is all."*

To belong to God is the privilege of any who believe in Jesus. We may not be theologians or students of prophecy. We may not be very knowledgeable, or anywhere near perfect. Even our doctrines may not be fully correct. But we have heard about Jesus, learned about Jesus, we have come to know Him and love Him. We know that He came to reveal the Father to humankind, and that the way He chose to die was a death for our sake. We believe in Him, and so we belong to Him.

This belonging is a reciprocal relationship - it cuts two ways. If I believe, He saves me. He gives me life. The fulness of His love enters into me. He belongs to me... and the line between us is unbreakable. My problems are His care, whether they arise from the world around me or from inside myself. He is the one who keeps me safe.

I belong to Him like something He has purchased (but bought on the cross, and not in the supermarket). I belong to Him like a prisoner of war (though the battle was in my mind, and not fought with shells and mortars). I have given myself to Him. So I am swallowed up in Him, just as He gives Himself to me – gives, to the extent that I am willing to receive Him. It is an awesome thing to belong to Christ.

Will it be known by others that we belong to Him? In general people are known by what they have done. Who was it, for example, that insisted upon an apostle staying at her home – who sold purple cloth and lived in Philippi? Lydia, of course, a woman of action; who also believed the good news of the Lord Jesus. She believed, she belonged, and the course of her life was changed. As for ourselves, because we believe, the course of our life is altered inevitably. So the actions by which people know us are altered. Actions speak louder than words, it is said. Yet we are known by words as well, for out of the fulness of the heart, the mouth speaks.

This is a challenge to us, that what we say and

what we do should both indicate who we belong to. Who am I? Little John Smith, a son of God? Someone like Lydia, a seller of purple cloth and also a believer, a child of God? Am I a humble believer, growing in the fruit of the Spirit ... in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self control? Do I find time to pray? Am I thoughtful ... courteous... grateful ... and good humoured? It is an awesome thing to live the life of a humble believer.

Because we believe and belong to Him, we want to serve Him. Others may tell us, our friends or our church or our fellowship, what we should be doing in order to serve Him. Perhaps we prefer our own ideas. "This is how I will serve Him," we think. But is that what He is thinking? Are we indeed following "not my way, but His"? His way is not uniform, regimented, a straightjacket, a rigid path for all to tread. Just as He gives us different gifts, so He sets differing paths before us. We serve where He calls us, where He gives the opportunity. For instance, in Matthew 25, the 'sheep' took all sorts of different opportunities to help those in trouble. Then they discovered what they had really been doing. Jesus said, *"Don't you see? When you're serving others you are serving Me."* Eight year old Charlotte was serving others, when she went with her father on a sponsored walk right across the mountains of England from coast to coast, through the wind and the weather, and raised a thousand pounds. Our own acts of service may be less spectacular, though a sudden challenge may cause us to surprise ourselves. Or our service may just be doing what we don't want to do, for the sake of others. What is important is to be faithful to every opportunity that we are given.

That is how we spread God's love. *"What a glorious time is spring, when all the trees are budding; the birds begin to sing, the flowers start their blooming. That's how it is with God's love, once you've experienced it, you want to sing, it's fresh like spring, you want to pass it on."* It is an awesome thing to share God's love in the lives of others.

And what more can we say? The future? If we belong to God now, and begin to worship and enjoy Him, to emulate His ways and do His bidding, this awesome relationship will continue in a future life, a future age, in whatever way He plans it for us. Praise the Lord!

GC

LEND A HAND

If any little word of mine
May make a life the brighter,
If any little song of mine
May make a heart the lighter

God help me speak that little word,
And take my bit of singing,
And drop it in some lonely vale
To set the echoes ringing.

If any little love of mine
May make a life the sweeter,
If any little care of mine
May make a friend's the fleeter.

If any lift mine may ease
The burden of another
God give me love and care and strength
To help my toiling brother

SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

Let music of sweet praise
Within thy spirit chime
And ring adown the ways.
Through every change of Time,
And echo round afar and near
The mercies of thy Saviour dear.

Hereto His grace hath led,
And safely He will guide
His bounties have been shed
Anew each morning-tide,
His love shall make thy future bright
At evening-time it shall be light.

Then break thou forth to praise
And be His name adored,
Resound through all thy days
The glories of Thy Lord;
Serve Him with joy and swell the song
Till listening hearts the notes prolong.

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Sixty years ago the expression 'unconditional surrender' was familiar to those who had lived through the Second World War. It meant that the defeated group of nations would be compelled to accept the terms of the victorious group of nations without questions or conditions. So with believers who come to the Lord; they must accept His terms without question. 'Unconditional surrender' aptly describes a Christian disciple's commitment to Christ. In many Christian communities this is known as 'conversion' or 'consecration'. The Bible provides a number of descriptive 'titles' that describe various aspects of 'following Jesus' and obeying His 'Call'. Paul's experience on the Damascus road is referred to as 'conversion' – a complete change in his way of life. Paul had spent years of his early life trying to destroy the Christian church but after conversion he spent the rest of his life converting others to the Way of Christ. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that God consecrates the Christian's life to His service in order that the believer concerned might become holy through a process of 'sanctification'.

Paul urges believers in Rome to offer themselves as a 'living sacrifice' (12.1) as an act of worship; in response to the goodness of God. He was referring back to earlier forms of religion when God was worshipped by the offering of an animal on an altar. In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul explains why and how Jesus bought redemption for us. From Roman 12, Paul tells us what we must do if we have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Jesus laid down the rule of 'self-sacrifice' when He said *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it"* (Matt. 16.25 NRSV). A little later he said to a rich young ruler, *"If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me"*. (Matt. 19.21 NRSV)

Jesus had already sacrificed more than we can comprehend by coming to Earth. What God had given Him in His earthly life was totally yielded to His Father's will. Doing what is right in this world is in itself costly because it means doing and saying what the world does not like. Self denial is more

than the willingness to part with a portion of one's income however praise worthy that may be. It is an act of giving up completely our own way – and all that we might naturally want to do. Commitment to Christ touches every conceivable aspect of life so that every part of our lives is governed by the will of God and not our own will. From the crown of our heads to the tip of our toes, from the moment we rise in the morning till the moment we fall asleep at night we are His and under His direction. The hours of rest from labour are God's and His child commits him or herself to God for His safe keeping.

Total surrender at the foot of the Cross is the only way forward for a Christian. This is the entrance to the Narrow Way. We must approach the Cross in total contrition, confessing our sin. We should heed the warning in Hebrews 6.1, to avoid *"laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God"*. But the writer is not telling us that repentance and faith are no longer required. He is concerned that we don't remain in a baptismal stance forever or to change the metaphor, we must not remain in a state of new birth (John 3.3) – we need to progress and grow. It is not possible to make that progress in the Christian Way or to grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ unless we live continuously in the attitude in which we approached the cross – contrition of our whole life, body, mind and spirit. So John writes (1.8, 9) *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*. That direct command of God is ignored by many Christians.

"A humble lowly contrite heart,

Believing, true and clean,

Which neither death nor life can part,

From Him who dwells within." – Wesley

When we have repented of our sins and accepted Jesus as our Saviour the remainder of our life is one of total commitment to Him. All that we have and all that we are, belong to Him forever. We need to follow His way of life carefully. Is that possible? Can we, today, live as a Jew lived 2000 years ago? Geographically and socially this may seem impossible. We live on the same Earth, and we are surrounded by human beings. But is it

practical when faced with the question of what we should do and say, to ask "What would Jesus do?" We live in another part of the planet, we speak a different language, we are surrounded by a vastly different culture, yet it is possible to follow Him, closely. Two things make this possible. Jesus promised to be with us always. It is hard to grasp that promise fully, immediately, but though it may take long years, we can really know our Saviour and walk with Him. It sometimes helps to learn how others have discovered this wonderful privilege. Every committed follower of Jesus is given the gift of His Holy Spirit so that God may live in us. Many Christians feel failures because the companionship of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit are not the directing and driving force in their lives.

For some the Christian life is little more than an excited emotional experience and for others it is more intellectual than practical. Life after consecration is pictured by the husband and wife who unconditionally give themselves to each other. Marriage in its true form is where both partners willingly submit to the wishes of the other. They wish to avoid all that hurts and want to make life undivided bliss. So is the relationship between Christ and His Church – between Jesus and everyone who has committed themselves to Him.

So what have we to lay on the altar of the Lord? In Romans 12.1 Paul's Greek word for body is '*soma*' and he is saying 'yield your whole selves', which includes our personality as well as our physical body. Another possible translation is 'make a decisive dedication of your very selves.' Our minds and bodies are part of God's creation, "fearfully and wonderfully made" and they need to be kept cleansed for Him. Paul writes (1 Cor. 6.19 Amplified) "*Do you not know that your body (soma) is the temple – the very sanctuary – of the Holy Spirit.*" However young and active we are or however old and frail, our bodies are the Lord's and at all times and in all places should be used, treated and cared for, because they are His. God has given us a brain – we have the skills of remembering and thinking, the abilities to make ethical judgments and to calculate and make predictions. These are all God's gifts and are dedicated to Him if we have been baptised into Christ. Our bodies have the gifts of movement and balance, of pain and touch. Our brains have the gifts of smelling, tasting, hearing

and seeing. All of these gifts and much more besides, have been surrendered to God. How much are we holding back and how far have we progressed, in making every detail of our lives dedicated to our Heavenly Father, every moment of our time, every activity and every occupation? When we fully appreciate that fact, then all that we have must be His, all that we do must be done for Him and in His way. We no longer speak for ourselves, we speak for Him. We no longer go where we want to go but where He sends us.

Jesus asks us to follow Him. He said that those who are really happy are those who suffer for Him. They share His willingness to live for others and His joy in the service of all; His desire that all may be saved and find new life in Him. But it will also mean that much has to be sacrificed for Him. He will call upon many to risk their lives for Him. He requires of some to do a lonely job and forego the world's rewards. He faced opposition and those who love and trust Him must expect the world's frown. Marriage, parenthood and friendship may be part of the Christian life – but they may not. God calls us to do what He wants with all that we have and are. But following Jesus is the greatest joy in the world, and no one nor anything can take it away.

Our eyes and ears are committed to God and we therefore need to be alert to what He is telling us to say and do. A child of God will want to know what the Lord is saying – in His Word and directly to his heart so that she or he can be obedient. This is only done by those who spend much time in prayer and in studying His Word. Prayer is simple in the manner of a child to the Father – studying is not intellectual or academic but allows the Bible to challenge us. It is not done once for all or once a week but is a daily experience so that moment by moment we are walking with Him in perfect trust and total peace. It is not too hard or too obscure – it is the privilege and inheritance of all who give themselves to the Lord. That is your privilege now. Take it – take Him, you will never regret it. In Him you will find the fullest life, however short or long that life may be.

DN

"Jesus looked at them and said 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

(Mark 9.26 NIV)

OPEN THE GATE

There were a lot of people, praying. Followers of the Way, believers in Jesus the Christ, under threat from the authorities. Some of their number had been arrested by King Herod (Herod Agrippa) and were being ill-treated. James (the brother of John, one of the 'sons of thunder') had been executed. Herod, because this made him popular in certain quarters, was doing the same with Peter and at this moment had him in prison.

So there were a lot of people praying. This was one of the times when the persecution of which Jesus had warned His disciples was flaring up. At Mary's house (she was the mother of John Mark) they were locked away, the courtyard gate secure against their enemies, and praying fervently, anxiously, for Peter. Years before, Peter and John had been triumphantly released from the authorities (Acts 4.23) and they had all rejoiced. But that was before Stephen had been stoned to death, and now James had been beheaded. What could they expect next?

There was a knocking at the outer gate. They sent Rhoda to see what new danger this might herald.

Who was Rhoda? She appears just this once in the story of the church. She was young, a 'damsel' (AV). The Greek word for her is '*paidiske*', which can mean a young girl or a female slave. There had been a girl like her who had been in charge of the gate at the High Priest's house the night Jesus was arrested - that was the one who chaffed Peter about who he was, and made him deny his Lord (John 18.17). Later in the Christian story, there was another young female, a *paidiske*, definitely a slave girl, who brought profits to her owners in Philippi (Acts 16.16). But here was Rhoda, a contemporary perhaps of John Mark (who afterwards wrote a gospel and travelled for a time with Paul and Barnabas), sent out, not to open the gate, but to find out who was knocking.

Peter, as we know but they did not, had been miraculously set free from prison. Out in the darkness and the cold night air, he puzzled what best to do. He made for Mary's house, where he knew he could find friends - it is always good when in trouble to seek out your Christian friends. They needed to know of his release, but he must not put them in danger. At the gate he knocked. "Who is

it?" "Me, Peter."

"Oh, praise God! You're free!"

A long silence. The gate did not open, there were quick light footsteps going away. Peter knocked again, not too loud, but repeatedly.

Inside the room where they had all met to pray, there was confusion.

"Who is it? Who is it?"

"It's Peter. I know his voice. He's free."

"It can't be. We know Herod has him in prison. You're daft, girl."

"I tell you it is Peter. I know his voice as well as you do."

"Then he must be dead. It is his angel, not him."

Outside the knocking continued. At last they all went and opened the gate - whoever was there, it was not soldiers. But Peter it truly was. He quietened their babble of astonishment. No great sermon on this occasion, he simply told them what had happened. "Tell this to James (the other James, step-brother to Jesus) and the brethren." And Peter went away as quietly as he had come.

Three comments:

1. Here was an occasion when a teenager was right and all the adult world were proved wrong. Rhoda was not a giant of faith, she simply told what she saw. But she did not have that superstructure of doubt and realism which prevents older persons from believing that God can do what in fact He has already done.

2. A comment has been made, that in a future day and age we may have an opportunity to talk to Rhoda about all this! Just as she may have told it to Luke the doctor and historian nearly two thousand years ago. Interesting.

3. It is very easy to be amused that all the believers earnestly praying for Peter's release could not believe it when it actually happened. Where was their faith? We, of course, are not experiencing the tension and fear of that dark night. Afterwards, perhaps they too could see the funny side of it. The serious point is that in our prayers we should be ready for surprising answers. Open the gate of our minds to what God is doing.

GC

ALPHABET OF PRAYER

ASKING: Ask and you will receive, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone that asks receives ... and he who seeks finds. Mt. 7.7-11

BLESSING: With the tongue we bless God (and curse man). Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. Jas 3.9.

CONFESSING: If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn. 1.9.

DESIRE: When you pray, what things you desire, believe that you have them and you will have them. Mk. 11.24.

ENQUIRY: I will be enquired of by Israel (to fulfil His promises). Ez. 36.37.

Lord what wilt thou have me to do?

FASTING: Anna ... served God with fastings and prayers night and day... gave thanks unto God and spake of Him to all that looked... Luke 2.37

GRIEVING: For the grieving of the needy, now will I arise, says the Lord. Ps. 12.5

HEARING. My sheep hear my voice and I know them & they follow me. John 10.27.

INTERCESSION: Supplication, prayer, intercession and thanksgiving for all men, kings, all in authority, that we may lead a quiet life. 1 Tim. 2.11

JOY: In every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. Philippians 1.4

KNEELING: Jesus kneeled and prayed in Gethsemane. Mt. 26.39.

Stephen kneeled and cried, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. Acts 7.60

LISTENING: Whether it is right to listen to you rather than God, judge ye. Acts 4.9

MESSAGES: Paul was told by Jesus to go into Damascus. Acts 9.6.

Peter told to go with the three men Cornelius sent. Acts 10.19, 20.

NEEDS: My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4.19

Ask and it shall be given you Matt. 7.7.

OPENNESS: Lydia worshipped God; whose heart the Lord opened; Acts 16.14

The two's eyes were opened; and they recognised Him. Luke 24.31

PENITENCE: Godly sorrow works repentance to salvation, not to be repented of. 2 Cor 7.9-11. God's goodness leads to repentance. Romans 2.4.

QUESTIONING: "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Paul)

All men mused as to whether John were the Christ. Luke 3.15, 16.

REMEMBERING: I thank God at every remembrance of you. Phil 1.3

Remember those in prison as those bound with them. Hebrews 13.3.

SINGING: Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Col. 3.16

Psalms, hymns, songs, making melody in your hearts to the Lord. Eph. 5.19

THANKSGIVING: Giving thanks always for all things unto our God and Father. Eph. 5.20

In everything give thanks. 1 Thess 5.18

UNDERSTANDING: I will pray with the understanding also. Cor. 14.15

Lest they should see... hear... understand and be converted. Acts 28.27.

VOWS: I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people. Ps. 22.25

WATCHING: Continue in prayer and watch in it with thanksgiving. Col. 4.2.

I will stand on my watch to see what He will say to me. Hab. 2.1.

'XTOLLING: I will extol you, for you have lifted me up. Ps. 30.1

Exalt the Lord our God & worship at His footstool, He is holy. Ps. 99.5.

YEARNING: With open mouth I yearn for your commands. Ps. 119.131

ZEAL: Epaphras has great zeal for you & them in Laodicea... Col. 14.12

The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up. Ps. 69.9.

JT

Where Light Enters

Light enters the smallest opening accessible to it. It searches out the recesses that would otherwise remain dismal and dark, thus penetrating the gloom. It is a fact disclosed by science that it lays hold of the lurking germs of disease whether in the home or in the human system. Of Him who came as the world's light, such is His ministry. Instead of sin fastening upon Him it could not even stand in His presence.

("The Quiet Time reprinted from BSM Dec 1937)

THE TIMES OF ISAIAH, THE PROPHET

Isaiah was one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets; one of the outstanding evangelists of the Hebrew race. His name means "the salvation of Yahweh". The prophet was conscious of his name and realised that he did not bear it accidentally. Jesha and Jeshuah are among his favourite words and seem to infer that like Abraham he lived by faith in the day of the future Jesus, who is the personal salvation of Jehovah (John 8.56; Heb. 11.13).

His father, Amos – no relation to the prophet of that name – appears to have been a citizen of Jerusalem. The social position of Amos cannot be defined, but Isaiah seems to have held high rank, for when Hezekiah, King of Judah, enquired of him, he sent a deputation of his chief officials (2 Kings 19.2). His prophetic ministry extends through the reigns of four kings, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, covering a period of at least forty years. Isaiah's prophecies have much in common with those of the other great prophets of the same period, Amos, Hosea and Micah. Many pieces of prophetic history are interwoven in the book of Isaiah. That these pieces are from the pen of Isaiah is probably because the writing of prophecy and history were from the beginning never totally separated. The Chronicler refers to a portion of these historical pieces as incorporated in the book of Isaiah (2 Chron. 32.32). He also informs us that Isaiah was the author of a historical monograph that embraced the whole reign of King Uzziah. (2 Chron. 26.22).

It is convenient to divide Isaiah's ministry into five periods, which, although unequal in length, are each marked by features peculiar to itself. The first three may be said to be Assyrian in outlook, the fourth Assyrian and Babylonian, and the fifth Babylonian.

The first period extends from the death of Uzziah, about 740 BC to the beginning of the reign of Ahaz and is dealt with chiefly in Isaiah, chapters 9 and 32. Like Amos, Isaiah appears here mainly as a preacher of righteousness and judgment to come. His ministry begins at a time when Israel had forsaken God and placed their confidence in worldly prosperity, warlike resources, superstition and idolatry. Middle-class luxury, oppression of the poor by wealthy merchants and tradesmen, wantonness of women, excess in festive drinking

and perversion of moral distinctions, abounded on every hand. He portrays this tragic condition of the spiritual life of Judah in these words; *"And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city"* (Isa. 1.8). He describes their waywardness in these words, *"The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider"* (Isa. 1.3). Isaiah traces all the manifestations of national corruption to a single source; absence of a religious spirit or the knowledge of God, in the men of his time. This truth he graphically describes in the unique story of the vineyard (Isa. 5.1-7).

The second period covers the critical period of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion of Judah, about 735 BC and is described in chapters 7, 8 and perhaps 9. This period finds Isaiah in an entirely new role, that of a political adviser. This fact can be better appreciated when we look at the contrast, which in this respect, he presents to Amos and Hosea in the North. Like Isaiah, they looked forward to a future time of blessing for Israel, yet their writings contain no hint of political direction for the leaders of the state. It may be said here that Isaiah revives this political function of prophecy that had been in abeyance since the days of Elisha.

One of the outstanding events of this period is the impressive interview between Ahaz and Isaiah as a result of the invasion of Judah by the combined forces of Syria and Ephraim. By this unbrotherly act the Northern Kingdom sealed its own doom. Both it and Syria fell a prey to the advancing Assyrians under the leadership of Tiglath-pileser. Isaiah 7 sets out the interview between God's prophet and the faithless Ahaz. Isaiah assures the king that the conspiracy will come to nought, and holds out a promise of deliverance on the condition of faith in God. Ahaz replied: *"I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord"* (7.12). Isaiah then continued the conversation, and gave utterance to the remarkable promise concerning a coming king in these words: *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (7.14). The king's unbelief is answered by the threat of an Assyrian invasion.

Isaiah did not accept the king's decision as final, but made an appeal to the people at large. From the

court he delivers his messages in the form of a series of oracles which are contained in chapter eight. They probably extended over a period of some months. Isaiah could see that the Syrio-Ephraimite conspiracy would be destroyed by the king of Assyria. He endeavoured to impress this encouraging fact upon the minds of the people by the erection of a motto: "*To Maher-shalal-hash-baz*" (8.1,2). Months later he gave the interpretation of the motto in connection with the birth of a son to whom he gave the motto as a name (8.3, 4). The people did not believe him; his message fell on deaf ears. The prophet was right. Damascus was overthrown in 732 BC and Samaria some ten years later. Judah, however, did not become a theatre of war between Assyria and Egypt. The rejection of the prophet's message by the common people marks a temporary cessation of his public activity (8.16-18). The Lord hid His face from the house of Israel, in that He withdrew the guidance of the prophetic word that had been so coldly received.

The next period is marked by the strange absence of any record of Isaiah's reflections on the events with which it is associated, namely the fall of Samaria in 721 BC. This event is foretold in several of Isaiah's most striking prophecies in 8.1-4; 17.1-11; 28.1-4. The fall of Samaria must have profoundly affected Judah, especially so when it is realised that the Ten Tribes comprised the larger portion of God's people. This followed the proud boast of the Assyrian: "*Shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her images?*" This should have had a very chastening effect on the heart of Judah (10.11). Judah seems to have concluded that if God failed to avert the doom of the Northern kingdoms, there was no assurance that He would protect her. This may have been the cause of the desperate struggle that afterwards took place to throw off the Assyrian yoke.

We now come to the most eventful stage of Isaiah's career, which covers a period from 720 BC to 701 BC, during which time Hezekiah is king of Judah. It must be remembered that, throughout his prophetic career, Isaiah had always urged upon Judah the need for a position of isolation and absolute dependence upon God. Ahaz absolutely refused to be guided by the prophet, and, fearing the consequences of a Syrio-Ephraimite conspiracy, tendered his allegiance to Tiglath-

pileser, who promptly responded to his appeal (2 Kings 15.29).

The first hint that Hezekiah might endeavour to free himself from the pact to which his father was a party, might be found in the short oracle of Isaiah 14.29-32, which is thought to have been the year of Hezekiah's accession to the throne. The next time that unrest is witnessed in Judah we find the Southern kingdom in the black books of Sargon. It has been suggested that Isaiah chapters 28-31 consist of the prophet's protests against negotiations on the part of Hezekiah with Egypt with a view to a revolt against Assyria. It is interesting to note that the originators of this revolt against Assyria in favour of an Egyptian alliance were anxious to keep the prophet in the dark regarding their plot. They did not succeed. Isaiah draws attention to their attempt to outwit the Almighty (29.15; 30.1-12; 31.1-2).

Isaiah then resorted to an even more drastic attempt to turn public opinion against rebellion. For three years he walked the streets of Jerusalem "*naked and barefooted*" as a sign of humiliation which awaited not only Egypt – the power with which certain statesmen of Judah sought alliance – but the power of Ethiopia at the hands of Assyria (20.2, 4). To quote the words of Dr. Skinner: "Isaiah consistently upheld the maxim that the safety of the state lay in abstinence from all attempts to recover its independence, and in quiet resignation to the will of God." There is no reason to suppose that the prophet held out any hope that such alliance would spare them from the trial of an Assyrian invasion.

In this, as in other periods, we find Isaiah against the spirit of unbelief and unfaithfulness that inspired Judah to seek deliverance through human wisdom and effort and alliances with surrounding heathen states. It seems clear that Isaiah expected the defeat of Egypt and Ethiopia at the hands of Assyria (chap. 20). He foresees a great expansion of the Assyrian empire under their victorious king, Sargon.

Isaiah also realises that Assyria is an instrument in the hand of God to fulfil a Divine purpose. But, as one historian asks: "How could an immoral force (Assyria) be used for moral ends? When and where and how would the Assyrian overstep the limits of his commission and appear in open conflict with the will of Him who had raised him up? And when

this point was reached, how would God rid himself of the formidable tool He had fashioned to execute His strange work on the earth?" This is the subject matter of Isaiah, chapter 10. 5-34, which covers the major portion of the period under review.

The contrast should be noted between God's purposes in raising Assyria up and the unholy ambitions of that despotic world power (10.5-15) the annihilation of this mighty military power under the metaphor of disease and conflagration (10.16-19); the encouraging message to the faithful remnant in Israel (10.20-27); the destruction of Assyria under the very walls of Jerusalem (10.28-34). The picture ends with the attempt of Assyria to overrun the earthly seat of God's visible government in Jerusalem, as he stands over against the capital, *"swinging his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion"*. His armed forces suffer a mortal blow, and Judah is saved from the Assyrian terror. *"The Lord God of Hosts shall lop the boughs with terror; and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down and the lofty one shall be humbled"* (10. 32, 33). Thus is the epic defeat of the Assyrians under Sennacherib foretold by God through the mouth of his faithful prophet. This prophecy was fulfilled in 701 BC. Other references to this defeat are to be found in Isaiah 14.24-27; 17.12-14; and chapter 18.

Isaiah felt that the hour had arrived when God would destroy His enemies, and thus vindicate the truth that He was indeed the *"Holy One of Israel"*. This was probably the gravest challenge to the power of God since the day when Samuel exclaimed: *"Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God; for there is none like you, neither is there any God beside you, according to all that we have heard with our ears"* (2 Sam. 7.22-24). Isaiah 28.7; 31.5, 8; 30.27-33 are also relevant.

In order that we might obtain a clear impression of this crisis, it is necessary briefly to review the policy of King Hezekiah. He had formed the opinion that Sennacherib's enterprise against Babylon had considerably weakened his armies. On the other hand Egypt might under the influence of the Ethiopian, King of Napata appear to be in the ascendancy. The traditional Egyptian interest in the Plain of Esdraelon – a triangular plain that breaks the central range between Galilee and Samaria – was now likely to increase. Just as the close of Tiglath-pileser's reign marked a change in the

foreign policy of Judah, so the close of the reign of Sargon, also a king of Assyria, witnessed another change in the policy of Judah. The prospect of freedom from the financial yoke of Assyria, imposed during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, together with the visit to Jerusalem of a mission of the envoys from the Ethiopian kings of Napata, caused Hezekiah to believe that the critical moment for action had arrived.

From this time onward, Hezekiah acted swiftly. He fortified Jerusalem and placed in protective custody in the capital Padi, Assyrian vassal king of Ekron. The toil of the king was unavailing. God did not intend Judah to think that, within herself, she had the power to deliver herself from impending disaster, or that her ends could be accomplished through alliances with heathen kings.

As soon as Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was free from Babylonian commitments, he lost no time in directing his attention to the powers with whom Hezekiah had associated himself. They were all soundly defeated, thus leaving the road to Judah clear for a full-scale invasion. The puppet king, Padi, was surrendered by Hezekiah and restored by Sennacherib to his throne. The campaign against Judah then followed. The record of Sennacherib – now in the British Museum – and that in 2 Kings 18. 13-16, are in broad agreement, Hezekiah was defeated and subjected to a heavy fine.

Certain difficulties arise when comparing the foregoing account with Isaiah, chapters 36 and 37. Of the various explanations that have been presented, it is generally held that after the capture of Ekron, Sennacherib set about the systematic reduction of the cities of Judah. Separate corps had the responsibility of capturing the capital. The Arabian army which Hezekiah had enlisted to his cause was easily defeated. Realising that further resistance was futile, Hezekiah sued for peace, which he obtained at the price of a very heavy fine. Assuming that he did not include the surrender of Jerusalem in his peace overtures, Sennacherib must have repudiated the agreement and gone back on his peace terms, for a siege of Jerusalem followed.

Hezekiah realised the helplessness of his position against so formidable a foe. In his extremity he went into the Temple, and humbly and earnestly appealed to God for protection against the opposing forces. He beseeches God to *"see and hear the words of Sennacherib which he had sent*

to reproach the living God" (37.14-20). Isaiah was commissioned to reassure Hezekiah that the Assyrian army would not lay siege to Jerusalem, nor "shoot an arrow at it, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it" (37.33). Hezekiah's extremity was God's opportunity. Sennacherib's army perished in a night; the angel of the Lord performed his work swiftly, suddenly, and in silence (37.36). Of the miraculous destruction of this mighty host, it has truly been said that "it is one of the outstanding examples of pacifism in practice."

An historian has summed up the crisis of the

fate of Jerusalem in these words: "The crisis of Jerusalem's fate becomes the occasion of that final revelation of the majesty of God to which Isaiah had looked forward from the beginning of his work, and which he with increasing distinctness connected with the overthrow of the Assyrian power. The whole history of redemption converges to this one event; it is the consummation of God's work of judgment both on Israel and on Assyria, and the inauguration of the reign of holiness and righteousness and peace reserved for the purified remnant of the nation."

Adapted and reprinted from BSM 1986

Time Scale for Isaiah's Ministry

Uzziah					Sennacherib
Jotham					attacks
Ahaz					Jerusalem
740 BC	735	721		710	700BC
Preacher of Righteousness	Political Adviser	Political eclipse	Acted parable	Israel's demise	Hezekiah seeks God

THE BOOK OF JASHER

Twice mentioned in the Old Testament, this book has not survived; nothing more is known about it than can be inferred from these two references. "Jasher" means just, upright, straight. The Vulgate calls it the "book of the just ones" and the LXX the "book of the upright one". There is just a possibility that the name is derived from a Hebrew word implying that it is a book of songs. The Syriac calls it the "book of praises". Less likely, perhaps, is that Jasher was the name of its author.

Joshua 10.13, after recounting the story of the sun "standing still" until the people had defeated their enemies, says "Is not this written in the book of Jasher?" It has been pointed out by scholars that Joshua's words in v.12 and the first sentence in v. 13 are poetry whereas the rest of the chapter is prose, and that this points to these words being a direct quotation from the book of Jasher.

*"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.
And thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon.
And the sun stood still,
And the moon stayed,
Until the people had avenged themselves
upon their enemies."*

The other reference, in 2 Samuel 1.18, relates to

David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, a poetic composition covering vv.19-27 of that chapter, and one of the most eloquent passages of the Old Testament. This, it is said in v. 18, "is written in the book of Jasher". On the basis of these examples it is thought that the lost book was a collection of poems or songs. It deals with the stirring deeds of Israel's ancient heroes, and other similar songs preserved in the O.T., such as Miriam's song of triumph following the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15) and that of Deborah after the defeat of Sisera (Judges 5), had the same origin.

The book was probably written in the time of David or Solomon, since the reference in 2 Sam. dates it to David's time at the earliest. The reference in Joshua would then be an editorial insertion supplementary to the original narrative, added in the days of David or later.

Several editions of a book claiming to be the lost book of Jasher appeared between 1827 and 1840 but these all stemmed back to one published at Bristol in 1751 which was almost immediately shown to be a forgery. In fact the book has never been discovered. It is sometimes said that Josephus declared (Ant. 5.1.17) that a copy was held in the Temple archives of his day but reference to the

place shows that he did not mention Jasher and probably referred to the Book of Joshua itself.

AOH

[Editorial Note: This reprint from 1986 is inserted for its interest and explanation. It should be noted that

the references to Exodus, Joshua and 1 Samuel could very well have been the source of the poems from which the editor of Jasher took some of his poems, the **reverse** of the suggestion above.]

ASPECTS OF LOVE

Part I

*A convention
address*

Truth and love are frequently discussed in our world but they are seldom practised. From politicians to salesmen, people conveniently ignore or conceal facts, and use words to improve their position or to sell products. The meaning of words is twisted, or used completely out of context, so that they become merely tools for the building up of egos, or for making suggestive remarks and unclean conversations. Perjury is common, and integrity and credibility have become endangered species, so it is not surprising that, where legal matters are concerned, we have to "swear" to tell the truth.

Jesus is the complete opposite of society's prevailing values, which include falsehood and self-centredness – for He is Truth and Love in person. Therefore, everyone who claims loyalty to Him **MUST** be committed to these ideals – not just following the truth, but living the truth, reflecting love and acting with love toward one another.

The apostle John had seen Truth and Love at firsthand - he had been with Jesus. He was so affected by all that he had seen and heard that all of his writings, from the Gospel to the book of Revelation, are filled with this theme. Truth and love are vital to the Christian and are inseparable in the Christian life.

What can we say about love? Our world is filled with its words. Popular songs, greeting cards, romantic novels and films, shower us with notions and dreams of ethereal, idyllic relationships and feelings. In fact if poets and songwriters down through the years had been denied the use of the word 'love', many of them would have been lost for a way of expressing their feelings and the world would have been deprived of a great deal of pleasure.

They tell us that, 'Love is a many splendoured thing,' and we shall see later that Paul, although he put it a little differently, completely agreed with this. Andrew Lloyd-Webber says that "Love Changes Everything," which is another thought

that the scriptures confirm. And we mustn't leave out Robbie Burns who said "My Love is like a Red, Red Rose, That's newly sprung in June," which is certainly true of Christian Love which blossoms and blooms like the proverbial Rose.

These writers were, of course, talking of the love between a man and a woman, and there's nothing wrong with that, in fact it's beautiful; but now we are going to look at the love that the Bible teaches us that we should have. It is love for one another, for our brethren, our friends, our neighbours, even for our enemies.

We can perhaps best explain that love by looking at the way it was used by Jesus in His interview with "*Simon, the son of Jonas*," after our Lord's resurrection, and comparing the different words they each used. You will remember that the disciples had been told by Jesus to go to Galilee, and they were there waiting for their Master to give them more instructions. But the waiting was beginning to play on their nerves, and finally we can imagine Peter saying, "I can't stand this waiting any more. I've got to do something. I'm going fishing, is anyone coming with me?" So off they all went, and after being out all night, without catching anything, they were just coming back to land in the early dawn, when Jesus appeared to them. At first they didn't recognise the figure standing on the shore, but when He called out to them to throw out their net once more and they caught one hundred and fifty three fish, they knew it was their beloved Master. But bringing the boat into shore was a slow process and Peter just could not wait to greet Him again, so he swam ashore.

In the twenty first chapter of his Gospel, John tells us that it was the third time that Jesus had appeared to His disciples since He had been raised from the dead. And in vv.15-17 he says that, after they had all breakfasted together, Jesus pointed to the boats, nets and the other fishing equipment and said to Simon Peter, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*" 'Yes, Lord,' Peter re-

plied, 'you know I love you.' 'Then feed my lambs,' Jesus told him. Jesus repeated the question: 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' 'Yes, Lord,' Peter said, 'you know I love you,' 'Then take care of my sheep,' Jesus said. "Once more he asked him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, 'Lord, you know everything. You know I love you.' Jesus said, 'Then feed my sheep.'"

Peter had been called by our Lord to be a Fisher of Men. It was to be a part of the harvest work involved in our Heavenly Father's plan of redemption, and now, in a fit of frustration at the inactivity, he had returned instead to try and win a harvest from the sea. It was as if Jesus was saying, Peter, what's more important to you? Do you want to be a part of My Father's plan with Me? Do you want to help Me with the work I've come to do, or do you want to spend the rest of your life fishing in the Sea of Galilee?

When our Lord said, "Do you love Me?" He used the Greek word *agapas*; but when Peter answered he used the Greek word *philo*, - both words mean 'I love.' *Agapas* is the word that was used in the first and second questions put by our Lord; but when He asks the question for the third time our Lord used Peter's word *philo*. The distinction between these two Greek words is described by Trench: who says that *agapas* carries more the thought of careful judgement and deliberate choice, while *philein* has more the feeling of attachment and particular personal affection. So the Greek word *agapas* - Do you love Me? - on the lips of the Lord seemed to Peter at this moment too cold a word, as though his Lord was keeping him at a distance, or at least not inviting him to draw near as, in the passionate yearning of his heart, Peter wanted to do. So he ignored the word used by our Lord and substituted *philo*, his own stronger and more fervent word for 'I love,' in its place. The second time Jesus asked the question He used the same word, *agapas*, again. And then, it seems that His perseverance has paid off because, when the Lord asked Peter for a third time whether he loved Him, He uses the only word that will satisfy Peter - *phileis* - do you love, and which alone expresses, for him, that personal attachment and affection with which he knows that his heart is filled. The Lord was telling Peter, "If you love me, then you must love my sheep and take care of them. I and

My sheep - My followers - come as a package, we're inseparable. So, if you love me you must love those that My Father has placed in My care."

Barclay tells us that *agape* is a word that was rarely used in secular Greek, but which has come to be the Christian word for love and means a love that shows unconquerable benevolence and undefeatable good will. In Matthew 5.45, we can find an example of this in our Heavenly Father; "*For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*" which means that however good a person may be, or however bad they are, they can still, if they will, all share in the gifts and benevolence of God. He doesn't just confine His blessings to those who love Him, but He makes them available to the entire world.

Agape love is the spirit that never seeks anything but the other person's good, no matter what that person does. However, it's not something that just happens, without our being able to do anything about it. It's a deliberate act of will by which Christian love makes it possible to show love to someone we don't like and, no matter how we feel emotionally towards them, to seek their good and never hate them. But to make this act of will we must choose to serve rather than being served. When we get to this point of choosing to honour others, - family, friends, brethren and neighbours, - and to serve their interests rather than our own, we're well on the way to Joy, Peace and a Godlike love. And even if our efforts are rejected and unappreciated, we'll be displaying the love that Jesus said that we should show; the love that brings honour and glory to our Heavenly Father.

Now the opposite of *agape* love is not hatred. It is indifference, and our Lord demonstrated this contrast between love and indifference in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. After the traveller on the Jericho road had been attacked and left for dead, by the thieves who had taken all he had, a Priest and then a Levite came along the road. Both passed by without trying to help the man. Possibly, the Priest was afraid that if he touched the man to help him, and then found that he was dead, he would be ceremonially defiled and so unable to serve in the Temple, while the Levite appears to have put his own safety before the suffering of another. They didn't know the victim; they both displayed an attitude of complete indifference to

his sufferings and just thought first of their own desires, feelings and safety. However the Samaritan, who came along a little later, showed that *agape* love by stopping to care for the man despite the possible danger that the man wasn't injured at all but was merely a decoy to get a passer-by to stop so that the thieves could rob him. Although the injured man was the author of his own misfortune, by travelling such a dangerous road alone, the Samaritan helped the man, regardless of his race or creed, and without considering the cost.

Our Lord told this story, which is recounted in Luke 10, to answer a question which had been put to Him by an expert on the religious Law in an effort to trap Him into a damaging statement. In vv.25-27 we're told that the lawyer had asked, *"Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"* To which Jesus had replied, *"What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?"* The man answered, *"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself."*

Up to that time, men had been trying to 'work their passage' into heaven, by keeping the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Laws – plus the thousand and one other laws they had manufactured out of them. But Jesus, with this answer was saying in effect; "That way is very hard and I know it's impossible for you to keep. My Father gave you the Law, not only to outline for you the ethics of a good life, but also to show you that you cannot save yourselves by your own efforts, you need a redeemer." He was saying; "If only you would listen to Me, I'm giving you a much easier way. If only you will do just this one thing, you will do all these thousand and one other laws without even thinking, because if you love, you will unconsciously fulfil the whole law.

If we just think about it for a minute, we can see how that is so. Take any of the Ten commandments and you can see how this works. Look at the first four: If we truly love God, we won't worship any other god or make idols for worship, we just wouldn't want to. Neither would we take His name in vain, and we would always be glad to keep at least one day in the week for Him as the Sabbath – and most of us keep at least a part of every day for Him. Then, if we truly love our fellow man, we won't kill him, or steal from him or covet what he has, or any of the other six. Just by that one simple action of loving we keep all ten. So, to our Lord,,

love is the most important thing of all. First, love shown to God and then Love for our neighbour, the person we may not even know, but with whom we might in some way come into contact.

There have been two really great examples of love. The first was shown after Adam and Eve had sinned by succumbing to the lies and temptations of the devil, and eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In His foreknowledge the Heavenly Father had already planned for this. He carried out His promise that because of their sin, they and their posterity would die. He also promised that in due time He would send a redeemer who would conquer the devil and all evil, and in so doing, make it possible for all mankind to have everlasting life.

This redeemer was, of course, our Lord Jesus, who came to give us the good news about God. Until then, men had always looked on God as a rather formidable King and Judge, who could never be approached, but was to be feared because He was always ready with a 'big stick' to punish our slightest mistake. But our Lord taught that God was a loving Father to all of us and that He was just waiting and yearning for our love, in the same way that an earthly father yearns for the love of a wayward child. He taught that our Heavenly Father needn't be feared and set apart, but that He could be approached like a friend that we know and love. He is a compassionate Father, to whom we can turn in our times of trouble. He is a Father who will help us, guide us, and never let us down or condemn us. That, even if we turn away from Him, He will still love us and will anxiously watch for us to return to Him: then, when we do turn towards Him again, He will hurry to meet us and welcome us with open arms.

It's said that God despises the sin but that He loves the sinner and that is true, but it doesn't mean that because He loves the sinner we can keep on doing wrong. It means that the moment that we change from our sinful ways, God is there to guide us, to help and support us. As our Lord taught, the Heavenly Father loves every one of His creation and just longs for the day when every one of them will *"Forsake their foolish ways"* and honour and obey Him.

John tells us that our Lord said, *"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I*

have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow. I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it – the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends." (John 15.9-13)

Jesus went on to prove that this wasn't just a piece of teacher's rhetoric. He actually demonstrated the love He had for every one of us by making the supreme sacrifice and laying down His life, not just for his friends, but for all mankind. Greater love can no one show than that.

In their distress and despair at the death of their beloved Master, especially in such a terrible way, they forgot what He had repeatedly told them. As Matthew records, *"From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that he had to go to Jerusalem, and he told them what would happen to him there. He would suffer at the hands of the leaders and the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, and he would be raised on the third day"* (Matthew 16.21).

This word 'must' is one of the great imperatives of the Bible. Our Lord had to die in order to fulfil the first part of the Father's plan for the redemption of mankind. And He had to be raised again on the third day to complete the work.

The disciples probably thought at the time, that Jesus was telling them some mysterious parable whose meaning would be revealed to them later on. And in our hours of dejection and desperation, when we can't see the hand of God, or feel His presence at our side, it is so easy to forget the things we've been told, just as they did. We fail to remember that our loving Heavenly Father never stops loving us and that it's at times like these that our faith and our trust in Him should shine through.

Luke says that, even as they nailed Him to the cross, Jesus said, *"Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing"* (Luke 23.34). It's just as if our Lord was saying, "It doesn't matter what you do to Me, I'll always love you, and forgive you." In Jesus, we can see what God is like, so in this prayer we can see that there's no limit to the love, the grace, or the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father.

Then, as if to show men how futile their efforts were when they tried to eliminate Him and His work of salvation, He rose again on the third day just as was prophesied, victorious over every one of these terrible acts and in the end conquering even

death. It was, in fact, not the crucifixion of Christ that was preached by the early Christians but the risen Christ. They never preached to anyone without insisting on the fact of the resurrection. For instance, Luke tells us that when Peter and John had healed the beggar outside the Temple gate called Beautiful, the astonished onlookers came rushing up to them, awed by the miracle and probably asking all sorts of questions. This was Peter's opportunity and he addressed the crowd, *"People of Israel' he said, 'what is so astounding about this? And why look at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power and godliness? For it is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of all our ancestors who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. You killed the author of life, but God raised him to life. And we are witnesses of this fact!"* (Acts 3.12-15).

Once the disciples were convinced that Jesus had 'Burst the bonds of death,' and had actually come out of the grave alive, it put such a new meaning into their lives that nothing else seemed worthwhile. They were convinced that a message that stopped at the cross had left out the most important fact of all; the fact that Jesus had risen again and so conquered death for everyone.

They knew that the resurrection was a FACT, and they went up and down the highways of the Roman Empire telling the story of Jesus with such earnestness and sincerity that countless thousands believed in it; so much so that they were even prepared to die for their belief.

This fact of the resurrection is an even more important point today. It's right that we remember that Jesus died for us on the cross, just as we should also remember all the degradation and suffering He endured for our sakes. But it's much more important for us to rejoice over the fact that, having shown so great a love by laying down His life for us, His friends, He rose again and so made it possible that, when the time comes, we also shall be able to rise again.

Jesus finished His course at the cross, but that's where we begin ours. Before the events of the cross we were dead in sin, but since the cross, as Paul tells the Romans in 6.11, we are, *"Dead to sin, but*

alive in Christ Jesus. " Our Heavenly Father showed His love to all mankind in making His plan of salvation. He showed it too when our Lord Jesus, His Son carried out His Father's wishes, even to the extent of dying on the cross. Therefore death is no longer a prison from which there can be no escape,

but is just, *"a little sleep, a little folding of the hands to rest."* From this we'll arise, to be a part of His Bride, His Church, and everyone else, to a full and fair opportunity to obtain everlasting life.

(To be continued)

RJH

A STUDY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

28 - Chapter 24

*Notes to aid
personal
Bible study*

vv.1-12 Jesus' Resurrection. Luke's is one of the longer of the four Gospels and he was now running out of his papyrus roll. This may have been a limiting factor in his account of the resurrection but more likely it was because he had been concise, with definite objectives in mind, throughout this first book. Those objectives were now fulfilled. That he knew much more than is found in this chapter is clear from Acts 1.3, and through his friendship with Paul he would have known the content of the first Corinthian letter, chapter 15.

No human eye saw the actual resurrection so there was no one to describe it to him but what was to be told about the empty tomb was from the women. They had done what they could when Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus' body. Now they were about to complete their work, as early as possible, before light - 'in deep dawn'. They had wondered about the removal of the stone but the doorway to the tomb was open. As they ventured inside they were suddenly faced with a celestial messenger and, as always he gave the observers a shock. Angels were present when the Son of God was born and now they were in attendance for His Resurrection. The women observed and listened and then went, as instructed, to tell the Apostles who did not believe them. Mark tells us they entered the tomb. Matthew and John record that they met Jesus. The story can be pieced together, wonderfully well, each testimony was from eye witnesses who Luke must have interviewed. Frank Morison's book "Who Moved the Stone" (Faber 1930/69) demonstrates this clearly. The Resurrection immediately became a foundational truth of Christianity from Pentecost through Acts and the letters of the NT writers. Fearful and despondent followers of Jesus, confused by the events around the trial and crucifixion, became powerful, fearless witnesses for the Risen Lord Jesus. During those terrible days while Jesus was in the tomb they had

struggled with their affection for Him as their Master and their respect as 'that Prophet' – Messiah. But when they saw the Lord they were ecstatically glad – and convinced by the evidences (infallible proofs) that He gave them. The frightened men who found it so hard to believe that He was alive again, became brave martyrs for their faith in Jesus, and so did countless numbers who came after them.

vv.13-35 The Road to Emmaus is one of the most moving and charming stories of all time. Luke must have met one of those two who walked the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus and gained a first hand personal account of the eventful walk. Geldenhuys says that as they walked, there was within them a violent struggle between fear and hope. Yet they were open to listen to the Lord and had their attitude been different on the journey, they would, at the gate and at the supper table, have missed the blessing. How many of us would have loved to have heard the Lord demonstrate from the writings of the prophets (Psa. 22 and Isa. 53 give us a start) that the Messiah had to suffer and die and be raised from the dead. Just as Jesus had given unmistakable proof of identification by speaking Mary's name to her, so now the two at supper with Jesus were convinced as He broke the loaves. The One who was with them now in the cottage at Emmaus had done the same thing in the same way by Galilee and many other places. Characteristic mannerisms are quite remarkable human behaviour.

Vv.36-42 In Jerusalem and on Olivet. The disciples had the privilege of discovering their Master again. It was really Jesus, a real live person who could eat fish. He had flesh and bones – he was identifiable – they were not just seeing an apparition or vision or anything else that was not real. Why did He invite the disciples, particularly Thomas, to *touch and handle* Him but requested Mary Magdalene not to *hold or cling* (Morris, Vine) to

Him? Barclay is not satisfied that we fully understand this question and his comments are interesting. That one servant of God may do something and another may not, is noticeable throughout Biblical and Christian times. There was something else they could not understand, nor can we yet. He could appear and disappear – He could pass through locked doors – and certainly He could do all the things He had done before their eyes during His ministry.

Luke's final words are brief but adequate. Even as he laid down his pen, the beloved Physician may have been planning to write that further account of

all that Jesus continued to do through his followers. If so, there was no need for him then to enlarge on the record of the ascension. They were witnesses of the resurrection and the power of the resurrection was going to carry them through the suffering, the judgment hall and death for the sake of their Lord. And that has been the privilege of the saints to this day. Let us give thanks that faithful, honest, committed and very able men like Luke bequeathed to us the Gospel of Jesus Christ by which we find salvation.

The End

DN

AFTER THE FLOOD

8 - Nimrod, Leader of Men

The most famous name in Middle Eastern folklore and legend, whether Jewish, Arab or Persian, is Nimrod. This legendary hero of five thousand years ago is the subject of countless stories, songs and even books, recounting his deeds of daring and his mighty achievements. The Arab world, through the repetition of the Hebrew form of his name in the Koran, knows him as well as do the Jews from the Old Testament. A notable Arab work of unknown age, the "Kusset el Nimroud" (Stories of Nimrod) was still, in the late 19th century, regular winter's evening reading and reciting by Middle East Arab villagers. The Rabbis of pre-Christian Israel blamed him for the first great rebellion against God after the Flood. Christian writers of this Age, taking the cue from them, have fastened on him responsibility for the system of paganism and idolatry which commenced in Babylon, later permeated the Aramaic, Greek and Roman worlds and subsists in another form in our own day. The fact that the historical figure upon whom all this has been blamed lived long before there was any paganism or any rebellion, simplifies the task of disentangling religious prejudice from sober enquiry and endeavouring to discover just what can be known of this man and his deeds.

The Old Testament is the basis of investigation. What the Sumerian and Babylonian legends have to say about Nimrod was written down round about 1800 BC and the Book of Genesis was in existence long before that. But the Genesis narrative is tantalizingly brief. After recounting the names of the sons of Ham, Gen. 10.8-10 says "*Cush begat Nim-*

rod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said 'Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord'. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar''."

That is all, but the passage, brief as it is, makes it possible to locate Nimrod approximately on the stream of time. The cities mentioned are well known to archaeologists; the Hebrew text in the phrase "*the beginning of his kingdom*", is more accurately rendered "*his kingdom was the beginning of Babel and Erech*" which means that he lived at the time these places first appeared as small villages at the very beginning of Sumerian settlement. This in turn must have been within a couple of centuries from the dispersion at Babel so that Nimrod must have lived at about that time.

This leads to consideration of his genealogy. V.8 says that Cush "*begat*" Nimrod, but he is not included among his sons and grandsons as in v.7. The inference is that he was a lower descendant of a later generation. If he flourished soon after the time of the dispersion of Babel he could have been anything between the 3rd to 6th generation from Cush. He is distinguished as having been "*a mighty hunter before the Lord*". This word "before" means "in the presence of", and infers a creditable rather than discreditable position. At this point in time, it must have been that Nimrod stood with his fellows in that what he did, he did as unto the Lord. "Hunter" is '*tsayid*', which indicates a man of the field, like Esau, who was adept at hunting game for

food or dealing with wild animals. The same word is used for providers of food, which would stress the close connection that must have subsisted in those days between the hunt for food animals and the provision of food for the growing community. This Nimrod must have attained fame and approbation as a skilled and successful exponent of the art of the chase. So one comes to his name. If this man really did live and Genesis 10 asserts that he did, can he be found in ancient history outside the Bible? Here one comes up against a real obstacle. The earliest writers of history or legend, so far discovered, did not live until something like eight centuries after the time indicated in Genesis as that of Nimrod's life. But the old-time legends they recorded do tell of a great hero of ancient time who in the interim had become a god. This god, the special patron god of the city of Babylon in later times, amongst other great exploits, was accredited with having built the Tower of Babel. Here, then, is a point of contact. The name of that Babylonian god, Marduk, when translated into Hebrew, is the Nimrod of Genesis.

Marduk, in the year 2000 BC, was the name of the Sun-god, son of the God of heaven, proclaimed as the "Word of God", by whom all things were made, the executor of the Divine work of creation, the protector and redeemer of mankind. (More can be said about this later when the translation from monotheism to polytheism, the worship of one God to that of many gods, comes to be discussed). The name "Marduk" was the Babylonian equivalent of the Sumerian "*Amar-utu*" which means "wild ox of the sun-god". The wild ox (Sumerian *am*, Hebrew *reem*, translated "unicorn" in the AV. and now extinct), was the most powerful and ferocious beast known in the ancient Middle East. As such, the name could well mean "Champion fighter for the sun-god". There was, however, no sun-god in the earlier days of Babel, and it is not surprising therefore to find that the earlier Sumerian name was "*Amaraduk*" which means "wild ox of God". Going back even earlier, to about 2500 BC, a temple at Lagash has the name "*Nimaraduk*" which can be interpreted as "chief champion fighter for God". This name might well be set against the Genesis "*mighty hunter before the Lord*". (There are grounds for thinking that it was about this time, 2500 BC, that Genesis was first committed to writing in the Sumerian language).

It is this name Ni-marad-uk which was translit-

erated into the Hebrew language at the time of Moses in Egypt more than a thousand years later. Conscious perhaps of the later association with the sun god, the Divine suffix "uk" was dropped and the name left as Ni-marad. Centuries later the Rabbis could not resist the temptation to re-interpret the meaning of the name. Israel had contact with Babylon throughout history, culminating with the days of Daniel. Their knowledge of the alleged pagan exploits of the sun god Marduk – Nimrod, had left its mark. In Hebrew, "marad" is a verb meaning "to rebel" and when expressed grammatically in the 3rd person singular passive, is spelt 'Nimarad', meaning 'he was rebellious'. This, of course, was too good to miss, and so Josephus in his history of Israel followed the Rabbis' example with a full description of Nimrod's rebellion at the time of the building of the Tower – all quite imaginary. Whether the historical Nimrod did or did not apostatise from his allegiance to God at some time in his later life may be a debatable point; there is nothing in the Genesis account to say one way or the other. It is quite feasible though, that the later Sumerian legends which assert that he was the leading spirit in the second, and successful, building of the Tower, after the dispersal of the peoples, rest on a basis of truth, and that this led by successive steps to the introduction of paganism several centuries later. The true position is that he was a leader among men who was deified after his death to the status of a god – no uncommon thing in those early stages of the world's history.

The statement that "*his kingdom was the beginning of Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar*" indicates, first, that he was an acknowledged leader among men, and second, that he exercised his influence at the time the Sumerian cities began to come into existence. These and other cities commenced as hamlets and villages at a time very soon after the dispersal at Babel. Within two centuries of that event they were in process of becoming "city-states", each exercising royal authority over an area of territory around them. In such case the second – and this time successful – attempt to build the Tower of Babel must have been little more than a century after the first. With this there began the rise of the Sumerian civilisation, which led to the universal worship of the one Most High God becoming superseded by an increasing array of "gods many and lords many", thus creating the idolatry for which Babylon in after years be-

came notorious.

The cities of Nimrod were to the south of Babylon. At the dispersal from Babel the sons of Cush went south. Calneh (Nippur) was the holy city of the Cushite Sumerians, sixty miles south-east of Babylon. Erech (Uruk) was fifty miles farther on. Accad (Agade) was, on the other hand, about sixty miles north of Babylon; it was so thoroughly destroyed by invaders from Iran seven centuries later that its site has never been satisfactorily determined, although the Iraq State Antiquities authorities stumbled upon what they believe is all that is left of the city. There is just the possibility though that where Gen. 10 says "Accad", it is the city of Ur that is meant. Accad first appears in history several centuries later. It was a Semitic and not a Sumerian stronghold and being to the north and not the south of Babylon not so likely to have formed part of the domains of the Sumerian Nimrod. It so happens that the archaic native names for both these places in the Sumerian language is the same – *uri-ki*. If this name appeared in the early or original version of Gen. 10 later copyists or translators may well have been uncertain which city was intended and in the upshot have picked the wrong one. The point is of little importance but it is more likely to have been included in Nimrod's sphere of influence than Accad, even if the latter did exist in his day. If, then, Nimrod did extend his influence over the south and the first four settlements were those named, then Gen. 10 is in full accord with the known facts. Babel, Calneh (Nippur) Erech (Uruk) and Ur were all in existence as incipient centres of habitation within a century or so after the Dispersal, four settlements strung along the then course of the Euphrates over a distance of less than a hundred and fifty miles, all destined eventually to grow into powerful and influential city-states. This was the sphere of Nimrod's influence and this, perhaps the first attempt at rulership and empire-building.

Nimrod was the man who taught them how to make the best use of what they had and maybe the rapid rise of their civilisation from that time onward might well have been in no little degree due to his insight and organising genius. A thousand years later an epic poem described him as the one who had given them their world. The likeness of it to the creation story in Genesis is apparent as is its local setting in the land of Shinar. The Genesis story had existed in written form for at least eight

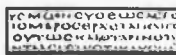
hundred years when this epic was composed. That much can be deduced from the archaic Sumerian word-forms that are still embedded in the later Hebrew text. So much for the oft-repeated assertion that the Bible account of creation was derived from the Babylonian legends. In actual fact the reverse is more likely the case. One of the most famous epics, the "Enuma Elish" (meaning "When in the eight" the opening words of the first stanza) of about the same date, 18th century BC, shows vividly how the people of later generations came to exalt Nimrod among the gods as idolatry grew and prospered.

So the people of the land praised their hero and it is not surprising that a few centuries later Abraham, the "father of the faithful," found himself alone in the land in his possession of faith in the One God. Neither is it surprising to read the words of Joshua to the hosts of Israel at the beginning of their occupancy of the land of promise. "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood" (the river Euphrates) "in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Josh. 24. 2). The immediate forebears of Abraham were idol worshippers – of Nimrod. That true understanding of God which must have been possessed by the immediate descendants of Noah had by the time of Abraham been submerged in the new worship of this man who by his prowess and enterprise had won the allegiance of the masses. It was left to Abraham to spearhead that return to God that has been marked in subsequent ages, first by the development of Israel and its emergence during the five centuries before Christ as a truly monotheistic people in a polytheistic world and then by all that Christianity has meant to the world during the past two millenniums.

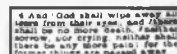
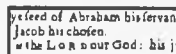
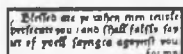
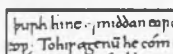
All that is left of the great Temple of Marduk in Babylon, and its mighty Tower, the Tower of Babel of the Bible, is a few lines of mouldering brickwork, rotting away in the middle of a marsh inhabited only by wild creatures. The cities, the temples, the canals, which at one time made this land the zenith of world civilisation have all gone. The name of Nimrod is remembered but all his exploits are in the past. Nothing has remained. He was not a god after all; he was only a man. And he has been dead for more than four thousand years.

(To be continued)

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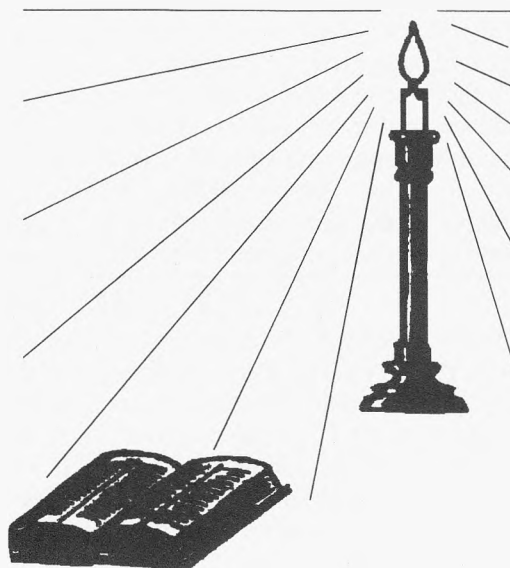
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NOTICES

Booklet Reprints. We now have in stock copies of 'Three Stories of Salvation' and 'Good News for All' – simple yet scriptural – these are ideal for keeping in a pocket or handbag to be passed to a friend. BFU material is not really suitable for wholesale distribution. It is planned, DV, to reprint other booklets among which are 'The Spirit of Prophecy' and 'The Cup of the Lord.' BFU is looking seriously at the possibility of a leaflet which can be handed to one who had not previously had much interest in the Christian Gospel.

PASS IT TO A FRIEND – Many readers of the Bible Study Monthly have passed on the magazine to a friend and suggested that they become readers. BFU will gladly send 3 trial issues of the magazine to any address sent in by readers. Another way of sharing your blessings with a friend is to draw their attention to the **BFU WEB SITE** – www.biblefellowshipunion.co.uk where they can have a taste or catch a glimpse of what BFU has to

offer.

We would draw UK readers' attention to the following:-

Warrington Convention – Saturday, 15th April at the Friends Meeting House

Family Bible Conference – Friday, 21st to Sunday, 23rd April at the Frontier Centre, Addington Road, Irthlingborough, Northants.

Blaby Convention – Sunday, 28th May at the Social Centre, Blaby, Leicestershire.

High Leigh Conference – Monday, 14th August to Sunday, 20th August at Hoddesdon, Herts.

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.

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1.7 RSV). These are comforting words and recall much to mind. They remind us that our Saviour 'died that we might be forgiven'. In Him, God removes all that is wrong in our lives, if we trust Him. God gave His Son, so that by our believing in Him, He would remove the cause of death and offer new life. There is no other way. There is much that led up to the shedding of Jesus' blood on Calvary. The story begins in the early days of the human race when Abel took a lamb as a sacrifice to worship the Creator. Shortly afterwards Cain shed his brother's blood and it 'cried out' to God from the soil. The story continues through the Old Testament and the New, until we come to the final vision of Revelation. There we are told of the great cleansing through the blood of the Lamb. It is a song of victory that sin and evil have been removed be-

cause of Jesus' obedience to His Father, in laying down His life and shedding His blood.

John, who wrote the letter quoted above, stood with Mary and watched as the blood of Jesus was shed upon the cross. In that dreadful scene was displayed the sad story of humanity – a history written, as it were, in blood. Men seem to have found pleasure in shedding each other's blood. Tribal battles deteriorated into global wars. There is no excuse or good reason for this behaviour. In a way we are all guilty of it every time we are angry with our brother or sister – every time we think hatefully – we are all guilty. It begins by thinking wrongly about another human being. It is to do with jealousy and revenge and a feeling that we want 'to get one over' some other man, woman or child. It is not until those thoughts are removed from the mind that the threat of murder can be removed. But

thankfully, sin that begins in the human heart and may result eventually in the carnage of war, can be forgiven, if there is full confession of the fault 'at the foot of the cross'. It is so simple yet so effective and vital.

Jesus did no wrong. His whole life was spent positively – blessing the lives of others as no other had done, particularly those who needed Him most. Yet His own fellow countrymen wanted to shed His innocent blood. How could Caiaphas and Co. plan to kill such a person? How could Judas betray such a friend to death? It was no strange thing for the soldiers who were used to shedding blood. They didn't ask those they slew - 'do you deserve what I am doing?' Brutal murder was part of their stock in trade. Yet a centurion did have better thoughts, as he watched Jesus die. Some cried and some mocked and some just stood and let it happen. But what if it had not happened? It doesn't bear thinking about. All the blood and tears that have been shed since the dawn of history, would have been in vain.

Praise God for the shedding of that blood on Calvary that meant victory over evil and sin. It is a matter of sooner or later accepting that 'Jesus died for you and me'. He hung and suffered there for you and me. And every time we become aware that we have broken God's law of love we should turn again to the sacrifice that cost the Son of God His life when, He of all people, did not deserve to die.

Should we not pray that our Father will make our conscience sensitive and aware of sin – shortcomings, weakness – that which does not measure up to the Father's love needs His forgiveness. He is more ready to forgive than we are to confess our faults. Let it not be a passing vision of the cross around 'Eastertide'. Let it be a constant vision so that we shall enjoy the victory of the surrendered life in the resurrected Saviour in our hearts - life lived to the full. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

DN

THE CHURCH'S FUTURE MINISTRY

St. Paul's words regarding the "saints" who shall "judge the world" will find substance in that wise, just and inherently benevolent Administration which, under the direction of the Lord Christ, will take over this well-nigh ruined world at the end and introduce what Peter called *"a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Pet. 3.13). The whole object of that Administration is to evangelise the world, to preach Christ and assist all who are willing to overcome their ingrained habits of wrong and build up characters strong for righteousness. It will be a day of self help. We are familiar in our own time with Alcoholics Anonymous and Smokers Anonymous and so on, organisations of men and women, slaves to some habit that they wish to break, banded together for the purpose of helping each other by encouragement and example to achieve their objects. We may see, in that Age, a Wrong-doers Anonymous, the membership of which extends to practically the whole world – for it is not probable in practice that a very great proportion of humanity prefers sin for its own sake. The programme is a very extensive one; the saints may be appointed to rule the world but they are going to have to work very hard in doing it.

There is a great deal of ignorance and prejudice and selfishness to dissipate and much instruction in the principles of right living to be inculcated. The

sights are set high – nothing less than the conversion of "whosoever will" to the service and worship of the Lord Christ. That in itself implies unequivocal harmony and co-operation with one's fellows in every affair of life.

It is evident that this rulership must come to an end when men reach full maturity. There is and can be nothing permanently immature or incomplete in Divine creation. The necessity for the Messianic reign and the ministrations of the Church in that reign lies in man's own immaturity and failure to develop along right lines without such ministrations. The day must eventually come when each man has taken the final and irrevocable decision – for Christ or against, for the principles of righteousness or evil. Since life comes only from God, and evil is inherently destructive, it follows that at the end the only ones who continue into enduring life are those who have accepted Christ and attained harmony with God. And at that point the saints who until then have ruled the world must step aside and leave all men in possession of their maturity in Christ, fully fledged citizens of Divine creation. That is what Jesus meant in his parable of the Sheep and the Goats, where the King is depicted as saying to those who have thus attained, *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Matt. 25.34).

That is what St. Paul meant when he said of that same climax, *"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father... that God may be all in all"* (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The Millennial reign of Christ over the earth is an event in time, the final phase in man's prepara-

tion for his destiny. At the end of that reign man steps into eternity; he needs the ministration of the Church no longer. The grand design is completed; man, at long last, has attained the full image and likeness of God.

AOH

ASPECTS OF LOVE

A Conference Address

Part 2

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, talked about the gifts, or the talents, that most of us have been given through the Holy Spirit. Then, at the beginning of the next chapter, that deals with Love, he goes into what he feels is most important, even if we do have any of these gifts.

If I might paraphrase his words, he says; *"Even if I were to be given the ability to speak in any language on earth, or in Heaven for that matter, unless I show love to others, all I would be doing would be making a useless noise like a clanging cymbal."*

Or just suppose I was given the gift of being able to know all about the future and could tell everyone all they wanted to know about it. If I didn't show love to others, what good would I be? Then just suppose I was given so great a faith that just by saying the word I could move a mountain. Unless I have love for others I am no use to anybody. Perhaps, if I gave all my money to the poor or even allowed myself to be killed I could boast about how good I'd been. Yes, I could brag about what I'd done, but unless I did it with love for others in my heart, and with no thought of my own benefit, the whole exercise would be a waste of time."

In the previous chapter Paul has been talking about the various talents or gifts, that God has seen fit to give us. The whole point of his argument seems to be that it is less important how well we use whatever the talent is that has been bestowed on us through the Holy Spirit - and we've all been given a talent of some kind - however small it may be - unless we show love to everyone, whether we like them or not, then we're wasting what we've been given.

Remember the parable of the talents? Think for a moment about the one who hid his talent in the ground until he could hand back everything that had been left in his charge, because he was afraid of the repercussions if he lost it all. The man wasn't condemned because he hadn't made a profit for his

master. True the master did say that if he'd put the money on deposit somewhere he would at least have gained some interest on it, but that was merely the master pointing out how the money could have been put to use without fear of loss. The man was condemned because he hadn't made any effort to use the talent with which he'd been entrusted. He'd just left it idle, and any gift we have and which we don't use will eventually waste away from disuse until we reach a point when we no longer have the gift. Paul goes on to illustrate the nature of love and makes it quite clear that he's talking about our behaviour towards our fellow humans.

Those who remember school days will know that if you pass a beam of light through a prism, the light is broken up into its component colours. Here, Paul, so to speak, passes the characteristic of love through a prism, to show all its component parts, by telling us in verses 4-8 that, *"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever, but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear."* He says that love is patient. The Greek word is *malcrotumein* and carries the thought of patience with people, rather than with circumstances. It means that we will be slow to show anger in our dealings with others, no matter how difficult, unkind and hurtful they may be. In fact it's the kind of patience that our Heavenly Father shows towards us. It means the personality that can bear with provocation and insults for a long time without hitting back.

Love is kind. It wishes ill on no one but is good-natured, gentle, tender and affectionate. The person who truly loves his fellowman will wish

him only good. As Peter says; *"All of you should be of one mind, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate when people say unkind things about you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God wants you to do, and he will bless you for it."*

Love knows no envy. There are basically two kinds of envy. There's the envy that covets the possessions of others, whether it's money, position or fame. This is very difficult to overcome because we're human and most of us would like to be better off, in some way, than we are. The other kind is much worse, because it's the kind that begrudges others what they have, not so much because people want it for themselves but because they don't want the others to have it.

Love isn't boastful or proud. True love will always mean that we'll be much more concerned about our own unworthiness to be loved, than in thinking about our own merits.

We will not go through Paul's whole list, but we can see what the composition of true love is and how love should make us behave towards our fellows. This description of love is a portrait of our Heavenly Father, a revelation of His character and so is a revelation of the character of Jesus and ultimately, it's a revelation of what OUR character must be in Him.

In his first letter, John tells us that *"God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them."* (1 John 4.13)

GOD IS LOVE. He doesn't say that God has love, or that God possesses love, or even that sometimes God is loving. He says that GOD IS LOVE. Love is a part of His very nature; so that everything that He does springs from the fact that HE IS LOVE. If we, so to speak, pass God through a prism, in the same way that we passed love, we see that God is patient and kind; He is never jealous or boastful. He is never arrogant or rude and never insists on His own way. He is never irritable or resentful. He never rejoices at wrong, but always rejoices at right. There's no fading of our hope in Him, God outlasts everything because God never fails.

We can also pass our Lord Jesus through the prism with the same result because since He is the only begotten Son of God, He also is LOVE and everything He did for us and everything He does

for us, springs from that divine love.

Then at the end of chapter thirteen of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, *"There are three things that will endure —faith, hope and love — and the greatest of these is love."*

We are used to various religious leaders telling us that the most important thing for us is to have faith, but what is the object of having faith? It's to enable us to come into a proper relationship with the Heavenly Father. And why should we try to obtain that relationship? It is because we want to become one of His children and be like our Lord Jesus; so that in the same way that Jesus is like God, we will be like Him. But, as we've just seen, GOD IS LOVE. Therefore love is much greater than faith.

The Authorised Version translates the Greek word *agape* as *charity* which in later translations is rendered *love*. Now charity is only a part of love and sometimes it is given without love in any sense of the word. Charity can be given with a grudging reluctance or with a lecture on the subject of thrift, or perhaps, laziness, which makes the giver feel superior and the recipient feel even worse than he already does at the need of charity.

Our Lord had much to say on the subject of charity, in all its forms. For instance, on the subject of giving help, and that is what charity is or should be, he tells us that if someone asks us for our coat, we shouldn't stop at that, but that we should give them our shirt as well. Or if someone asks our help in carrying something for a mile, we should willingly and happily help them for two miles. In other words, if someone asks for a little help we should happily and lovingly do more than they ask.

Our Lord looked on Himself as a doctor who had come to heal men of the disease of sin. Mark tells us that the Pharisees were questioning Him about why He was eating with "sinners" and tax collectors, a group whom the Pharisees looked on as outcasts of society and beyond salvation, people who should be avoided at all costs. He told them, *"They don't need a doctor — sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."* (Mark 2.17)

He had come to seek the lost who according to the Pharisees, were condemned to eternal destruction. He came to find those who were heading away from God, to turn them around so that they would go back towards the circle of the Divine Love. He

was well aware of the inherent sin that was in everyone, but it wasn't what we are that interested Him as much as what we can be, if we would only accept the offer He was making.

Paul tells us that *"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"*. (Galatians 5.22) These fruits are the manifestation of the love that our Heavenly Father shows towards 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 and admired. People around us are starving for love, joy, peace and all the other graces of the Spirit and when they find them in our lives they realise that we have something which they would like to have. We don't bear fruit for our own use, but so that others may be fed and helped, and so that our Heavenly Father may be glorified.

The Christian who behaves like this becomes the salt that silently keeps society from corruption. The light, that shines on the earth with a ray of the Glory of Heaven. Jesus said that; *"You cannot get grapes from a thorn bush,"* and *"If someone wants good fruit they must go to a good tree."* So 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.

In John's gospel, we're told that our Lord said; *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me."*

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted. My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great

glory to my Father." (John 15.1-8)

The Gardener, our Heavenly Father, only allows those branches which bear fruit to remain on the vine, everything else He cuts off. And what is fruit? The term fruit implies something which requires a long developmental process, and which is therefore lasting and permanent. It's something that the branch bears, not for itself, but for the owner, something that's to be gathered. True the branch draws sap from the vine in order to grow stronger and thicker, but this is only so that the branch can fulfil its purpose of bearing the fruit. This is a process of development in each one of us: and the produce of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is lasting and permanent. Fruit is a visible expression of the power of the Holy Spirit working, invisibly, within us: while the nature of the fruit is evidence of that power at work within us. However, the Gardener is not satisfied to leave the vine just bearing fruit. He prunes all the fruit-bearing branches so that they will produce more fruit, and this is a continuous process throughout our lives because, as the Lord says, *"My true disciples bear much fruit."* This shows us that as we grow in Him our fruit bearing increases until we bear the nine-fold fruit that Paul wrote about to the Galatians. The fruit bearing that brings great glory to the Father.

As all the pruning in the world cannot make the tree produce good fruit unless it has the right growing conditions, so spiritual fruit can only grow in a climate blessed with an abundance of the Holy Spirit and the word of God. The vine needs good light to produce fruit bearing branches. Dark places produce unfruitful branches: strange weaknesses, distortions, immaturity, indirection, failures in practical life and conduct. If we are to bear all kinds of precious fruit, each in its rightful season, we must trustfully and joyfully lay open our whole being to the full expanse of God's light shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to tell us that we should *"walk in the Spirit,"* and it's our privilege to walk in the full light, to have our whole being instructed and illuminated so we should keep in step with the Holy Spirit. We should try not to run ahead, neither should we lag behind, because our Heavenly Father knows what we need for our spiritual development, and He knows how quickly or slowly we can absorb what He supplies for that development.

Now a non-believer judges the quality of our

Lord's fruit by the behaviour of those who claim to be Christians, not just their words. So, if we fail to show those fruits of the Spirit, which have been developed in us through the Holy Spirit's working, by not giving understanding, kindness, sympathy, or even just a friendly word, however we may feel ourselves or whatever we may think of the person we're talking to, we are letting down our Lord. And because the Spirit brings forth only good fruit, and this fruit carries the seed for even more fruit, God, who is the gardener, will cut out all those branches which don't give good fruit. Because, as we're told in the first chapter in the Bible; *"The seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came"* and the gardener only wants good, wholesome fruit.

As we saw earlier, it's the persons who fail to use their talent who are condemned. It's the fig tree which, in spite of every care and attention by the gardener, stubbornly refuses to bear any crop that is in danger of complete destruction. It is the tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit which is to be cut down and cast into the fire.

Jesus said that we should never fail to respond to other people's needs in life. As He told us, in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, it's those who do not give kindness, understanding or help when it is needed, that will be condemned. To see someone in need, and remain unmoved by their troubles, to pass by on the other side, because it is more comfortable and more convenient for us than having to put ourselves out or get involved in someone else's problem; if we are so wrapped up in our own lives, so unaware of others that we don't even see their need, we are just as wrong as if we had been urgently called on for help by someone who was desperately in need and we had coldly refused to give that help, even though we were quite able to do what they asked.

So to ensure that we are sent to the right hand with the sheep, and not to the left hand with the goats, our constant prayer must be "Teach me my Lord to be sweet and gentle in all the events of life. In disappointments, in the thoughtlessness of others, in the insincerity of those I trusted, in the unfaithfulness of those on whom I relied, let me put myself aside, to think of the happiness of others, to hide my little pains and heartaches, so that I may be the only one to suffer from them. May no one be less good for having come within my influence, no

one less pure, less true, less kind, less noble for having been a fellow traveller in our journey towards eternal life."

So, if our Lord returned today – and He said that no one would know the hour or the day – would we be able to look Him in the eye and say 'I've done my very best to follow your teaching.' Or if He should come today and find our hands so full of future plans, however fair, in which our Saviour had no share, what would He say? If He should come today and find our love so cold, our faith so weak and dim we had not even looked for Him, WHAT WOULD HE SAY? If He should come today and find we had not told one soul about our heavenly friend whose blessing all our ways attend, WHAT WOULD HE SAY?

Jerome, the Church historian, relates that when the Apostle John became old he used to go among the churches and assemblies everywhere repeating the words, "Little children, love one another." His disciples, wearied by the constant repetition, asked him why he always said this. His answer was, "Because it is the Lord's commandment; and if it only be fulfilled, it is enough." So, *"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God – for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us. And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. All who proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world."*

RJH

A FAMILIAR ROAD

Cleopas and his friend had spent the last few days in Jerusalem along with the friends of Jesus. They had been devastating days and all their hopes and longings suddenly vanished. We are not told who Cleopas' friend was on this occasion, but it could quite easily have been his wife since they appeared to be going home. They were walking to Emmaus, a village about seven miles (12 km or 60 furlongs) to the north west of the city. They might have left by the Damascus gate and turned left, westwards or possibly by the Jaffa gate, from which they would need to turn somewhat northwards. They were probably walking towards the sunset, down hill, most of the way from the heights of Jerusalem (762m) towards the Judean foothills. They must have travelled that way many times before and their most recent visit had been for Passover and to see the prophet and teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. It was about three years since they had first met him and become familiar figures in His little band of close disciples.

Slowly, through the years since then, they had built up high hopes that he would do something for the people of Israel. Everything seemed to point to Him restoring the ancient Kingdom of Israel and ridding the land of the hated tyrants, the Romans who ruled. They so wanted to be free to worship the one true God, as only they could. So when they walked up the hill, only a week before, they were confident that Jesus was about to act and eagerly looked forward to listening to Jesus and watching Him at work. Then as the feast approached it became more and more obvious that the Judean Jews, many of whom lived in the city, were bitter in their opposition to Jesus. While among the Galilean pilgrims in Jerusalem they felt safe but there was a nasty undercurrent of opposition to their beloved Master. Then just as the actual feast was beginning, a dreadful thing had occurred. One of their own number betrayed Jesus' whereabouts after sunset to the Jewish priests. They had Him arrested, tried Him by kangaroo court that was quite illegal and rushed Him off to the Roman governor to 'rubber stamp' their conviction by the death sentence. It all happened overnight and Jesus had ended upon a cross – crucified by Roman soldiers at the behest of the Jewish leaders. When they first arrived in Jerusalem it would have seemed impossible for such a thing to happen. Through it all, they had believed that Jesus, with power from Heaven, would over-

come His enemies. But He did not and now he lay dead in a borrowed tomb.

As the two people walked, they talked. It helped to relieve their feelings and their conversation was animated. It helped to pass the miles as well. And as they walked they became aware of a fellow traveller, someone else going their way and he drew up alongside. He was interested in their conversation and enquired what was causing them so much distress. They were mystified that someone who had just come from Jerusalem should not know the talk of the town. They explained how they had cherished high hopes of Jesus restoring Israel as an independent nation. They had so looked forward to Him transforming God's people. There was more than a Romans occupation to sort out. They wanted their freedom to live as God had instructed.

Now He was dead and their hopes of liberation at the hands of their Messiah had gone. They were now utterly devoid of hope. As they walked they told the Stranger of their confused and anxious thoughts. Their hearts were heavy with sorrow. He questioned them about their troubles and they revealed to Him their deepest longings and heartaches. Slowly they became aware that their new companion was not only asking questions but supplying some answers.

He made it clear to them that they had no reason to be disappointed and in fact should have understood what had happened. He explained to them that Israel's Holy Writings clearly showed that it would be so. Like all Jews and others of the people of Israel, they had completely failed to identify the true Messiah from the words of the prophets. As they had read them, they particularly noticed the crushing of their enemies but had been blind to the fact that before His ultimate triumph, the Messiah must endure much suffering and hardship.

As Jesus hung on the cross on Calvary, He cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" As to why Jesus cried out in such a way has been the focal point for many enquiries since. If the disciples had understood the whole of Psalm 22 and not just looked at the latter verses of triumph they might just have had a clue about what was happening. It was in that first part of Psalm 22, following the words of 'the great cry' that the sufferings of Messiah are described. Some of the more thoughtful in Israel had felt that the

suffering described the experiences of the nation as a whole but not Him who was to 'redeem Israel'. In much the same way they had interpreted Isaiah 53.

Human nature sees what it wants to see and somehow filters out that which it doesn't want to know. Now the 'stranger' had revealed the truth – the need for suffering and death that the prophets had clearly spoken about. As He quoted the prophecies about Messiah, the two men, who had been so sad, felt their hearts tingling, as the words of Scripture became clear. But they did not recognise their 'new' friend. Did Jesus have a power to prevent them from knowing who He was? And had this been so earlier in the day when others saw Him at the tomb? Or is it that spiritual blindness is caused by sin? Are things of the spirit not perceived if we regard sin in our hearts? Strangely, physical blindness and other disabilities were regarded as being the result of sin by the people of ancient times (John 9.2). Jesus made it clear that this was not so.

These two men, Cleopas and his companion, had been humanly normal in their reaction to the real world and its circumstances. The miles sped by during those two or three hours. Almost too soon they were at Emmaus and home. Nightfall had come suddenly and the unidentified 'Teacher' made as if to continue His journey. And like good eastern people they extended hospitality. I wonder if they ever read those words '*entertained angels una-*

wares'. But they had been with more than an angel. They pressed the unknown man to stay with them as it was getting dark and He accepted their kind invitation. They would have felt hungry after the walk and the excitement of the day and quickly placed a few good things on the table and sat down together to enjoy them. The man who had led their conversation now led them in prayer and asked a blessing before breaking the bread. When did they last see bread broken like that? They were hardly likely to have been at the Lord's supper. Did their minds go back to a hillside in Galilee when some hungry crowds were fed as their Master broke the loaves and fishes? As the thought came into mind, so the stranger was gone. It was so important that Jesus was properly identified by something he did. For the second time that day, a disciple, not in the elite band of 'eleven', was given the unique privilege of identifying their risen Lord. Was that characteristic of Jesus too?

Cleopas and his companion asked no more questions. They put on their cloaks and were soon on that road again but this time they were heading for Jerusalem to break the news to fellow disciples. Now it was tears of joy not sorrow and they only wanted to say 'We have seen the Lord'. What a lovely walk it had been.

DN

It would not have been very unusual for a Gali-

FORTY SPECIAL DAYS

It would not have been very unusual for a Galilean

carpenter in that era to have died in his early thirties. Life expectancy then cannot have been very different from that in the poorer parts of the world today. Nor was it very strange for such a man who had gotten involved in a controversial public ministry to anticipate his own death in the capital city, and warn his friends what to expect. They were dangerous times for anyone who lifted his head above the parapet. But what was utterly bizarre was his expecting to suffer a horrible execution, and then 'rise from the dead'.

From our vantage point of faith, and further on in the world's history, we can see the resurrection of Jesus Christ as part of a plan, and therefore not so surprising. In fact, as Christians we have got used to the whole idea. "Born of the virgin Mary ... crucified, dead and buried ... rose the third day" – the story of the Son of God who came among us, gave his life to save us from evil and extinction,

and returned temporarily to the Father for a two thousand year moment in eternity.

The resurrection was real, a solid fact in history, and not a myth. While every religion has its stories, the brief post-resurrection episode is crucial in our Christian story. For forty days Jesus appeared to His friends, not dead but alive. He then disappeared from sight, hearing and touch – gone. Mission accomplished. Luke summarises: "*before he was taken up [to heaven] he gave instructions by the power of the Holy Spirit to the men he had chosen as his apostles. For forty days after his death he appeared to them many times in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive, and he talked with them about the Kingdom of God*" (Acts 1.2-3 GNB). The detailed record of this period is scattered over the gospels, the accounts varying in what they report, but consistent in the conviction that "Jesus is alive!" How do they tell the story?

Mark's gospel, embodying it is thought the recollections of Peter, is suddenly cut off after recording the appearance of an angel to the women who had come to embalm Jesus' body. *"Don't be afraid. You are looking for Jesus from Nazareth who has been crucified. He has risen from the dead. He is not here. Look, here is the place where they laid him. Now go and tell his followers, and Peter, 'Jesus is going into Galilee ahead of you, and you will see him there as he told you before.'"* (Mark 16.6-7). (The rest of this gospel is a summary written by a later hand.)

Matthew's gospel follows the same line, except that the women now meet Jesus himself, who tells them not to be afraid, and promises to meet his disciples in Galilee. On a hill in Galilee Jesus meets the eleven, and gives them His final instructions.

Luke, who must have gathered the material for his gospel while Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea, tells the Jerusalem end of the story. He gives details of the women at the tomb. The first day of the resurrection Jesus walks with two disciples, who then rush back to Jerusalem with the news. Jesus appears to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, and it is from Jerusalem that He leads them out to Bethany before He is separated from them. They are told to remain in Jerusalem until they receive 'power from on high' - the Holy Spirit. Why does Luke omit mention of Galilee? Perhaps his sources knew only the Jerusalem part: perhaps, it has been surmised, he was running out of writing space and had to be brief? Who knows?

John's gospel includes meetings both in Jerusalem and Galilee. Jesus speaks to Mary Magdalene near the tomb, to Thomas in the upper room, and then to Peter beside the lake in Galilee. John's account has his customary freshness of personal details, perhaps first recorded early on, and then edited much later into the complete gospel as we have it.

Putting these accounts together, we can trace the purpose in what Jesus was doing during this period. He reassured his grieving disciples; He let it be known that he really was Jesus, Son of God, who was alive again after being killed; and He gave His followers instructions for the future.

If the disciples were shattered by His death, they were incredulous at His resurrection. Such things do not happen in this world (though the killing aspect is all too frequent). There was strong personal grief. So He appeared to Mary Magdalene

who at first thought He was the gardener, and then, parting from her gave her a job to do: *"Go to my brothers and tell them, I am going back to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"* (John 20.17). It was 'goodbye', but a parting for the best of reasons.

Thomas was the object of His personal care. Thomas, the realist, the loyal, who could face the worst but found it hard to believe the best. Jesus gave him the tangible proof he needed, His body that could be seen and touched. *"Stop being an unbeliever, and believe!"* - there must have been arguments with the other disciples when they told him they had seen Christ alive. Now his astonishment knew no bounds - *"My Lord and my God!"* (John 20.28).

Peter, guilty of disowning his Lord, was specially cared for. *"Tell his followers, and Peter"* said the angel. *"He has appeared to Simon"* reported the gathered disciples to Cleopas. By the lakeside in Galilee, Peter was given the chance to reaffirm his loyalty, and was given the task of feeding Jesus 'sheep'.

The women at the tomb were told, No, don't be afraid. Cleopas and his despairing companion were given a full explanation from scripture, and a new hope. The eleven were reassured: He took pains to demonstrate that He was real, not ghostly or imaginary, and He put His resurrection in context: if they considered the scriptures, alongside what Jesus Himself had told them, His resurrection was no more than they should have expected.

In all this, to convince them that He, Jesus, who had died, was actually speaking to them, was vital. It is equally vital for us, who not having seen, do believe. It was sometimes the little things that convinced them. His tone of voice when He said *"Mary"*. His characteristic manner of dividing the bread which caused the penny to drop for Cleopas when all afternoon he had only been conscious of someone with exciting ideas.

The meeting with the seven disciples fishing on the lake was a more elaborate parallel, what He was doing now being the same as what He had done before. He guides experienced fishermen, tells them where to find the fish, and the result is a marvellous catch. Three years before, He had done this and invited the astonished fishermen to become 'fishers of men'. Now, a death and a resurrection later, He was giving the same men the same object lesson, and leaving them to carry on the same work.

No wonder they recognised *"It is the Lord!"*

Jesus did not rely only on these flashes of recognition. To His disciples He spelt it out: *"Peace be with you... Why are you troubled? Why do you doubt what you see? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have a living body as you see I have... Do you have any food? Remember when I was with you before? I said that everything written about me must happen - everything in the law of Moses, the books of the prophets and the psalms. It is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and that a change of hearts and lives and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name"* (Luke 24.38-44).

And so He gave them His instructions. First a rendezvous in Galilee as they drew breath at what had happened – and He met 500 of His followers on one special occasion. Then, back at Jerusalem, instructions to stay together there and wait for the power of the Holy Spirit that would be given them. And after that?

John reports: *"As the Father sent me I now send you."* He breathes on them, in token of receiving the Spirit. *"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you don't forgive they are not forgiven."* To Peter: *"Take care of (feed) my sheep."* To all disciples, *"Follow me."*

Luke speaks of repentance and forgiveness of sins preached in His name to all nations, starting at Jerusalem. *"You are witnesses of these things."* *"When the Holy Spirit comes to you, you will receive power. You will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world."*

Matthew tells of the great commission given on the hill in Galilee. *"All power in heaven and earth is given to me. So go and make followers of all the people in the world. Baptise them in the name of the*

Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have taught you, and I will be with you always, even until the end of this age." (Matthew 28.18-20).

Today, almost two thousand years later, we are Christians as a consequence of the obedience of those disciples; and not only them, but a chain of believers reaching down through the centuries from them to us. There have been the faithless and the faithful, the struggling and the strong, the meek and the misguided. As we test the quality of our own faith, there are challenges to us implicit in Jesus' words in the first days of the resurrection.

Do we, like Thomas, need to stop doubting but believe?

Do we, like Peter, feed His sheep – and shall we be taken where we are unwilling to go? (John 21.18) Shall we, as was expected of John, live till Jesus returns – and does it matter? (John 21.22-3) Do we have any better knowledge of God's programme than the first disciples, or should we expect to? (Acts 1.7)

Are we His witnesses? Making disciples? Baptising? Preaching repentance and forgiveness?

Need we be waiting for the power and direction of the Holy Spirit?

When Jesus told the eleven that He would be with them always, does that also include us?

These forty special days were a time for providing evidence, for giving personal encouragement, and for setting a course for His followers who thought they would have to 'go it alone'. It was a time when Jesus showed His deep love for His followers, and they showed their relief and joy and love to Him. He is still loving all His followers. He loves us.

(Bible quotations from the New Century Version unless otherwise indicated.)

GC

THE SAINTS WILL JUDGE THE WORLD

We begin with a story.

Jim and Joe were new Christians. Enthusiastic, learning the Bible fast, they gave the elder at their church great joy, until ... until they fell out, when Jim sold Joe his car. The elder did not know the details of the quarrel, but it was serious. They avoided one another, did not attend the midweek Bible study, kept at opposite ends of the congregation at the worship service. Then, worst of

all, it became known that Joe was suing Jim in the County Court. The elder had to do something – he called them together, and very seriously read to them the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. *"When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? (vv.1, 2) ... To have lawsuits at all with one another is a defeat for*

you. *Why not rather suffer wrong?* (v.7)"

Afterwards, Jim and Joe looked one another in the eye. "Well, that's told us, hasn't it?" After all, they were sincere believers. "But what did he mean, the saints will judge the world?"

"Sounds a bit ambitious, doesn't he?"

"Who are the saints, anyway?"

We can imagine that this was the beginning of a considerable Bible study.

What follow are thoughts that Jim and Joe might have found stimulating.

Who are the saints referred to here? One might quote Vine: "as used of believers, saints designates all such and is not applied merely to persons of exceptional holiness, or those who having died, were characterised by exceptional acts of saintliness". In 2 Thessalonians 1.10 "*glorified in his saints*" is put alongside "*marvelled at in all who believe*" and the passage goes on with Paul praying for all the Thessalonian Christians that God would make them worthy of His call. According to this, 'saints' does not refer only to special Christians ("She's a real saint!"); not only to those special people whom the church canonises after their death (St Mary, St John, St Benedict...); and not only to any group who for whatever reason consider themselves to be a superior sort of Christian, because of knowledge perhaps, or believing that God has specially called only them: but includes all those whom God has set on one side for His use simply through believing in Christ. Like Jim and Joe. So are Jim and Joe, two fairly ordinary young men, to be part of a body who are charged with judging the world? If so, when, and how, and in what context? And what is meant by 'judging'?

They had of course already in their dispute been engaged in judging one another in the precise sense that Jesus had told His disciples not to judge. "*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged and the measure you give will be the measure you get ... first take the log out of your own eye*" (Matthew 7.1ff). Jesus was talking of not being condemnatory. He also required self examination and proper humility before making up your mind about someone's deficiencies. Both are qualities very necessary in someone who has been given the task of judging others. Paul told the Corinthians not to jump into forming judgments about other

Christians, when that is really for God to do. "*Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God*" (1 Corinthians 4.5). So Joe and Jim were debarred from 'judging' each other or the Christians in the next street/church/denomination.

If Jesus separates judgmentalism from judging, what next? There is a parallel with the 'judges' of the Old Testament. They dispensed justice, punishing the evil doer and vindicating the righteous. A judge might be the one who saved the nation from its enemies, led them in battle and ruled them in times of peace. It makes one think of Christ as The Judge. He administers justice, defeats His enemies, saves His people. This is way above anything that Jim and Joe might expect to do, except as junior assistants.

When are the saints to judge? There has been real benefit for the human race when genuine Christian believers have acted as judges, magistrates, teachers, police, soldiers, matrons, politicians Our society has in the past been thought of as a 'Christian' one, and still enjoys the benefit of Christ's ethical teaching so far as it is followed. On the other hand, there has been the real danger of corruption when 'the church' judges and controls 'the world'. 'Christian' prelates poisoning their rivals, 'Christian' crusaders slaughtering the infidel, 'Christian' hypocrites teaching a morality they do not themselves follow - the world can multiply instances of where Christians in authority are no different from the rest. It is in a future age that Scripture in fact looks to the rule of the saints with Christ. "*He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*" 1 Corinthians 15.25. Is this the same thing as Christ acting as judge? There are two senses in which Jesus is spoken of as judging. Revelation 19.11 has it: "*in righteousness he judges and makes war*". Perhaps this reflects and amplifies the work of an Old Testament judge. Isaiah 2.4 speaks of the Lord: "*He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*" This judging is control and administration. (Revelation

19.15): *"He rules the nations with a rod of iron."* He is the root of Jesse (Romans 15.12) who rises to rule the Gentiles.

The other sense of judging is expressed in such scriptures as: 1 Peter 4.5 *"Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."* Acts 17.31 – *"(God) has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed ..., raising him from the dead."* Acts 10.42 – *"(Jesus) is the one ordained by God to judge the living and the dead."* John 5.27 – *"(The Father has) given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of man."* Revelation 20.12 – *"I saw the dead ... the book of life the dead were judged by what they had done."* John 12.47-8 – *"If anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him – for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.... He who rejects me has a judge – the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day."* This sort of judging involves delivering a verdict following an opportunity for life.

The scripture which so startled Jim and Joe was *"the saints will judge the world"* – not Christ, but the saints. A further group of texts indicates how this fits in. *"The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God"* (Romans 8.19). John's vision in Revelation: *"I saw thrones ... seated on them those to whom judgment was committed."* These were Christian martyrs who

came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20.4). The courts of heaven proclaim: *"Thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and has made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on earth"* (Rev. 5.9, 10). Paul encourages Timothy: *"if we endure we shall also reign with him"* (2 Timothy 2.12). Christ tells the churches: *"he who overcomes shall rule the nations with a rod of iron"* (Revelation 2.27). Paul tells believers: *"Would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you"* (1 Corinthians 4.8).

Thinking through all these texts, Jim and Joe might conclude (1) that the time to be judges is not this present time, but when Christ's people come alive from the dead; (2) that it is Christ Himself and His message who judges in the sense of passing a verdict on men and women; (3) that there is to be a period for believers of ruling or reigning with Christ, which is when they 'judge the world'.

As a result of their studies we wonder what Jim and Joe will do next. They may be staggered at the high destiny in a future age that they expect as believers. Meanwhile, they have to settle down to living ordinary lives in our ordinary world. Will they be humble, helpful and loving to their brothers and sisters in Christ, and try to do some good in the world around them?

GC

AFTER THE FLOOD

9 - Eber, Man of God

The passing of the period of Nimrod saw the emergence of another figure, one of greater significance to later generations, for to him, in all probability, must be given credit for the compilation of the first ten chapters of the Old Testament in the form we now have them. Eber, great-great-grandson of the patriarch Shem, was born some four hundred years after the Flood and grew to manhood during the days of Nimrod. He lived to within four hundred years of the birth of Abraham and so came just about halfway between Noah coming out of the Ark and Abraham leaving Ur for the land of Canaan. Nothing is said about him in Genesis, save his place in the descent from Noah to Abraham and the reason for the naming of his son Peleg, but it was this man who gave his name to a numerous race of descendants which included many Arab peoples and also the nation of Israel. The term

'Hebrew' is derived from Eber and it is from him that the chosen people traced their pedigree. Anything else that can be suggested as connected with the life of Eber has to be inferred from what is known of the history of the times in which he lived. They were times that saw the rise of the Sumerian civilisation and the commencement of a series of events that was to lead to Abraham, to Moses and eventually to Christ.

The later part of Eber's life of four hundred years is likely to have spanned a hundred and fifty year period, the beginning and ending of which were, marked by two disastrous floods. When he was about a hundred and eighty years old the south country, in which stood Ur, Erech (Uruk), Calneh (Nippur), and Eridu, suffered a widespread overflow of the Tigris and Euphrates which flooded the entire country and, according to

Woolley, wiped out many of the country-folk, leaving mainly city-dwellers to survive. This was the flood of which evidence was found by Woolley during his excavations at Ur of the Chaldees in 1930, when he uncovered a bed of water-laid clay ten feet thick with human remains, above and below. (At that time this discovery was thought to be that of the Flood of Noah's day and even today it is sometimes thus quoted. It was established after examination, that it was in fact a much later and lesser flood.) A hundred and fifty years later there was a second similar flood. This time it was in the northern part of the land in the area of Babel, and this time it was the important city of Kish, near Babel, the capital of the entire country which suffered most. The city was completely destroyed. According to Langdon and Watelin, who excavated Kish in 1924-30, the calamity *"definitely marked the end of an era"*.

Between these two major floods there were several lesser ones, affecting various parts of the land. It was probably this, occurring as it did during the latter part of the life of Nimrod, which led the Sumerians to commence work on the comprehensive system of canals that in after years regulated the floodwaters. This also gives credence to the legends asserting that Nimrod himself took the initiative in leading men to the harnessing and restraining the floods. There is one Biblical allusion that connects all this with Eber. The genealogy of Abraham's forefathers related in Gen. 10 contains a rather obscure remark. Verse 25 says *"And unto Eber were born two sons, the name of one was Peleg, for in his days was the earth divided"*. This word 'divided' means to cut a channel, watercourse, canal, and 'earth' (erets) equally means the land. The Genesis chronology places the birth of Peleg at just about the beginning of this "flood" period and just when the evidence points to the digging of canals in Shinar. Here is an incidental testimony to the historical accuracy of Genesis.

Another evidence confirming the above comes from the climatologist, C.E.P. Brooks writing on world climate in ancient times. Referring now to this period 2800-2600 BC, Brooks shows that in 2800 there occurred another sudden and drastic degeneration in the climate conditions of the earth leading to two centuries of abnormally wet conditions. Such a change could well account for the widespread floods in Iraq in the days of Eber.

The cold increased the annual snowfall in the Armenian mountains which fed the two great rivers and so flooded the Iraq plains from time to time, causing these precise conditions indicated as at the time of the birth of Peleg.

It is to this period in the middle of the life of Eber, that the rapid increase of the Sumerian cities must be credited. Over the short span of less than two centuries the land became dotted with settlements that quickly grew to sizeable communities of anything between five and twenty thousand inhabitants each. Of these, the two most important politically in those early days were Uruk (Erech of Gen. 10) and Kish. In these two cities the concept of kingship and kings commenced, although perhaps in a rudimentary fashion. Kish was situated about eight miles from Babylon. It was the first city to exercise political control and for the whole of this period, the latter part of Eber's life, about a hundred and fifty years, it had rulers who ruled over the whole land of the Semites and Sumerians. There is evidence that at this time Babylon (Babel) with its Tower, was a purely religious centre, devoted to the worship of the one true God, and Kish the political capital. The remains of Kish, excavated in 1924-30 reveal it to have been a city of crude and primitive construction but built by a knowledgeable and civilised people. The houses stood along well-planned straight streets and had a good sanitary system of drains and water supply. Their metal was copper, but of this they made carpenters' tools - saws twenty inches long and chisels, table cutlery and polished mirrors twelve inches across with handles. Four-wheeled chariots with leather furnishings drawn by horses traversed the streets, and craftsmen made fine coloured pottery and life-like copper ornaments. The inhabitants were agriculturists and shepherds. There was no evidence of warfare or of warriors. They seem to have been a peaceful people, living chiefly on fish, fruit, grain and vegetables. The population was definitely a mixed one, Semitic and Sumerian, sons of Shem and of Ham (Oxford University Museum possesses the skeletal remains of seven of these people, contemporaries in their lifetime of Eber and Peleg). Two dynasties of 'kings', more properly city governors, reigned simultaneously, one over the Semitic element and one over the Sumerians and it was two of the earliest Semitic rulers whose names reveal their worship of the one true God. One

remark of Watelin ('The Excavations at Kish.' Vol. 4) in this respect is illuminating. In discussing their burial customs he says "the rituals which attended the burials reveal belief in a future life". It is so often claimed by supposed authorities that early man had no belief in resurrection or a future life. This testimony to their understanding of the doctrine at so early a date, nearly three thousand years before Christ, is valuable.

It is quite possible that Kish was the hometown of the patriarch Eber. Genesis gives no clue whatever in respect to any of the patriarchs until it comes to Abraham six centuries later living in Ur of the Chaldees, a hundred miles to the south. But in Eber's day the people of Shem were hardly likely to have got so far south as Ur. At the dispersal from Babel, Arphaxad son of Shem migrated with his people some hundred miles northward where they eventually founded and developed the city and nation of Mari, which was coming into existence in Eber's time. But some of them were continually trickling back into the Plain of Shinar and Kish was at least fifty per cent Semitic, of Arphaxad. There is one very good reason for associating either Eber or his son Peleg with the city of Kish. It is, in all probability, the city where the stories of Eden, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel were first written down in the form in which we have them today. No one is more likely to have been the writer than one or other of those two men.

Kish is the place where the oldest writing at present known has been found. Several other places, Uruk, Shuruppak, Elam, run it close but Kish does seem to be the oldest. It was a long time before the knowledge and practice of writing penetrated to the Semites of the north. The wise men of today declare that this is when writing was invented; at no previous time did man know how to write. From the Bible point of view this may be questionable. Gen. 5 speaks of "the book of the generations of Adam" which seems to imply the practice of writing, it has often been remarked that the narrative of the Flood bears all the signs of having been written by an observer at the time of the event itself. It is hardly conceivable that the human race should have endured the two thousand years before the Flood without learning how to record its thoughts on paper or its then equivalent. On the other hand the early form of writing found at Kish and elsewhere is elementary and immature, without grammatical distinctions, or many of the

parts of speech which are necessary to a valid written language. It was another four centuries before the Sumerians arrived at that stage in their inscribed clay tablets and so far as the present store of knowledge is concerned no one could be blamed for asserting that this is where writing originated. Does the answer to the conundrum lie in the circumstances of the early post-Flood world? Noah and his sons, emerging from the Ark, may well have possessed the art of writing but in the new world numbers were few, all of one family. There was a need of labour to obtain necessities of life and there would be no urgency, time, nor inclination to practise the art of writing. After several generations it might easily have happened that none, or at least but a few, knew how to write or read. So the art was lost, to be recovered in the days of Eber when men were multiplying fast, trade developed with distant peoples and need for writing became evident.

A much more recent instance may serve to illustrate this point. In the fifth century AD, Romans withdrew from Britain, after a period of rule of some five hundred years. The declining power of the Roman empire led to the recalling of the legions leaving Britons and the Roman civilian farmers to their own devices. They left behind them an orderly and civilised country, the population of which was literate, everybody could read and write. The Saxons, Angles and Jutes, illiterate barbarians from the Continent, overran the country and destroyed the British-Roman civilisation they supplanted. For another five hundred years ordinary people became illiterate, unable to read and or write. The only places where literacy survived were the monasteries and abbeys where the monks, secluded from the world, preserved the ancient books and the ancient knowledge. Not till the Norman conquest did literacy return to Britain.

Did something like this happen in the days after the Flood, and was it the generation of Eber, five hundred years later, which saw the first attempts at reviving the lost art? In such case, just as the monks of the fifth century AD preserved the old writings until better days should come, so it may be surmised, did some line of reverential men preserve the ancient records handed down from the days of Noah and the antediluvians. No line would be more appropriate and none more probable, than the line of Shem which led eventually to Abraham and then to Israel, to whom says Paul, "were committed the

oracles of God." (Rom. 3.2). Hence at the period in question, Eber could be the one having custody of these priceless records, and on him would fall the task of editing and arranging – perhaps translating – them into the form which later on became the early part of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

There is some internal evidence in these early chapters of Genesis to support this view. The tenth chapter, the famous 'Table of Nations' goes as far as the twelve sons of Joktan, son of Eber, and there stops. For details of subsequent patriarchs down to Abraham one has to go to Gen. 11.10-32 which clearly was written six hundred years later, after the death of Terah. This looks as though the early record up to chap. 11.9 was brought to an end by someone unable to go beyond Eber's grandsons, the presumption being that this author was Eber himself. A further evidence resides in the geographical names appearing in Genesis. Some are known from cuneiform inscription of 2000 BC; others are so archaic that they had passed out of use by 2000 BC or at least do not appear in any known tablets. Thus Hiddekel (river Tigris) and Euphrates have survived as names of the two chief rivers of the land. 'Eden' is the Sumerian *'edinu'*, meaning 'the plain' and was applied to the whole land of Shinar and Sumer. 'Ararat' meaning 'the highlands' was the name (despite popular impressions) of the mountainous land to the east of the plain (now in Zagros mountains of N.W.Iran) and only in later days extended northward into present day Kurdistan and Armenia. (The whole of this area was still called the land of Arat as late as the 13th century of the Christian era, as witness the narratives of travellers such as Rabbi Petachiah of Ratisbon). The land of Nod of Genesis 4 was the Sumerian Noda, halfway down the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf where the river Mande still preserves the name. The land of Havilah (properly Khavilah) of Genesis 2 has been identified as lying between Iraq and the Caspian Sea. Until the middle of the Christian era that sea was still called the Sea of Khavilah – but that name for the territory does not appear in the tablets and is superseded by the only recently identified city-state of Aratta which was probably founded towards the end of Eber's life. The land of Cush with its river Gihon (modern Batin) in north-eastern Arabia became known as Dilmun by 2400 BC and here the later Sumerians fixed the site of the Garden of Eden. It follows from

all this that the first few chapters of Genesis must be dated to at least as early as 2600 BC, within the lifetime of Eber.

The archaic semi-pictographic writing of symbols appears to have been derived from pictures of the objects represented. Only a very limited number of tablets have been recovered from Kish, Uruk and elsewhere and any reconstruction is largely conjectural. Nevertheless the basic principles can be discerned. Thus the symbol for "foot" is a crude representation of a human foot and the symbol serves to indicate the ideas of 'to walk', 'to go' and 'to stand'. It also stands for the preposition 'on'; the human foot of course is 'on' the ground. Likewise the symbol for the 'sea' or 'water' is two wavy lines and also does duty for the preposition 'in', on the principle of being 'in' the water. The writing was arranged in vertical columns and the reader started at the top right-hand corner, reading from top to bottom and from right to left. Four centuries later this type of writing was superseded by the more familiar 'cuneiform' (wedged-shaped) characters which were more easily impressed upon the clay tablets that had become the only writing material available. So the old 'semi-pictographic' writing disappeared.

Is this, the possible connection of Eber with the preparation of the beginning of the Bible, the reason for his apparent special status in the genealogical line of patriarchs between Noah and Abraham? This man may have been notable among his fellows in the things of God, a champion of righteousness standing rigidly for the God of Noah, and was known to immediate later generations as the one who preserved the ancient writings and rendered them into the current tongues. If so it may be easier to understand why Eber and not Abraham was regarded as the ancestor of the later people God, so that even Abraham himself came to be referred to as 'Abram the Hebrew'.

It might be that in that dim far-off time when the post-Flood world was young, there were two figures noted among men: Nimrod the Cushite who admittedly achieved great things in the material building of the new world, and Eber the Semite who cared more for the things of God. It was he who began to blaze the trail of written history that led to the story of Sinai and of Israel and the coming of Christ, and eventually to the New Testament. And the work of Eber has survived

where the achievements of Nimrod are dust.

(To be continued)

AOH

Editor's Note – a recent BBC documentary featured archaeological work on the culture of the Indus basin that seemed to have a bearing on the content of the above article. This research built on the earlier discoveries of Sir Mortimer Wheeler, the

well known archaeologist who broadcast in the 1970s. The documentary commentator seemed astonished that in Indus society there appeared to be no defence planning, no places of worship and a great emphasis on the needs of children, exactly what we might expect if connected with the society here described.

ALL SORTS

If only we knew God better, we should all be alike. Should we?

"If only I could hear the voice from the whirlwind and, like Job, hold a conversation with God Himself! God is not mute: the Word spoke, not out of a whirlwind, but out of the human larynx of a Palestinian Jew."

(Yancey)

* * * * *

But all do not have the same point of view.

The vision of Christ that thou dost see

Is my vision's greatest enemy:

Thine has a great hooked nose like to thine,

Mine has a snub nose like to mine

Both read the Bible day and night,

But thou read'st black where I read white.

(William Blake)

* * * * *

"There is an apparent capriciousness and arbitrariness about the work of the Spirit of God which laughs at our modern docketing. The Spirit, like the wind, said Jesus, "blows where it likes" (St. John 3.8), and though we can fulfil conditions and, so to speak, set our sails to meet the wind of the Spirit, yet (to change the metaphor) we can never harness or organise the living Spirit of God. We are indeed sure of His gentle purpose, but the details of His plan lie beyond our understanding and it is at once more sensible and more fitting for us to cultivate a sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit, rather than to arrange His work for Him!"

(Phillips)

* * * * *

"Sometimes those of us who look for Jesus cannot see past our own noses. The Lakota tribe, for example, refers to Jesus as "the buffalo calf of God." The Cuban government distributes a painting of Jesus with a carbine slung over his shoulders. During the wars of religion with France, the English used to shout, "The pope is French but Jesus Christ is English!"

(Yancey)

* * * * *

"What God works in one place or in one person, He ought, we feel, to work in all places and in all persons. But we are not dealing with, shall we say, an electrical circuit in which the power of electricity can always be relied upon to do the same things under the same conditions. We are not using an impersonal force, and if there is any question of using, it is He who uses us and not we Him. God is of course really moving with what, from His point of view, if I may say so reverently, I can only describe as celestial ingenuity. But to us, who at the most only know the superficial facts of the situation, His actions may at times appear arbitrary or even capricious. I do not think we need to go "all solemn" about this, or to overemphasise our own ignorance and sinfulness. It is surely far better to accept with good humour the situation as it is - that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways higher than our ways (Isaiah 55.8-9); and to realise that though we are called to this tremendous task of co-operation with Him, and are no longer servants but friends, we still need to be most humble, teachable and flexible as we follow His leading."

(Phillips)

* * * * *

"I ... entreat you to live and act as becomes those who have received the call that you have received with all lowliness of mind and unselfishness, and with patience, bearing with one another lovingly and earnestly striving to maintain, in the uniting bond of peace, in the unity of the Spirit. There is one body ... one Spirit ... one and the same hope held out to you ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism ... one God and Father of all, who rules over all, acts through all, and dwells in all ... Yet to each of us individually grace was given ..."

Paul in Ephesians 4.1-7 (Weymouth)

* * * * *

"One of our human weaknesses is to expect our own experience of God to be reproduced in identical terms in the experience of another. Worse than this, we sometimes tend to think that if another's experience is not the same as ours, it must be either spurious or incomplete. Now here we must be very firm with ourselves and use our common sense as well as our charity. People themselves differ greatly in their capacities and gifts, and also in their particular inward needs. One may need to be provoked and challenged by the Spirit of God, another may need relaxation and the release of laughter by the same Spirit. One may need painful lessons to reduce pride and over-confidence; another may need tender love and encouragement by the same Spirit. We all tend to overlook the beam in our own eye to which we are so accustomed, and so magnify the mote which is in our brother's eye. Only God knows the relative size and importance of the assorted beams and motes that exist between us, and much the most sensible thing to do is to leave God to deal with each individual Christian with the

infinite variety and delicacy of His own love and wisdom. If we feel we must do something about the spiritual life of another Christian, the most constructive thing we can do is to keep our hands off and our tongues quiet, and to pray."

(Phillips)

* * * * *

"We don't see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as He knows us!"

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love." (1 Cor. 13.12-13 [The Message])

Passages selected from
Philip Yancey - *The Jesus I never knew*
J.B. Phillips - *Making Men Whole*

SIMON OF CYRENE

*From a booklet called
'Who were there?'*

Simon from Cyrene, chief city of a country on the north coast of Africa, modern Libya. Why was he there? Probably for the Passover. He'd spent the night in some nearby village. The city was overcrowded, and lodgings hard to get. Just before nine that morning, on his way in for the Festival, he got mixed up with a big crowd swarming round three men being led out for execution. One of the three was Jesus of Nazareth. After long hours of physical torture and mental anguish, He was unable to carry the heavy cross-beam the soldiers had thrust on Him. He staggered and fell, just as this man Simon came on the scene. An awkward moment this, for the officer in command of the escort. He couldn't order one of his squad to take up that shameful burden: there'd be trouble if he tried to make a Jerusalem Jew do it. Nobody was keen to 'touch wood' that morning! Then, glancing quickly round, the officer caught sight of Simon. He was obviously a stranger; his darker skin made it pretty certain that he'd have no friends there to take his part. The officer ordered him to pick up the man's cross and carry it for Him. A humiliating thing to have to do, in front of a crowd like this. But he had to pocket his pride, shoulder the cross-beam, and bear it up the slope. At the time, he didn't relish that

gruesome job a bit. Only afterwards did he realise what a priceless privilege had been thrust on him. Because he carried that load, and saw what happened to Jesus on the green hill, his whole life was changed. In St Mark's Gospel, not only is Simon mentioned; his two sons are also. There would be no point in doing that unless they were known to the folk who read the Gospel. They must have been well-known as Christians to the Church in Rome. It looks as if what happened that morning made Simon a disciple of Jesus Christ: later on, he got his faith over to his boys. Most of us have tasks we don't like doing, things we would dodge if we could. There are hard, bitter experiences to be faced sometimes, which just don't make sense. If that's how it is with you, will you try to remember what this man found through doing the thing he couldn't avoid? He had no option. But the doing of it brought him very close to Jesus. Later on, he realised he had helped the Saviour of the world along His way, had carried the Cross for the Son of God. He helped another, and found that Other to be the Saviour, who transformed life for him and for his family. What a free way to face the hard task, the bitter disappointment which you can't escape today. Look for the face of Christ in it. When the load

seems too much for you, remember, you are helping to carry His Cross. Some people's lives seem to be run on the cafeteria system, you know: "Self-Service Only". Simon acted on the opposite princi-

ple. He found a joy that never faded out of his life. So can you today.

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THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

5 - Avenues of Time

The most striking and spectacular, besides the most important type of Bible prophecy is that which has its object and focus at the end of the Age, the time when God brings what Paul calls 'this present evil world' to a close. He replaces it by the Heaven-directed administration of the Messianic Kingdom, the period characterised by the presence of Christ as World-King during His Second Advent. St. Peter is on record as declaring in his first evangelical address at Pentecost, that every one of the old Hebrew prophets since the Age began had said something about that time; a painstaking reading of the Scriptures will confirm the truth of his words. Every prophet has said something, either in brief or in considerable detail, about the manner in which the kingdoms of this world will eventually become the Kingdom of our Lord. Proof of the genuineness of any prediction can lie only in its manifest fulfilment so that much of this type of prophecy still awaits vindication, but many of the intervening factors have now passed into history and to this extent given the stamp of authority to such prophecies.

Daniel the statesman of the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BC is responsible for recording the most striking of these 'eschatological' (relating to the last things) predictions, and no better examples for the present purpose can be found. He records fore-views of events that were to occur in the political affairs of the world at various times throughout the two and a half millenniums that have elapsed between his day and ours. These started with contemporary happenings of only a few years beyond his own death and extended into a time which to us is still future. The correspondence of that which was thus recorded with events that undeniably have happened is so exact that the Book of Daniel has become a battle-ground between believers in the influence of the supernatural and those who deny the existence of the supernatural.

Daniel started on the basis of a prediction sixty years earlier by the prophet Jeremiah to the effect

that after seventy years' captivity in Babylon the Jewish people would be restored to their own land. Nearly two centuries previously Isaiah had given the name of the conqueror - Cyrus - who would order that restoration. Before Daniel died he witnessed the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus and fulfilment of the prophecy by his restoring the nation to its land and ordering the rebuilding of the Temple. But in the meantime Daniel had received and recorded revelations imparted to him by a celestial visitant, the messenger of the Most High, announcing himself to Daniel under a proper name, Gabriel. This coming of a heavenly messenger to Daniel is one instance of the lifting of the curtain that divides us from the spiritual world, even though it affords but a shadow image of that world. We are permitted to glimpse just a little of those activities that are going on 'beyond the veil'. *"At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth"* says Gabriel to Daniel *"and I have come to tell it to you."* (Daniel 9.23 RSV). There is indication here of activity and organisation in the world of the spirit which shows it to be a very real world. Here is an individual, a citizen of that world, deputed to carry out a task involving his transfer temporarily to our world, in a way that human eyes could see, so that the message may be given.

That message comprised three distinct and separate fore-views of things to come. One was plainly stated to extend from Daniel's own day to the coming of Messiah for the purpose of suffering and death - the time we call the First Advent. The other two covered a much longer space of time, between them they extend beyond the ending of this present world-Age and into the Messianic Kingdom. The exactitude of the first prophecy is a matter of wonder to all who read, but no longer a question of dispute. Taking as a starting point an event that was not to occur for some eighty years after the death of Daniel - the decree of Artaxerxes king of Persia authorising the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem - the coming of the Messiah was to be sixty-nine 'sevens'. This was a cryptic way of indicating four

hundred and eighty three years. Precisely that number of years from the Decree to AD29 when Jesus of Nazareth began His ministry. The Messiah had come! Gabriel predicted that associated with the Messianic appearance would be events the details of which must have shaken Daniel and his fellow-patriots to the core. Foreign powers would destroy Jerusalem and its Temple again, bring to an end the old ritual of sacrifice and worship, and desolate the land. The pages of Josephus give sufficient testimony to the terrible manner in which that prediction was fulfilled within forty years of the coming of Christ, in the Jewish War against Vespasian and Titus resulting in the depopulation of Judea and the Dispersion of Israel amongst all nations.

Although the same definiteness of time-scale is not associated with the 'end-of-the-Age' predictions of Daniel it is true to say that Gabriel gave him a relatively clear and detailed picture of events that were to happen over a period of something like twenty-five hundred years. That much is evident even if we do not fully understand the fulfilment of all that he told Daniel. The question of immediate interest to us is this: how could these detailed happenings be known so long before they occurred? The account in Daniel 11 is no general statement of the ultimate purpose of God, no set of terms that cover in a general way the main drift of world events into the Kingdom. The detailed and precise nature of the narrative implies that Gabriel could see, or had seen, a clear panorama or chart of world history as yet not enacted, and was able to speak to Daniel with the precision of absolute knowledge.

It is here that we are brought face to face with one of the most intriguing statements in the whole of the Scriptures; one that seems to have received less than its due share of notice from scholars and commentators. *"I will show you the truth"* says Gabriel (ie. in the 'true writings' - Dan. 11.2). It takes a moment or two to realise that these 'true writings' which Gabriel proposed to reveal to Daniel, and did reveal in what we now have as chapters 11 and 12 of the latter's prophecy, are not recorded in any 'true writings' which now exist upon earth! These two chapters with their detailed account of world history from Daniel's time to the consummation of the Kingdom, stand unique in literature. There is nothing like them in the Bible or anywhere

else. Whatever may be the nature of those 'true writings' from which the angel Gabriel drew his authority to speak, they are not of this world or this order of things!

Then what can they be? Are there indeed books in Heaven? Did the angel bring with him a celestial scroll, from which, as his unrolled, he could read to the prophet concerning things to come? Is there a literal 'Book of Life' reposing in some kind of heavenly library, containing all the records which are to be made known when the Last Day shall come? Will the angels turn over literal pages to find the judgments recorded, when all men stand before the great Throne, and the *"judgment was set and the books were opened"*?

We do not think so. What we do know is that there must be counterparts to these things in the heavenly realm. Just as the records of men upon earth, preserved in book form, exist as aids to memory, so in that spiritual realm, there must be 'records of memory' waiting to be called upon when the time of decision and judgment comes. But not only of memory, for the angel spoke of things yet to come as being already recorded in the 'true writings'. What then can these 'true writings' be but the eternal purpose of God, known unto Him from the foundation of the world, made known by Him, to angels or to men, as He sees fit? The expression 'true writings' in such a connection gives a terrible finality to the things to which reference is made. There can be no escape from the fulfilment predicted. There can be no possibility of turning the current of events so that the details of prophecy given by the angel do not come to pass after all. These things shall be and they are so written. The only explanation of that irrevocable finality consistent with God's gift of free will to man is that God having set in motion the forces which are leading men to their destined end, sees into the future and perceives what is coming. This is much the same as a railway train driver from his cabin who looks forward along the track and perceives the trees and rivers and towns advancing toward him. But the passengers are limited to their sideways vision and can have no conception at all of what they will be seeing five minutes hence.

We naturally ask ourselves what determines the nature and sequence of events. Were they arbitrarily devised and ordained by God in the dim long ago before as yet any of them began, before man

had been created or the earth brought into being? Or can we conceive of God, in the immensity of His power and wisdom, being able to take a comprehensive view of the world as it now is. He sees all its creatures with all the thoughts and intents of all their minds, discerning in His infinite knowledge just how every one of those creatures will react to each of the influences that will be brought to bear upon him or her during life. Does He thus perceive the end from the beginning not because He had arbitrarily willed the minutiae and detail of that end but because He can foresee what is going to be the effect of every thought and word and action of every person at this particular moment. Does He see the further effects of those effects and so on into infinity, so that from the state of the world and the men in it at this present time, He can as it were calculate the precise outcome at the 'end of the world'?

The world of computers can perhaps help us to understand. A computer can solve in a few seconds abstruse mathematical problems which would either take a professional mathematician years to calculate or by normal methods would not be capable of calculation at all. A computer does this when the necessary data relating the problem is fed into it. It calculates the effect arising from a large number of causes with lightning rapidity. Similarly, the Divine Mind, in an infinitely greater fashion, can take in all the possible influences bearing upon people, all the facts and figures which go to make up our world and people's minds as they are now. From that He can foresee what is going to be the outcome. Man's power of choice, his exercise of freewill is not fettered or limited in any way by the fact that God can foresee how he will exercise that power.

Let Isaiah, who knew the majesty and power of God more intimately, perhaps, than any other of the prophets, give his testimony as to what he perceived of this aspect of God's character. *"I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, AND FROM ANCIENT TIMES THE THINGS THAT ARE NOT YET DONE."* (Isa. 46.10).

"Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us

the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified." (that is, perceive that man can tell the end from the beginning; Isa. 41.21-23 RSV). The point so noticeable when pondering these Scriptures is that the certainty of the prophecy is due, not so much to God's exercise of fore-ordination, but to God's knowledge of things to come. It is as though He sees what is not yet apparent to men, and tells them what He sees. It would seem that this power to foresee future happenings is one that can be shared by others in the spiritual realm. The word 'gods' in Isa.41 is 'elohim' and denote the celestial powers. It is evident that this clear perception of the future is not normally possessed by the angels, for we are told that the mysteries of coming things are matters *"which the angels desire to look into"* (1 Pet. 1.12). Gabriel certainly had knowledge of coming things when he spoke to Daniel; so did the angels who appeared to Ezekiel and Zechariah. Above all, our Lord, manifested to John on the island of Patmos, declared that He was about to show him *"things which must shortly come to pass"* (Rev. 1.1). Our Lord, at that time, had a clearer knowledge of the time and events of His Second Advent than He possessed sixty years earlier when, in the days of His flesh. Then He had said *"Of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the son, but the Father"* (Mark 13.32). It may then be literally true that God does "see" down the "stream of time" and, without deliberately ordaining or commanding specific events and happenings, does perceive what those happenings are going to be. If this be indeed the case, we may rest assured that men like Daniel and Ezekiel are the very ones to whom the visions of remote futurity would be given. They were men whose hearts were earnestly set on the fulfilment of all God's gracious plans; men whose minds were closely attuned to God in their endeavour to see what He could see, and to hear what He would say to them. Hence Paul, caught up into the *"third heaven"* (2 Cor. 12.2) was able to hear and see things which could never be repeated or imparted in their detail to his fellows, because so different from anything with which we are familiar upon earth.

This brings us to the greatest difficulty in the imparting of this type of prophecy. The conditions

of far distant days differ so widely from those of today that a great many statements and allusions must of necessity be quite unintelligible unless re-expressed in terms familiar by reason of everyday use. Suppose an angel from heaven had appeared, for instance, to Sir Francis Drake in 1588 to tell him of the great war of 1939-45. It would be supremely difficult for the Elizabethan Admiral to understand the angel's description of naval warfare with its dive-bombers and submarines. The angel would have to recast his description along the lines of wooden sailing-ships, bows and arrows, primitive ball-firing cannon, and cutlasses. His reference to American participation would leave Sir Francis puzzled, for North America, although vaguely known to Europeans, had not then been colonised and its only inhabitants were American Indians. Holland and Belgium would have to be referred to by their medieval name of Flanders, and Russia as Muscovy. The whole story would need recasting in the atmosphere and within the limits of knowledge of the sixteenth century. The angel would be hard put to it to convince the sceptical sailor that men would be flying in winged ships miles above the earth and at the same time converse easily with their fellows on the ground a hundred miles away. So when the angel spoke to Daniel, and Jesus spoke to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, their language had to be accommodated to the knowledge of the times. Gabriel spoke of kings at war with one another down to the end of the Age. In the reality those "kings" may be local powers or they may represent empires, presided over by mighty military conquerors. They may depict whole races of mankind exercising a period of world supremacy and then declining and giving place in turn to others. But to Daniel they were kings. The angel spoke of Michael standing up; we know that he referred to Christ, who is to take control at the time of the resurrection, in the dawn of the Millennial Age. Daniel knew not Christ and like other Jews of his day, he looked on 'Michael the archangel' as the traditional spiritual prince and champion of his people. Hence quite naturally Gabriel used the name of the archangel to represent the one of whom Daniel would not as yet know.

So Jesus, viewing the events of today from two thousand years ago, could not describe those things to His disciples without using words and terms familiar to His hearers. Men do not live on house-

tops today, neither do most women grind at corn mills. But He could not have said "Let not the factory worker return to his bench, nor the train-driver to his engine-shed" for such words would convey nothing to the disciples. We must interpret the words Jesus did use in the realisation of this fact. Each individual example of prophecy, therefore, has to be considered and interpreted on its own merits. The judgment of the student must be brought to bear upon the text, whether literal or symbolic, in everyday plain language or in metaphor or poetry. Was it intended only for the people of the generation to which it was first spoken or was its meaning veiled that it might reveal its message in a much later day? Does its range cover the few short years only of its own epoch or does it extend forward into far futurity, affording guidance for a Christian of the generation in which the prophecy is to have its fulfilment? To what extent does it illuminate the eternal purpose of God and the ceaseless operation of the Divine Mind working in history and the world of men? It is only when we can ask these questions and set their answers in proper relation, that we shall be able correctly to interpret the prophecies, *"comparing spiritual things with spiritual"*.

When all that we can say has been said, it remains that we know very little of the power behind prophecy. If the foregoing has helped to demonstrate that prophecy is in fact based upon a sure knowledge of the future and that God reveals it to those whose minds and hearts are attuned to Him then it has served its purpose. That revelation of such knowledge is of value in the development of Christian character and the preservation of Christian faith. It will be necessary for many minds to be exercised and many pens to be busy if the "sure word of prophecy" is to be expounded in all its fulness of light for our day, for such things can never be the peculiar privilege of one man. The subject is too vast to be comprehended from one viewpoint. But whilst remembering this we need also to remember that in prophecy, as in perhaps no other Scriptural subject, it is necessary that old understandings be continuously amplified and enlarged, and oft-times drastically revised, as we progress along that upward pathway that "shines more and more to the perfect day".

The End

AOH

MANY MANSIONS

"In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14.2).

If there are so many mansions in the Father's house, why did our Lord find it necessary to go away and prepare a place for His disciples that where He is, there we may be also? Were none of these mansions good enough? In Divine creation there are many homes suitable for living beings, many stations of existence, both spiritual and material. Look up into the starry heavens: behold the magnificent array of stars, some of them attended by planets like our own. Here in this great universe there are an untold myriad of possible abiding places for living creatures. Sir James Jeans, speaking before the Royal Institution in November, 1942, and giving what was then the very latest considered conclusions of astronomers on this subject, said *"the chance of a star, in a nebulous state, having given birth to planets before attaining to the sun state is considerable. A fair proportion of the stars must then be accompanied by planets. Of these a substantial fraction are likely to be in a physical state not very different from that of our own earth, and so capable of maintaining life like our terrestrial life; it is possible that such life is far more abundant in space than we used to think"*. Bible students may not readily agree to the last sentence; it is more likely that these other planets are being prepared for future races of men made in God's likeness, when the drama of sin and death has been enacted once for all upon this earth. But it does seem that many "mansions" in the skies, existing from of old, "or ever the earth was", have been and are being prepared for the further purposes of God. Nevertheless, none of these terrestrial mansions can ever be a fitting home for the glorified Christ company. Made like unto their Lord, clothed upon with spiritual bodies even as He, possessed of powers and attributes far above the human, there must of necessity be, somewhere, a home prepared for them which is of like quality.

What, then, of the spiritual world, of which our visible universe is but a material counterpart? Long before the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and commanded light to be; long before the particles of which sun, and moon, and stars are made, had begun to come together, God Most High reigned upon the throne of His holiness. The Son, the Logos, rejoiced "always before him" (Prov.

8.30), and ten thousand times ten thousand glorious celestial beings lived their lives and carried out their varied occupations and vocations in sinless purity before Him. That world of theirs, impossible for our human brains to imagine or visualise, must have a more glorious counterpart to everything that gives us pleasure or sustains life here on earth. Those angels do always behold the face of the Father (Matt. 18.10). Could it not be, then, that among those heavenly hosts and in the order of things in which they live, and move, and have their being, there may be found that superbly glorious home to which the King will lead His Bride when the day of union shall have come? Perhaps not. Perhaps there is something more planned by the Almighty Creator that is only then to be revealed. Perhaps there is an exercise of creative power leading to another creation that is to be for the Church alone, as high above the angelic world as that world is above our present terrestrial world.

All these planes of being, with their varied homes and worlds, belong to the Old Creation that creation which commenced when the Most High, in the solitude and silence before Time began, through His Son created the spiritual world, and varied forms of spiritual beings to fill that world. He then brought into existence a material universe, making man in His own mental and moral image and likeness, in form of flesh adapted to the earth upon which He was to live. All this constitutes the Old Creation, the First Creation, the one brought into existence by God through the instrumentality of His beloved Son, *"by whom also he made the worlds"*.

This creation, with all its mansions, is, or will be when sin is banished, complete in itself. The New Testament speaks of the subsequent coming into existence of a New Creation something the like of which has never been seen or known before, either upon earth or in heaven. Spiritual beings, but on a higher plane than spiritual beings have ever been constituted before. The Divine Son is the Head of this New Creation. His followers who are called to follow in His steps are promised that, if faithful, they too shall share in the glories of that New Creation. They have become dead in Christ and have been buried with Him in His baptism and have risen again to walk in newness of life with Him. They are not yet clothed upon with the "body", the

outward organism in which the new spiritual life and identity finds itself at home, and through which adjusted in its own surroundings and to its fellows, but, nevertheless, they are a "New Creation". *"If any man be in Christ, there is a New Creation. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Cor. 5.17).

So it is not surprising that this New Creation, endowed with immortality, the gift of God, should need a new kind of home of a nature that the Old Creation had never needed and never seen. Many mansions there have been in the Father's house, but none just suitable for immortal beings. The Bridegroom must needs go away and prepare a place exceeding the most glorious spiritual condition previously known, just as the glory of the spiritual exceeds the glory of the earthly.

If this be so, what joy must fill the heart of the Heavenly Bridegroom as He comes to call His Bride to her new home. With what deep satisfaction must He then contemplate the imminence of the day when He shall *"see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied"* (Isaiah 53.11). The new home ready; angels in heaven eager to witness the great event; the Heavenly Father awaits the presentation of the Bride before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. What wonder that it is said that the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and that His beloved shall be "caught up" to meet Him in the air, so to be ever with Him. Who knows the wonders of that marriage feast, when the wisdom of all the ages, and deepest confidence respecting the work of the future, shall be imparted to those to whom it is given to sit around that festal board. Here it is that the picture of the Bride must merge into that of the anointed and glorified company. From that wedding feast these will come forth, radiant souls possessed by an all-embracing and overpowering love for their Lord and their Leader, the Head of their house. That home is to be their headquarters, their homeland, from which they will go forth to carry out the wonderful works that are to be their portion to all eternity.

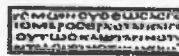
The wedding feast is limited in time. The world of men will be passing through the severest phase of the world's final trouble while those wonderful scenes are being enacted in heaven. The Church will have gone from earth to be presented to the Father, to become accustomed to their new environment and powers. Now they will receive their

final instructions for their first great work, the conversion of men upon earth. They will not linger for the cry of humanity resounds to the heavens, and the whole creation, groans and travails in pain together, *"waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God"* (Rom. 8.19-22 NRSV).

So the cavalcade sets out. The Lord who had come to earth for His saints, and taken them to Himself, now comes to the world with his saints, and there is no man who knows it not. We do not know, we cannot say, what coming and going there may be between that place which is our home, prepared for that purpose by our Lord, and this place which for a thousand years is the scene of our labours. *"What we will be has not yet been revealed."* and our deepest thinking can only furnish us with a shadow of the reality.

Perhaps, though, we can visualize, dimly, at the end of the thousand years, another great gathering in the spacious halls of that "prepared place". The work with mankind is over. Evil has spread its wings and flown far away; never again will its shadow darken God's fair realm. Sin is no more; all the earth is at rest, it breaks forth into singing. Listening angels have heard the sublime words, echoing from high Heaven: *"Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*. The cherubim which for long ages have stood on guard with the flaming sword, keeping the way of the Tree of Life, now wing their flight back to the Throne of God, their long vigil over. The Sons of God who wondered, and shouted for joy, when the foundations, of the earth were laid (Job 38.7) are shouting again for joy to behold this triumphant conclusion to the eternal purpose of God. Away up in that highest home of all, the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church commune together. The further plans of God are spread out to view. There are works of creation, mighty beyond imagination. There are designs for the enrichment of God's glory and superabundant happiness for creatures yet to be born. They are happy in His service and unceasing joy in each other's fellowship and in the presence and companionship of our glorious Lord, age after age without end, to all eternity.

BJD



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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Edith and the other men wrote
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us of your language against you

All valleys shall be exalted
mountains and hills layed
low is made made of

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

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

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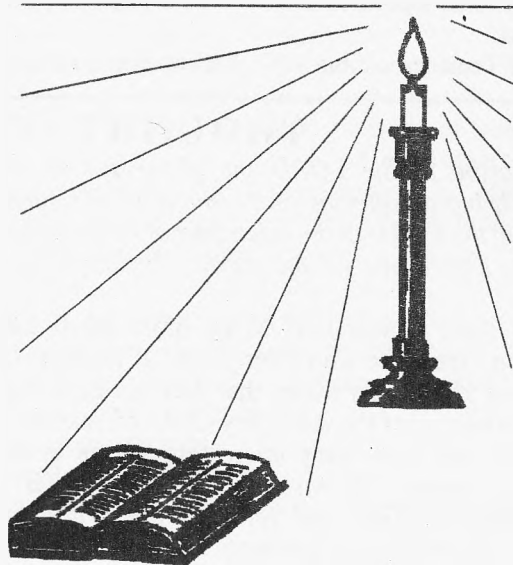
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NOTICES

THE 'TALKING BOOK SERVICE'

Cassette recordings of each issue are sent, without cost, to the partially sighted. We are very grateful to the Brother who records and dispatches the cassettes.

BFU WEB SITE contains information about how this charity operates and lists its literature. It also contains the 'current' issue of the Bible Study Monthly. Many people around the world visit the site and some of them write to us requesting the magazine and literature. We are grateful for this opportunity to witness to our faith and also to the Brother who operates the web site and keeps it updated.

The Trustees of the Bible Fellowship Eventide

Trust invite you to a Convention in the Chapel at Gainsborough House, Saturday and Sunday, 3rd and 4th June.

The editor apologizes for the printing mistakes that occurred in the March/April Bible Study Monthly. Steps have been taken to try and minimize these kinds of mistakes.

Gone From Us

Sister Hilda Spilsbury (Warrington)
Brother Tom Harper (Bristol)
Brother Jim Redmond (Liverpool)
Sister Gertie Cornell (Poole)

'Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away'

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him all the earth." (Psalm 95.8, 9 NIV)

But what is worship? Many have asked that question. Are those who enter places of worship, of whatever kind really aware that they are gathering in the presence of the Almighty God of Creation

There are three very interesting verses in the letter of James. *"if anyone thinks that he is a worshipper of God and yet does not bridle his tongue, his worship is an empty thing. This is pure and undefiled worship, as God the Father sees it, to visit the orphans and the widows, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."* (James 1.26-28 - Barclay). The word *'threskeia'* is translated in the AV as 'religion' - means the outward expression of religion or piety. Barclay⁽¹⁾ suggests that what James is really saying is "The freest ritual and the freest liturgy you can offer to God is in the service of the poor and personal purity". Whatever form a Christian meeting or service takes, it has no spiritual value unless the lives of those so

assembling reflect God's concern for the most vulnerable in society - world wide.

When members of God's family meet together their thoughts need to focus upon their Father and that begins with quiet individual meditation. Worship may continue in song and prayer, in the study of God's Word or in listening to the preaching from the Word. Some also may feel led to worship in drama and dance. David danced before the LORD. Jeremiah acted out a parable by the banks of the River Euphrates. It is vital that worship should include elements that are genuinely meaningful to young folk. If they cannot share the worship of older Christians they will readily go elsewhere and perhaps to places that do not relate to their spiritual interests.

How important then, that we share the privilege in the right spirit. Before we join our voices in song, those minutes of quietness in His presence create a sense of awe - perhaps in the spirit of the wonderful hymn, 'How Great Thou Art'. And that is when we find His rest.

DN

¹ William Barclay, 'The Daily Bible Study' p 61, 'The letters of James and Peter' (St. Andrews Press 2001)

THE NATURE, ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

Part 1

A conference address

Romans 15.13 is a wonderful verse of Scripture – *"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost"* (KJV).

The word "Ghost" is translated from the Greek "*pneuma*" which means "*air, wind or spirit*", and so the last phrase of Romans 15.13 is better translated "*through the power of the Holy Spirit*".

Returning to the first part of verse 13 we read *"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing"*. Those words describe a wonderfully blessed condition.

To be "*filled with all joy*" means never to have a moment of sadness, never a moment of sorrow, never to shed a tear. And to be "*filled with all peace*" means never to have a moment of anxiety, never to have a moment of apprehension, never to feel angry, or have a feeling of animosity, because when we are angry or have a feeling of animosity, we are not at peace with our circumstance or situation. So to be filled with all joy and peace describes a wonderfully blessed condition. Such a condition could be deemed to be the pinnacle of Christian character development. But it's not. The Apostle Paul goes on to say "*that we may abound in hope*". In other words his prayer was that they might be filled with all joy and peace so that they might abound in hope. The Apostle establishes a hierarchy in which being filled with joy and peace is prerequisite to abounding in hope.

We may reflect on three aspects of hope - its nature, its role in our Christian pilgrimage, and its importance.

The Nature of Hope

We don't need to speculate about the nature of hope. The Apostle Paul defines it precisely in Romans 8.24-25: *"For we are saved by hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it"* (KJV). The Apostle makes two important points about the nature of hope. Firstly, hope relates to that which is not seen – "*for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*" For us to "see" anything, be it a material object or a situation or condition, it has to be realised; we have to "have it" already. Consequently hope relates to things that are

unseen; to things that we do not yet possess. Secondly, hope relates to things that are future – "*if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it*". We only wait for things that we expect will eventuate in the future. So hope relates to things that are currently unseen but which we believe will come – things that are future.

It is very important for us today to realise those two aspects of hope. In 2 Peter 3 the Apostle describes our days: *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you, in which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour; knowing this first that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation'. For this they willingly are ignorant of that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water whereby the world that then was being overflowed with water perished."* The scoffers do not believe that the flood of Noah's day actually happened. Many of the other stories recorded in the Old Testament are also dismissed. Today the scoffing is occurring not only in secular circles but in some Christian circles as well. Recently a Christian church minister declared that the first six chapters of Genesis were a myth. It is very important for us today to realise that our hope relates to things as yet unseen; things that are still future. The bombardment of our hope that we are experiencing today is simply the fulfillment of this prophecy in 2 Peter 3.

The Apostle Paul uses a powerful analogy in 1 Thessalonians 5.1-5: *"But of the times and seasons brethren ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye brethren are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness"*. That is a wonderfully

comprehensive explanation. The apostle uses the analogy of being in darkness and being in light. In the natural world if one is in a completely darkened room they can't see anything regardless of how good their eyesight. Likewise with spiritual things. Spiritually we are in the light, those outside are in darkness. So it doesn't matter how intellectual our opposer might be, what their academic standard is, or how well they have their mental eyesight tuned to temporal things, if they are in spiritual darkness they can't see spiritual things. Of course we only see them because God has shown them to us: we do not see anything by our own intellectual ability. Let us never forget what Paul wrote to the Corinthians – *"The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, ... neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned"* *"But God has revealed them unto us by His spirit"* (1 Cor. 2:14, 10). What a privilege it is that God has touched our hearts and opened our eyes so that we can see spiritual things.

However we do not yet see the fruition of our hopes. In 2 Peter 3:13 we read *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"*. That is what Christians are praying for when they pray *"thy kingdom come"*; *"the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness"* is the same as *"the kingdom"*.

However, to the man in the street it is an unrealistic hope. Cain slew Abel at the beginning of human history and human history has been plagued with war, strife and dissension ever since. Man has suffered the consequences of evil for a very long time, so long in fact that mankind generally is justified in assuming that it will always be the same. For Christians to have a hope of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness is unrealistic to those who do not enjoy insight into God's plan. Indeed we need to ask ourselves *"is it an unrealistic hope? Is it a fantasy?"* It certainly is not. The Apostle Paul made sure the Christians at Rome realized it was not an unrealistic hope when he wrote in Romans 15:4 – *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"*. In the 21st century, the expression *"things written aforetime"* could be applied to the whole Bible. However when the Apostle wrote to the Romans, the *"things written aforetime"* were the things written in the Old Testament. Paul also

explains God's reason for having them written. The reason was not so that they could be knowledgeable about the history and kings of Israel, or that they would be able to quote the numbers in the book of Numbers. The things were written aforetime *"for our learning that we, through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"*. Our hope is not a fantasy – it is not founded on scientific theories. Our hope is based on the promises of God, promises like the promise given in Isaiah 2:1-4: *"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it."* (What a remarkable statement that is concerning Judah and Jerusalem – all nations shall flow unto it.) *"And many people shall go and say 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths', for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"*. This is one of the precious promises of God upon which our hope is based, and is one to which the apostle Peter refers in 2 Peter 3:13: *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"*.

However to stop there would be quite discouraging. The concept of nations beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks is the direct opposite to what we see today. Currently North Korea is concerning the world with its aspirations of becoming a nuclear power. There is also some concern about Iran not being dissuaded from nuclear aspirations. And so there is no evidence at the present time of the nations beating their swords into plowshares. However even the present situation is prophesied. Joel 3:9-10 says: *"Proclaim ye 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 plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears, let the weak say I am strong'"*. The world today is fulfilling that prophecy. And so when we read in Peter's epistle that we are to look

for "a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" it is important for us to realise that time is a critical element in God's plan, and that the hope set forth by Peter is still future.

And now let us consider the intervening verses in 2 Peter 3.7-12 *"But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men, But beloved be not ignorant of this one thing that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation (conduct) and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat". "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God" – we look for and haste unto that day because we see beyond it and see the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness as promised in verse 13.*

Our faith in the promises of God is strengthened by the many other prophecies that have been fulfilled. One of them is the prophecy that was fulfilled at Jesus' first advent. In Matthew 1.19-23 we have a record of the circumstances that surrounded Jesus' birth: *"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying 'Joseph thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying 'Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel which being interpreted is, 'God with us'.'" To the*

natural person it was incomprehensible that a virgin could conceive. However it was prophesied in the Old Testament (Isaiah 7.14). So Jesus' birth was an amazing fulfillment of one verse of Scripture written aforetime, and that gives us great confidence in the other promises recorded in the Old Testament.

The prophecies relating to Jesus' first advent extended beyond the circumstances of his birth. We read how, as they walked by the way, did their *"hearts burn within them" as He "opened to them the Scriptures" (Luke 24.32). "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself". (Luke 24.27)* We can have great faith in the prophecies of the Old Testament!

So we've seen so far that hope relates to things that are not seen, things that are yet future, and that our hope is not fantasy but is based on the promises of God.

A further aspect of the nature of our hope is that it should grow. Romans 5.1-5 reads: *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace whereto we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. And hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us".* That's life's experience. When we were young we were inclined to think that there was nothing wrong with the world – especially if we were fit and healthy. If there was anything that needed to be fixed we would fix it. There was no need for hope. But as time went on we began to realise that it takes a little longer than we had first imagined to rectify some faults. We started to need some patience. *"Tribulation works patience".* Later on again, with more experience, we started to realise that we were unable to fix some things. So we started to hope that someone else would fix them. Eventually we realised that the only hope for solving the world's problems is the hope set forth for us in the word of God. And the longer we live, the more we realise that the only hope for the world are the promises of God, and so our hope increases (that is, grows) day by day.

GS

MAN OF SORROWS

1 - Behold My Servant

*A study in
Isaiah 53*

The latter part of the Book of Isaiah presents a grand panorama of the Divine Plan of Salvation, the means by which that salvation is accomplished, and the nature of the world that is to witness the accomplishment of that salvation. This noble prophecy presents a picture of the "Servant of Jehovah". He is a 'suffering servant', who because of His unquestioning loyalty to His Father in Heaven and His uncomplaining acceptance of the suffering on earth which that loyalty involves, becomes the means whereby God is able to reconcile to Himself "whosoever will". The story closes with a wonderful pen-picture of the new heavens and earth, cleansed from the defilement of sin, which results from that reconciliation. The end of the vision is strikingly like the closing scene of the Book of Revelation, where the Holy City has come to earth and its light enlightens the nations, nothing that defiles being able to enter into it.

The whole of this Messianic prophecy of Isaiah forms a setting for its brightest jewel, the sublime passage which constitutes the 53rd chapter. From this chapter we have our conception of Jesus as a lamb who is led to the slaughter and a man of sorrows who is acquainted with grief. That is not the only aspect of Jesus of which we know. We realise that in His earthly life He was not always and even not habitually overshadowed by sorrow. His countenance was more often lighted by happiness and benevolence than darkened by grief and sadness. His relations with men were not always that of an unresisting sheep being led to death. There were times when He took full command of the situation in indignation and even anger, reproving Pharisees and priests for their hypocrisy and greed. There were times when He held His hearers spell-bound, teaching them as "one having authority". But here in Isaiah 53 we have what is intended to be a doctrinal presentation of the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" and therefore it is only to be expected that the suffering aspect of our Redeemer's ministry should be stressed to the exclusion of every other consideration.

This study opens with verse 13 of chapter 52. This is really the commencement of the description and this is where chapter 53 should in fact have started. In verses 13-15 of chapter 52 the voice of God is heard speaking from heaven declaring the

mission of His Servant the Redeemer. Verses 1-10 of chapter 53 contain the spoken response of those on earth who understand the message and accept the Redeemer. Verses 11-12, the closing words from God, give assurance of the triumphant fulfilment of all that the Redeemer comes to accomplish.

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently. He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." (v.13). Although the term "servant" in the Old Testament usually carries the thought of a slave, since most servants were bound to their master's house and family and could not leave even if they wanted to, it also includes the thought of reverential respect and obedience as from a son. Here at the outset we are reminded of that word in Hebrews *"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God."* Throughout His earthly life Jesus made clear that He was always consistently carrying out His Father's will and purpose. The absolute supremacy of God the Father is everywhere acknowledged. For the work and duration of the Millennial Age *"the Father judges no man but has committed all judgment to the Son"*. At its end *"then shall the Son himself be subject unto him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in all"*. But here in Isaiah there is something more than the usual significance in the word "servant". There is no other servant anywhere in the Bible like this one. Here we have the suffering servant of God who by means of His suffering is going to restore God's erring creation to Him. Abraham (Psa. 105.6), Job (Job 1.8), Moses (Josh. 1.1), Joshua (Josh. 24.29), David (Psa. 18.1) and Isaiah (Isa. 20.3) were all honoured by being called servants of God but none of them held the position before God that was occupied by this "suffering servant", Mighty as were the works that all those men did in their several spheres, none of them could match the work done by the One who is described with such eloquent pathos in Isa. 53. *"Behold my servant"*. The injunction is imperative. We are to look upon this One and see in Him all that we need to take away the load of our sins and all that we need to show us the way back to harmony with God, and everlasting life.

He shall deal prudently – wisely, is the meaning. The word is from a root meaning to attend closely, to be circumspect. In the Book of

Proverbs the same word is often used in the sense of having understanding. *"The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him"* says Isaiah 11 *"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord"*. The rest of chapter 11 goes on to describe the practical out-working of that wisdom in the work of the Millennial Age when many are to be turned to righteousness and the stony hearts taken away from men and replaced by hearts of flesh. Here in verse 13 the "dealing prudently", or with wisdom, would seem to have reference rather to His First Advent and His life on earth rather than His Second Advent and His reign over the nations. Even though He was to be despised and rejected and ultimately put to death His whole life was to be characterised by Divine wisdom and it was so truly thus characterised that His opponents *"could not gainsay the wisdom with which he spoke."*

Now come three verbs, crowding one upon the other, all expressive of his ultimate triumph and glory. *"He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high"*. This must refer to the outcome of His earthly life, the glory that was to follow, for none of these things were true while He lived on earth. It might be that here we have an indication of the three steps by which the One who died on the cross in obedience to the Father's Will was ultimately brought to be seated at His right hand *"from thenceforth waiting until his enemies be made his footstool"* – to His resurrection, His ascension, His *"entry into the presence of God for us"*. The first word "exalted" means to be raised up, the second, "extolled" to be borne up or lifted up, as by angels or other medium, and the third just what it says, to be very high. Our Lord after His ascension was *"higher than all heavens"*. We might very reasonably therefore take these three words as descriptive of the upward progress of our Lord after the close of His earthly life to be glorified with the glory that He had with the Father before the world was. Thus He had prayed to the Father in His Gethsemane prayer recorded in John 17. *"Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and in earth and under the earth."* (Phil. 2.9, 10).

"As many were astonished at thee: his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men". (Isa. 52.14). The first phrase means to be dumb with astonishment, to be compelled to silence by the solemnity or the

strangeness of what is seen. The subject of astonishment is the second phrase *"His visage was so marred"* and here it is very possible that the traditional view is hopelessly wrong. The word for "marred" occurs only this once in the Old Testament and there is serious doubt whether it is correct. It means, not only "marred" in the modern sense of that term, i.e. to deface, but it means to destroy utterly by decay and corruption. Such an expression carried to its logical extreme is quite out of place in any description of our Lord. There is no evidence that our Lord was in any sense unlovely to look upon. There is at least some piece of evidence to the contrary. We know that little children came spontaneously to Him and would have been less likely to have come to one with a repulsive face. Jesus as a perfect man must have arrived at the maturity of human life in possession of physical beauty far excelling anything that had been seen on earth since Adam. The sorrows and disappointments of life may have left their mark on Him to the extent of a more serious and reflective mien. There is, however, no more likelihood that those experiences, or the *"going out of virtue"* from Him as He expended vitality for the good of others, rendered Him unlovely to look upon than it does in our own cases today. We are witnesses that such experiences in the life often tend to make the countenance sweeter and more attractive; it is usually bitterness and discontent which sours the visage, and that we do not associate with our Lord.

The Septuagint has it *"so shall thy face be without glory from men, and thy glory shall not be honoured by the sons of men"*. This rendering must have come from a different Hebrew text than the one that declares His countenance to be in process of destruction by decay, and it makes a much more fitting commentary upon the person of our Lord, so much so that we are perhaps justified in accepting it in place of the Authorised Version. Our Lord while in the flesh did indeed manifest a glory all His own, a *"glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* but it was not a glory He obtained from men, neither was it a glory that was honoured by the sons of men. They despised and rejected him instead. The words of the Septuagint are literally true therefore in our Lord's experience. Some scholars consider that the word has suffered the alteration, at the hands of an ancient copyist, of one letter which has changed the word from one meaning "to anoint" and that on this supposition the reference here is not to a

countenance that has been marred by disfigurement but one that has been anointed for ceremonial purification. The word in this case would be the same as that used in Leviticus for the consecration of Aaron and his sons. It is used elsewhere for the anointing to office of the kings of Israel. If this is the true interpretation then this verse indicates the astonishment of the beholders at seeing one among them who is anointed for the purpose of cleansing the people from sin, which is itself a fitting introduction to the sublime theme of chapter 53. Such cases of a changed letter altering the whole meaning of a word are not uncommon. It is tolerably certain that the passage in the original never taught that our Lord's physical appearance would be repulsive or unattractive and if so we shall have approached to a more accurate conception of Jesus' human nature.

"So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider." (52.15). This "sprinkling" is similar to Moses' sprinkling of the blood upon the altar and the people (Exod. 24) and of the blood of the sin-offering in the Day of Atonement ceremonies (Lev. 16). It is also the sprinkling of water for purifying and making clean in Lev. 19. The sprinkling of many nations is the purification and cleansing of many nations, and the purifying agent is the blood of Jesus Christ. Hence, the Apostle tells us that we have come to *"Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel"*. (Heb. 12. 24). Hence we are *"elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"*. (1 Pet. 1.2). What a triumphant testimony this is to the final success of God's Plans. *"So shall he sprinkle many nations."* It is not that only a few will eventually attain eternal salvation and the many suffer everlasting loss and cutting-off. God's plan is going to be gloriously successful, and "many nations", the majority of earth's children, receive lasting benefit from the ransom sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There is a subtle allusion here to the priestly function of the "servant's" work on earth. After the institution of the priesthood, only the Levitical priests could lawfully sprinkle the blood of the offerings. Hence this servant who comes to execute the will of God in the realm of human salvation is qualified and authorised to act as a priest – as we have it in the Epistle to the Hebrews *"We have such*

an High Priest ... a minister of the true tabernacle". (Heb. 8.1-2).

Now we are told that *"kings shall shut their mouths at Him, seeing things of which they had never before heard, and understanding things which heretofore had never come upon their minds"*. This is quite clearly spoken prophetically of the far distant future when Messiah will come in the glory and power of His Kingdom. These words are quite inappropriate to the First Advent. If kings shut their mouths at Him it is because they respect and honour Him. So it was in the days of the patriarch Job's prosperity and glory, when he was the acknowledged lord of his community and nation. *"When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me, and covered themselves, and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth."* (Job 29.7-10). Poetically, Micah says, *"the nations ... shall lay their hand upon their mouth."* (Micah 7.16) at the rising up of God to fulfil His age-old promise to Israel. So here, the mighty exhibition of Divine power that will eventually reveal the all-conquering Christ to mankind will cause kings and mighty men to stand abashed and silent in the presence of One Who is to exercise all rule and all authority and all sovereignty in the earth.

"That which hath not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they understand." This is a Millennial promise also. Most commentators say that these words were fulfilled in the coming of the Gospel to the world when Jesus came, and in the preaching of the Gospel in the world throughout the centuries since. They expect the world to be converted during this Age. The kings and great ones of the earth still do not "see" and "understand" the things which heretofore had not been proclaimed. With all the making known of things that had been kept secret from the foundation of the world the "seeing" and "understanding" is still not an accomplished fact. It is still mainly the *"poor of this world, rich in faith"* who have seen and understood but most certainly not the kings and mighty men. We are led therefore to the conclusion, that this word will have its fulfilment in the coming Age. In that day, things that the powerful and influential and intellectual of earth had either never considered seriously for a moment, or if they had, had dismissed as unworthy

of further consideration, will be brought prominently before their attention and demand acceptance. *"God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*

It requires only a moment's thought to appreciate what a revolutionary change in the thinking of educated men and women will be brought about by the Kingdom. Every one of us is familiar with the half-pitying, half-cynical smile that comes over the face of some as we try to tell them the message in its simplicity and beauty. "Do you really believe that?" ... "Rather fantastic, isn't it?" ... "You'll never change human nature" – we have heard all the stock replies. There are so many in the world brought up in the ways of the world and according to its standards who find it quite impossible to consider the story seriously even for a moment. It is so foreign to their way of thinking and alien to all their conception of things. That is why one can truthfully say that they have never heard or been told of these things. The message has fallen upon their ears, perhaps repeatedly, but the ears were deaf to the message; they could not receive it. Now, says the prophet, *"in that day when the servant of the Lord commands the attention of all men, they will see and understand"*. It is a true word, applicable in principle to men in the age to come. But is it really intended in its fulness to the Church now? *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,*

neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2. 9). Isaiah first uttered those words, so well known because the Apostle Paul used them in his epistle. And Isaiah's phrase is vivid when we think of these kings who are to see and understand. *"For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside you, what he hath prepared for him that waited for him."* (Isa. 64.4). Paul's words were intended for the Church, the spiritually-minded sons of God in this Age; Isaiah's rhapsody was designed to embrace all men and to bring within its scope those who in this 'present evil world' do not know God. *"Him that waits for him"* says Isaiah; this is none other than every son of mankind who ultimately inherits the earthly Paradise. *"It shall be said in that day ... we have waited for him, and he will save us."* (Isa. 25.9). In the glorious outcome of God's redemptive Plan, when all that are in heaven and on earth join together in one vast song of praise and adoration to the One sitting upon the throne, and to the Lamb, the men who formerly doubted and disbelieved and disparaged and denied will perceive in the ways of God and the benevolence of God, heights of wisdom and love such as the heart of man, unaided, could never have conceived.

(To be continued)

TH

"What we need is a renewed vision of the person of the Redeemer, a vision of the cross and a practical obedience to the ways of the cross, a thankful recognition of God's grace abundantly bestowing its blessings upon us. We must be taken hold of and be flooded through and through by the power of the Holy Spirit this implies in detail that we must stand the test in difficulties, in sorrows, we must be able to dismiss the spirit of worrying and overcome all spiritual weariness and symptoms of fatigue, we must be ready to bear witness and must have a missionary spirit. Brotherly love and sanctification, prayerfulness and hearkening to the Word of God, must characterize us. All this will enable us to run steadfastly towards heaven and glory."

Into that Greek-Roman Mediterranean world the apostles carried the gospel of Jesus Christ. 'Jesus is Saviour' was their message. It is He who frees from the guilt and power of sin. Faith in Him creates new life, solves all problems, gives joy and

strength, grants a victorious life, a living hope, and an eternal glorious goal. Therefore Christ is the revelation of the saving power of God. Where He reveals himself the powers of darkness are conquered. The gospel is the 'power of God' (Rom. 1.16).

"How does God act? Does He only give us 'out of His riches? Here a little joy and there a little victory? Today a little help; and tomorrow perhaps an occasional answer to prayer? No, He the all sufficient One gives *"according to"* His riches. His standard is not our daily needs – even though if this only were the case that would make us very happy. *"As thy days so shall thy strength be"* (Deut 33.21). But He uses the measure and criterion of eternity for our temporal needs and gives us His blessings *"according to"* His fulness. This is why the word *"abound"* is one of Paul's favourite expressions."

Erich Sauer - 'Arena of Faith'

GOD'S KINGDOM

When Christians talk about 'the kingdom' they may mean different things. For example, the collection in a church was taken and a prayer offered for it to be well used 'for the extension of the kingdom' - that is, among other things, to bring about an increase in the number of believers and their influence in the world. On the other hand, in a house-group there was expressed a longing for 'the kingdom' - that is, for a time when Christ's universal rule is imposed over the earth, characterised by goodness and peace, when men know God and are obedient to Him. So is the kingdom present now, or is it future; does it grow gradually or is it imposed with all God's authority?

What is a kingdom? The dictionary gives: "A country, state or territory ruled by a king or queen". The kingdom is defined by the king being the effective ruler, and the authority he exercises, and this is applied concerning a period of time or a geographical area. The dictionary also recognises one meaning as "the spiritual reign or authority of God". Incidentally, our kings, although their authority is acknowledged, may be disobeyed, yet they still are kings. Is it so with God?

Into our common speech has slipped the idiom "till kingdom come" meaning "forever" - applied to someone, say, who may go on talking interminably "till kingdom come" - like our interminable wait for the kingdom of God? Another idiom is "to kingdom come" meaning "into the next world" - used to describe something utterly destroyed. Does this give a startling hint that someone lost to us now may be restored in God's future kingdom?

The kingdom of God is wherever or whenever God rules. That surely must be everywhere, and forever. *"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations."* (Psalm 22.27-28). *"Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations"* (Psalm 145.13). The present and perpetual kingship of God is the reason we expect all people to acknowledge Him in future.

But surely it is the presidents and dictators that humankind have to acknowledge? It is under God's sovereignty that rulers on earth have their authority. The great Nebuchadnezzar was told *"The Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will"* (Daniel 4.25). *"He [God] has put down the might from their thrones"* cried Mary in

the Magnificat (Luke 1.52). *"There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God"* claims Paul (Romans 13.1). Without teasing out all the implications for civil obedience, the main point here is that human rulers are subordinate and temporary, compared with God's rule which is supreme and permanent.

But His kingdom is not without its rebel. To Christ, Satan offered all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4.5, 6). John acknowledged *"The whole world is in the power of the evil one"* (1 John 5.19). The "kingdoms of the world" have not yet become *"the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ"* - when *"he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11.15).

Through the Bible there are prophecies about the kingdom of God being established - when God's potential authority is actually seen when He is acknowledged. In Daniel's time they looked for a future kingdom of God. *"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end and it shall stand for ever"* (Daniel 2.44). *"With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man. He came to the ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed"* (Daniel 7.14). This is the kingdom of Christ. Paul follows this, in 1 Corinthians 15.24, 25 with *"Then comes the end when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet...."*

This looks to the end of the story. Meanwhile, the establishment of the kingdom of God, the sphere in which at any time His rule is acknowledged, has been seen in progressive stages through history.

1. King David, three thousand years ago in Palestine, spoke of *"the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel"* (1 Chronicles 28.5). It was Solomon who would rule, but it was the kingdom of the Lord. God was seeking willing obedience. He had given the Law. The kings of Israel were to administer His kingdom, as a holy nation.

2. But the Israelites, while thinking of themselves as God's people, and calling themselves such, in fact were in a state of rebellion, like other men. *"They have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged"* (Isaiah 1.4). In due course, they rejected God's Son (John 1.11). The kingdom would be taken from them (Matthew 21.43) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it. They were rejected, broken off (though Paul entertains a hope for their restoration) Romans 11.15, 20, 25.

3. What followed has been God's kingdom in 'mystery'. God calls upon all men, everywhere, with no distinction of race or nationality, to submit voluntarily to His rule. The kingdom is an inner secret not revealed to everyone (Mark 4.11) – not obvious by observation, but apparent to the heart and mind; a kingdom which cannot be entered unless one is 'reborn' (John 3.3); a kingdom which was in their midst in the person of Jesus (Luke 17.20); not to be looked for with outward signs; but a rule of His Spirit, discerned by our spirits (1 Corinthians 2.14).

This is the phase of the kingdom which our churches pray may be extended. Where the king is, there is the kingdom, in the midst of us. That is the focus of our loyalty, our obedience. This was how Peter and John asked (Acts 4.19) whether it was right they should listen to the authorities, or to God. In our hearts we reverence Christ as Lord (1 Peter 3.15) not fearing what may come to us. Christ makes His home in our hearts – through our believing (Ephesians 3.17). We call Jesus our Lord (1 Corinthians 12.3). What applies to the individual, applies also to the Christian community; but just as there may be rebellion in the church, so individually we are not without sin.

There are New Testament references to the kingdom which speak of suffering for those who

enter it. Paul speaks in 2 Thessalonians 1.5 of being worthy of the kingdom of God *"for which you are suffering."* He told the new Christians in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch that *"through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts. 14.22).

4. But then comes the fourth phase, which contains reward and glory. *"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matthew 25.34). *"The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers ... the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"* (Matthew 13.41, 43).

This is the time when God asserts His rule universally, a kingdom in glory, not hidden but obvious to all. Christ comes in His glory, as judge over the nations (Matthew 25.31). Every knee bows. Every tongue acknowledges Jesus as Lord. (Philippians 2.9-11).

This time of Christ's rule following His coming fulfils the longings of all creation, also the hopes of His followers, but it is not pictured as without conflict. Although those who belong to Christ have been raised from death, there are still 'enemies', not all finally dealt with until the 'end' (1 Corinthians 15.23-6). But the potential for love, peace and happiness implicit in God's sovereignty finally becomes the universal state of things, so that in the end He is *"everything to everyone"* (1 Corinthians 15.28). That is the fullest answer to the prayer Jesus taught us ... *"Thy kingdom come."* That is the final outcome we look for: not only a gradual increase 'soul by soul and silently', nor just a longing to be able to serve our Lord in a better day than this; but after all the travails and processes of history, a work complete Thy kingdom – has come!

[This study owes much to Vine's Expository Dictionary, section on "Kingdom'.]
GC

"... always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus ... for we ... are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake ... so then death worketh in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4.1-12). It was a case of Paul putting Paul to death, for his brethren's benefit, that life and strength might be induced in them. It was the life's-blood of Paul that became the quickener, the energiser of these, his dear brethren in the Lord. When other men might be taking life leisurely – yea, when many of his brethren were taking life easily, Paul was intensively seeking ways and means of putting himself at the service of these believers, hoping

thereby to produce spiritual energy in his brethren. Persecution might stop some men, but not this seasoned warrior – perplexities might daunt less determined men but not this unconquerable spirit – "On every side pressed hard, but not hemmed in, without a way, but not without a bye-way; pursued, but not abandoned, thrown down, but not destroyed. At all times the putting to death of Jesus, in our body bearing about." That is Rotherham's beautiful translation of Paul's intensive words, as he describes what it means for him to serve his Corinthian brethren.

AFTER THE FLOOD

10 - End of the Golden Age

The latter part of the lifetime of Eber the man who is most likely to have first committed to writing the early chapters of Genesis as they now appear, witnessed a rapid and substantial increase in population. Some six hundred years had elapsed since the Flood, and the posterity of the sons of Noah was beginning to penetrate territories far distant from the first settlements in the "Plain of Shinar", the Euphrates-Tigris valley. Archaeologists have remarked on the evidences of this population increase at this time in this land itself, and with it the indications of peoples in faraway areas with which trade, the exchange of goods and materials, was beginning to develop. The human race was beginning to spread over the wider world.

Egypt, of course, had been settled for nearly three centuries and was already on the way to becoming a powerful force in world affairs. There was close contact between them and their fellows in Sumer (Shinar); they were at this time beginning to adapt the recently introduced Sumerian writing to form their own characteristic script, the well-known Egyptian hieroglyphics which adorn so many of the Egyptian tombs. It is established by scholars that the writing of Egypt was derived from that of Sumer, as was, in fact, every other kind of writing the world has known. At this time, also, the Great Pyramid was built, enshrining the geophysical and astronomical knowledge which the Egyptians had acquired. But now other influential nations that figure in later Bible history were in process of formation. The most significant of these from the point of view of Bible history and the affairs of the future nation of Israel would be the people known as the Canaanites. At the time of the dispersion from Babel it would seem that the sons of Canaan, son of Ham, made their way by easy stages to the land which was afterwards called by that name. Following the Euphrates northward and then striking west across the plains they came to the Mediterranean Sea coast and there they settled to become farmers and traders. They built towns on the coast – Sidon of the present day is one of them – and Joppa. Striking inland they founded Gaza and Damascus, Jerusalem, Jericho, Sodom and Gomorrah. Other centres known only to archaeologists and long since passed out of

existence appeared in later years but were probably started by the Canaanites. One of these was Ugarit, better known today as Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast, discovered in 1929; others were Alalakh in Syria, and Ebla, located and excavated in the 20th Century. They seem to have established and maintained a network of trading connections with their Sumerian and Egyptian counterparts and rapidly grew in power and influence. The Canaanites were still there when Abraham entered Canaan but by then there had been a great deal of immigration by Semitic peoples more or less kindred to Abraham. These mixed and intermarried and so gave rise a thousand years later to the celebrated nation of sea-going traders known as the Phoenicians. By that time their ships were making regular trading journeys to Britain, the Mediterranean countries, the West African coastlands, the West Indies and Central America. In the days of Eber, however, the farthest they appear to have penetrated was the area of the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, Crete, Greece and Egypt.

The Canaanites seem to have abandoned the recognition and worship of God more quickly than did the Sumerians or Egyptians. Their religious practices became debased at a very early stage, so much so as to become proverbial in the ancient world. The Phoenician historian Sanchuniathan was regarded by experts as mythical until the Ras Shamra tablets were found in 1929. He wrote about a thousand years before Christ, in the time of King David, who had a great deal to do with the Phoenicians of his day; Hiram, king of Tyre was their ruler. He said that in the earliest histories of his country, the Deity was known as the Most High God, the same term as used by the Sumerians of the same period. Perhaps even the depraved Canaanites were sincere worshippers of the true God when first they settled in the land, before its luxuries and pleasures turned their hearts to gross idolatry. The same thing happened to Israel in the same land a thousand years later. There are evidences that the worship of the true God endured at least among some of the Canaanites. When Abraham entered Canaan six hundred years after the time of Eber he found the Jebusites of Jerusalem a Canaanite tribe,

ruled by the Priest-king Melchisedek, "the Priest of the Most High God". Another of the same period was Abimelech, king of Gerar, near Gaza, also with his people acknowledging the God of Abraham. But in the main the Canaanites seem to have been apostates: almost from the start.

North of the Canaanites, the Arameans were settled, men of Aram and to some extent Arphaxad, sons of Shem. They had made their way up the Euphrates river and found the wide plains of what is now northern Syria and southern Turkey admirably adapted for their nomadic habits. Here they could tend their flocks and herds, moving their encampments from place to place as necessity dictated, with none to say them nay. Much later, as they increased in number and the land became more densely populated, they had to establish farmsteads and grow crops to feed themselves and their animals, but that was in the future. They eventually built towns and Haran was one of their chief centres. Abraham went to this town when he left Ur of the Chaldees, and he sent his steward there to find a bride for Isaac. When Jacob set out to get away from his brother Esau, this is the land to which he came. This land of Aram-Naharaim, "the land of the two rivers", was to be closely associated with Old Testament history.

Away on the eastern side of the Plain, beyond the Tigris river, lay the mountains from which the early descendants of Noah first came into the Plain of Shinar. Now they began to go back, contingents of men and women seeking living space, hardy men and women not afraid of the rigours of a mountain habitat. They called themselves Elamites and they were, in the main, descendants of Elam, the son of Shem. Once established in the mountains they speedily found that they had entered a land which yielded metals and precious stones – gold, silver, copper, rubies, emeralds, and the greatly prized blue-green mineral called lapis-lazuli. Building stone could be quarried in abundance, granite, limestone, sandstone and a wondrous polished black stone which used to be called diorite but has now been found to be limestone impregnated with carbon under heat and greatly to be desired for the making of statues and images. Forests of cedar, rivalling the famed cedars of Lebanon, of oak and of fir trees were there, providing unlimited supplies of timber for building. None of these things existed in the Plain

itself. So it was not long before the Elamites up in the mountains and the Sumerians down in the Plain were engaged in an intensive and expanding trade with each other and so the famous era of Sumerian artistic manufactures in metal and stone began.

Although bearing the name of Elam the Semite, the probability is that this people was a fusion of both races, Semitic and Sumerian, of Shem and Ham. Their national characteristics tend to show this. Their commercial and artistic qualities betraying Sumerian ancestry and their ferocity in war their Semitic. But this latter emerged later; at this time they lived at peace with their fellows although in later centuries they became a scourge to the more peaceable inhabitants of the plain.

The land of Havilah (Khavilah) of Gen. 2, south-west of the Caspian Sea, was probably an Elamite colony. So also was the city-state of Aratta, the existence of which was unknown until the 20th Century. This was a time of population expansion when groups of pioneers set out in all directions to find hitherto uninhabited lands in which to settle. Their children upon attaining maturity would set out still farther and so the world became populated. Within the next three or four centuries the Cushite had colonised the whole of Arabia and penetrated Iran and into Pakistan where by the time of Abraham a second extensive Sumerian civilisation existed on the plains of the river Indus. The descendants of Phut, son of Ham, had colonised North Africa over the area of the present Sahara desert, which in their day was fertile and forested, and those of Japheth had reached half-way across Siberia on the one hand and half-way across Europe on the other.

And while all this was going on the people in the Plain were quietly building their cities and organising their lives together, without acrimony and without war, still serving and worshipping the God of their forefather Noah. Here was the seed-bed in which was nurtured and carried through from generation to generation the Seed of Promise, that line of descent protected and guided by Divine Providence which was to lead first to Abraham and finally to Christ. Eber, at this time the custodian of the Divine oracles, must soon relinquish his charge to his son Peleg, and he in the fulness of time to Reu, and so on for three more generations and then to Abraham. That is the point at which the story of the out-working of God's Plan of redemption really

begins. Perhaps that is why what may be termed comprehensive Bible history, there has its commencement. From that time God began actively to work in the world of men to bring them back to Himself. The latter part of the life of Eber saw the birth of the conception of kingship. The first kings – little more than tribal chiefs – were at Kish, eight miles from the Tower. For nearly two centuries they held sway over all the settlements in the land, according to the old legends. Their rule was kindly and beneficent. The name of the third king of the dynasty, Palakinatim, living during the lifetime of Eber, means "reign of righteousness" and of the fourth king, Nangish-lishma, "may God listen with gladness". The second monarch was a woman whose name incorporated a suffix indicating loyalty to "the most high God". Such engravings as have been found have no indications of war; they depict only scenes of the hunting of food animals and the arts of the agriculturalist and the shepherd. Farming, fishing and trade with the mountain-dwellers to the east and with Egypt and Canaan in the west filled their life. The Most High God was worshipped by the Semites at Babel and at Nippur by the Sumerians and all creation seemed to be at peace. A Sumerian poet of six centuries later said of this period "There was a time when the cities of Shubur and Hamazi, the many cities of Sumer, the land of kings, Divine laws, and of all that is good; the land of Martu, living in security; the whole universe, the people in unison, to E'n lil 'lord of the heavens' in one tongue gave praise". Another of the same period described the time in the distant past when the wild animals were tame and submissive to man. Then there was no strife or rivalry between men, the land brought forth its crops and the rain came in its season and the sun shone warmly always and there was peace amongst men.

But changes were on the way. Towards the close of Eber's life a new power began to rise in the south to challenge the rulership of Kish. The little settlement at Uruk (Erech of Gen. 10.11) was becoming an influential centre and beginning to manifest ambitions for dominion. According to the "King Lists" compiled some eight centuries later, the first man recorded as asserting himself as ruler was one Meskiag-gashir, and of this man two curious and unexplained things are recorded. The first is that he was "the son of the Sun God" and the

second that he "crossed the sea and ascended the mountain". Now at the time the "King Lists" were compiled the Sun-God was Marduk, and the origin of Marduk was the Biblical personage Nimrod. Does this suggest that this first recorded ruler of Uruk was in fact the actual son of Nimrod and perhaps succeeded his father in the rulership of the Sumerian south country? The timing could be right. Nimrod is most likely to have lived during the early part of Eber's life and this postulated son in the latter part. If the case is indeed so, then it is possible to link Nimrod with the annals of history outside the Bible. The second expression is more obscure. Why attach special significance to his crossing the sea to ascend a mountain? One immediately thinks of the sacred mountain which they all revered as the "Mount of the East" where their fathers emerged from the Ark and toward which their temple-towers at Babel and Nippur pointed in recognition of its sanctity. In later times that same mountain was to become the mountain of the gods, the centre of the world and the entrance to Arallu, the nether-world of the dead, but at this time it was sacred to the Most High God, the God of Noah and his sons. Is this expression a reference to some kind of pilgrimage to the mountain. One of his descendants, Gilgamesh, King of Uruk a century or so later, is recorded as having done the same thing. A glance at a map, will show that to reach the mountain Kuh-i-Anaran in Lat. 32N, Long. 46E from Uruk, the traveller would have either to cross the then existing northern extension of the Persian Gulf or make his way around its northern end. The latter course would involve travelling through the home domains of Kish and it might be that relations between Semites and Sumerians were already becoming strained and so the pilgrim elected to follow the sea route.

Somewhere about this time the city and land of Kish suffered a major disaster. A colossal flood completely destroyed the city and its surroundings, and drowned most of its inhabitants. An abnormal quantity of water carried down by the great rivers built up in the level plain and brought the peaceful life of the people to an end. It was a long time before Kish recovered – probably several generations. Langdon says ("The Excavations at Kish," Vol. 4) "This flood definitely marked the end of an era. It covered uniformly and for a long time all that remained of the civilization of Kish.

This flood layer marks a complete separation between the types which we have now left behind, the industries of the potter, founder, sculptor, and the types of industries which will be found above it". The physical remains show this; the evidence of a highly sophisticated civilization below the "flood layer" is replaced by a considerably less cultured one above, and in some respects Kish never recovered its former grandeur. It might well be this event which gave the rising power of Uruk the opportunity to take the initiative and make its bid for the leadership of the country. In another sphere of life, it might also have been the reason for the migration of the family of Shem marked out in the Bible — Eber, his son Peleg, and his grandson Reu. All these might well have been alive at this time — from the Kish-Babel area to the southern city of Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham, great-great-grandson of Reu, is found living four centuries later. A rather flimsy evidence to this effect is found in the Gen. 10 statement that the sons of Joktan, son of Eber, made their dwelling in an area which although at present very uncertain, was most probably in the south country and in the vicinity of Ur.

But Langdon's statement above quoted to the effect that this Kish flood "definitely marked the end of an era" has proved true in more senses than he could have realised in 1924. The discoveries of the 20th Century have established that it was at about this time that three great evils affecting mankind had their rise. They are evils that have afflicted men ever since and will inevitably continue so to do until the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From the time of the Flood until this time, the evidence is that men lived peaceably with each other in the reverence and worship of the one true God, the God of Noah their common ancestor. In all the remains and relics that have been discovered there are no warlike weapons; in such admittedly scanty records as exist there are no references to man fighting man, and no evidence of worship offered to false gods. But now there came a great change.

Those three great evils that brought this "Golden Age" to an end were commercialism, war and paganism. It is a remarkable fact that all three made their debut into the world together, as though they were interdependent. Men were penetrating

fast into the outer world and discovering all kinds of exciting materials and products, Trade between the peoples developed in consequence and that gave rise to greed and selfishness and so eventually to war. With the loss of high moral values men lost faith in the Most High God and began to imagine lesser gods, gods made in their own image and likeness, and so a pattern was set which all generations have followed to this present day. In the days of Eber the old order passed away and life was to be very different thereafter.

(To be continued)

AOH

THEY WAIT

Did you say the wonderful trees are dead
Because their limbs are bare?
Did you say that all around is dead
Because no flowers are there?
Wait — till the soft warm breezes blow —
Wait for the sun and rain —
Here is a beautiful truth I know,
They all shall live again.

Did you say that the loved ones you have lost
Are dead beneath the sod?
They only sleep — they are not dead —
They wait for the 'Trump of God'.
They wait — till the Risen Redeemer
In glory shall cleave the skies,
At the sounding of the trumpet
The 'dead in Christ' shall rise.

So when the buds are bursting
And blossoms wake with the Spring,
We remember in that 'morning'
We shall wake to meet our King.
Oh! Glorious morn! Oh! Glorious Lord!
We wait Thy coming, when
We put on 'immortality'.
And rise to live again

(This poem was found among some old papers belonging to our auntie. It had probably been copied out for her when her husband died, about 30 years ago. When was it written? Who knows, a hundred years ago?)

RMC

ASPECTS OF JOY

So what is Joy?

"Joy – a vivid emotion of pleasure, gladness" (dictionary). Joy is listed by Paul as the second fruit of the Spirit, next to love and peace. Joy can be a sustained condition (we may know persons who seem to be continually joyful) or it may be a transitory emotion, linked to a particular cause, and fading as the reason for it ceases. Rejoicing and praise of God go together.

*"O praise ye the Lord, praise Him in the height,
Rejoice in his word, ye angels of light ...*

*O praise ye the Lord thanksgiving and song
To Him be outpoured all ages along.*

For love in creation, for heaven restored

For grace of salvation, O praise ye the Lord!"

Joy results from God's action. There is the famous passage in Job (38.7) describing poetically the laying of the foundations of the earth – when *"the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."* Creation is an expression of His love, and He has joy in creating. In our humble way we experience something of the same emotion when our plans succeed – the artist who completes a picture, the engineer whose machine works, the lover whose attention wins a response, the evangelist whose words bring a new person into the family of God. Indeed, we feel joy whenever we are fulfilling the purposes for which God made us, and He shares our joy (or we share His!)

Mary the mother of Jesus fulfilled the purpose of her existence. At the biological level she shared the human experience of pregnancy, but far over and above this it was the manner of her pregnancy and the identity of her child that inspired her. *"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed For he that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name"* (Luke 1.47). It was an experience to awe and chasten her, but she was joyful. She sensed that in using her, God was showing His acceptance of people like her who had faith, and was putting on one side the dictator and the multi-millionaire.

A little later the angel was speaking to the shepherds: *"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."* This great experience for them gleamed

and was gone: one night of glory, and then an infant in a feeding trough. Yet the joy they felt must have lingered. The fact which provoked this joy continued to bring real joy to many people for many years – a person had arrived who would save mankind. If we can grasp what happened in the world at that time, we shall rejoice. The better we understand the purpose and effects of Jesus' life, the greater our joy will be.

Jesus was aware of the pains women experience in childbirth; also of a mother's joy when her child is born. He used this sequence from distress to delight to encourage his disciples on the last night before Calvary (John 16.20). He gave a picture of future joy. His disciples were going through the pain of saying goodbye to Him, of realising that they had to say goodbye. Jesus pointed out to them that they would see Him again. He may have been referring to his resurrection, when they had the joy of meeting Him alive after losing Him in death. But after a few weeks they would be saying goodbye again, more happily, but still goodbye. So they must anticipate the joy of His return. It is like the joy of being reunited with a loved friend. It is the joy of being part of a team that ministers salvation.

Paul too used the picture of childbirth, of pain leading to joy. In Romans 8 he speaks of the problems of our world: the futility, the sense of mankind not going anywhere, 'when will we ever learn'; our slavery to the tyranny of change and decay. This condition though painful and long drawn out is essentially temporary. Paul looks for a time when *"the sons of God are revealed"*, when the magnificent liberty of the children of God characterises a new era, when love's work in the planet is purposeful and permanent. This means great joy.

But joy is not only to be found 'in the morning', we can experience it now, 'tonight'. There are many delights in trusting our Lord, in fellowship, in all the blessings of today. Sometimes these joys require effort to find them and appreciate them. Mental effort, perhaps, to keep life in perspective. "J stands for Jesus, Y stands for yourself, O stands for nothing" – so we must let nothing come between us and the love of Christ. Or discipline, perhaps: "Jesus first, Others next, Yourself last" – a rule for living which may be hard to keep, but

brings its own satisfaction. Joy is like a fruit which needs to be cultivated, all the intrusive cares and emotions being weeded out of our lives so that the true fruit can grow. Even beyond this self discipline, the trials and problems which come into our lives unannounced and unwanted can be regarded as a source of joy. That is, if we follow James' way of thinking (1.2). "*Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials.*" The theory is that trials which test our faith produce endurance, with the consequence that we become more complete as Christians. Of course, if we do not respond appropriately, this will not happen.

It is all part of joy-cultivation: to impress on ourselves the thought, 'I will enjoy life's medicine. It tastes awful, but it is doing me good.' We can even thank our 'Doctor'.

It may be possible to psyche oneself into a state of being joyful. What is more real and permanent is to relax and 'Rejoice in the Lord'. Paul's advice to the Philippian Christians (4.4, ff) will help in this. To dwell on what is right and pure and lovely. To trust our concerns as a request to God before they become worries. And to be aware of God's power available to meet our needs now and in eternity.

The joy of the Lord is an emotion, but is based on a great reality – His love.

The Israelites of Ezra and Nehemiah's time had the book of God's law read aloud to them, and were dismayed that they had not been keeping it. Their leaders told them to cheer up. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*" The point for them to remember was not that they had failed God: it was that God would never fail them. So they should rejoice, have a party, give gifts to those in need. Their joy was to be not only private and personal, but tangibly expressed with happiness and love shared among them all.

Joy is not simply a private matter. Like the other fruit of the Spirit, love, patience, faithfulness and the rest, it applies as we move among our friends and all those we contact in our lives. We have love, which wells out towards others. We are patient ... with others; faithful ... towards others. So with joy. Others cause us joy: our joy infects others. And joy is part of the character of God! The fruits of His Spirit express what He himself is like. So as we trust in Him, may we, as Paul prayed, have joy and peace in believing. (Rom 15.13)

GC

GOD'S TOOLS

The Carpenter's tools had a conference. Brother Hammer was in the chair. The meeting had informed him that he must leave because he was too noisy. "But," he said, "If I am to leave this Carpenter's Shop, Brother Gimlet must go too, for he is so insignificant that he makes very little impression.

Little Brother Gimlet arose and said, "all right, but Brother Screw must go along also; you have to turn him around again and again to get anywhere." Brother Screw then said, "If you wish I will go, but Brother Plane must leave also. All his work is on the surface, there is no depth to it. To this Brother Plane replied "Well, Brother Rule will have to withdraw if I do, for he is always measuring other folks as though he were the only one who is right." Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper and said, "I just do not care for him, as he is rougher than he ought to be. He is always rubbing people the wrong way." Brother Chisel had risen to give a cutting remark, when in the midst of this discussion the Carpenter of Nazareth walked

into His tool room for He had come to perform His day's work. He put on His apron and went to the bench to work.

The article that He was completing was A New Creation. He employed the hammer, the gimlet, the screw, the plane, the ruler, the sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work was over and His article completed in perfection Brother Saw arose and said, "Brethren, I perceive that all of us are labourers together with God." How many of us as Christians are just like tools, fussing at others because they do not do things just the way we think they should. There was not one accusation against any of the tools that was not absolutely true; yet the Carpenter of Nazareth used every one of them; and He used each in a place that another would not do at all.

Let us be good tools in the hands of God.

Written by Sr. Burdet and submitted by a reader.

KNOWING THE LORD

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10.14,15 NRSV). In this parable Jesus describes Himself and what He does. The word 'good' is from the Greek word 'kalos' which Barclay says means 'winsome'. A 'good' shepherd looked after the sheep with sacrificial love. Today we might say "what a lovely person"; someone to whom we are readily attracted – someone to whom children are drawn. He is a shepherd who is prepared to sacrifice Himself for His sheep. He is a shepherd who cares for the sheep because they are His own, unlike a hired man. He provides the best pasture and cleanest water so that His sheep can grow. He protects them from robbers and predators. To do that He must know His sheep and they must know Him. Does this really describe our relationship to the Lord? We may know lots of things about the Old and New Testament but if we don't know Him, shall we be ready to meet Him 'face to face'? To know Him best we must be like Him – winsome – truly 'good'. Like the sheep of the flock we must learn to trust and obey Him, for this will not only provide for our needs but prevent us from straying. This gentle, patient shepherd longs to unite us to Himself. His Father becomes our Father.

Jesus took the covenant pictures of the Old Testament, the shepherd, the vineyard and the husbandman and reinterpreted them for His followers in a way that showed how very intimate this relationship becomes. He leads His sheep and knows them all by name. William Thomson describes sheep in the Holy Land, and how the shepherd leads as they follow his voice. H. V. Morton tells of two flocks mixed up together in one pen during the night but in the morning the sheep were separated into their own flock when they recognised their shepherd's voice and followed him out to pasture as he talked and sang to them.

In first century Israel, the 'hireling' sheep-minders didn't know their sheep. Scribes and Pharisees refused to accept those Jews who didn't interpret the Law as they did; yet it is clear that those who were not fussy about traditions were regarded by Jesus as genuine sons and daughters of Israel, more than their leaders. A Jew could not conceive of the idea that Gentiles were part of

God's flock – a Phoenician mother – a centurion – a woman by a well.

The ideas contained in the parable in John 10 were familiar to the people of Israel. The picture of Israel as the flock of God was woven in their thinking. Psalm 78. 70-72 speaks of David as an under-shepherd and Psalm 80.1 pictures God as the shepherd. Psalm 95.7 has the reassuring words *"we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."* The later prophets developed the theme *"He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."* (Isaiah 40.11) Jeremiah saw the result of the waywardness of the flock, *"He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd"* (31.10) and Ezekiel 11.12 *"For this is what the sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep."*

In His last discourse with His disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus spoke to them of their closeness to Himself and to the Father (John 14-16). Jews sought eternal life and asked Jesus about it several times in His ministry. Speaking to the Father (John 17) He says *"This is eternal life, that they may know you"*. He develops the theme into a 'oneness' with the Father and the Son and with each other and these relationships are interdependent. From Pentecost until today the oneness between the Father and each of His children has developed the fruit of the Spirit through the work of the Lord Jesus.

What is God like? How can we come to know someone who is so much greater than the vast Universe that He has made? And why select us for this wondrous privilege? If we think in terms of knowledge then it is mind-blowing. His magnificence is too immense for our comprehension. But Jesus assures us that we can 'know Him'. This is not the same as knowing about Him. A child may know very little about his or her parents, but he should begin to know them from very early in life and the process begins long before the child becomes aware of him or herself.

To come to know God doesn't demand that we are specially clever or knowledgeable. We do not need to know the world's great thinkers or understand their philosophies. Paul makes this

clear in 1 Cor. 1 and finally quotes from Jeremiah 9.23, 24. *"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these things I delight, declares the Lord"*. (Jer. 22.15, 16) Through the bitterness of suffering this prophet came to know God as well as any person knew Him until Jesus came to Earth.

We can know God by thinking His thoughts, reading His Word and listening to Him in the conviction of our hearts. No preacher or book can substitute for Him. He wants us to share His life and He wants us to be like Him. He created mankind so that He could express His love because He wants to share. Since the dawn of history God has fostered that companionship. It helps us to understand this if we look carefully at the Old Testament folk. We can start as early as Enoch who walked with God. Did he catch something of the idyllic friendship of Eden? Abraham entertained God's messengers. They were direct representatives of the Living God – to speak with them was the nearest that a human could get to hearing Him speak. Abraham was talking to a friend on that monumental walk to the Judean ridge in which he probed God's mind through the angel (Gen. 18). From this record of the Patriarch interceding for the Cities of the Plain it is clear that Abraham already knew something of God's compassion as well as His justice. Isaac met God at Gerar where the covenant and the promise were renewed and he was told that he must 'stay in the Land'. Jacob met God at Bethel and was told to leave the Land to go to Haran; but God would go with him. What God wanted for the father was not what He wanted for the son. They were given quite different instructions. Jacob returned under God's protection and wrestled with the 'stranger' and eventually celebrated His return to the Land at Bethel by worshipping God. In order that he could enter the presence of a holy God in a holy land he had to clean up his household. Much later still, at Beersheba, now he was becoming an old man, God met him again and told Jacob to go from the Land to Egypt. He promised again that He, the God of his fathers, would be with him, to protect him, to provide for him and one day restore his descendants to the Promised Land. In all these

incidents a patriarch met God and was given instructions as to what he should do (Genesis chapters 26, 28, 35 and 46).

As we turn from the book of the patriarchs to the book of the history of God's people, we are faced with the man through whom the Law was given to Israel and through whom the Covenant was made. This man came to know God in a very special way. At the Burning Bush, Moses began a conversation with God that did not end until he stood for the last time on Mount Nebo. Before that he was to reach the heights of Sinai and come as near face to face with God as any man was able. He also reached the top of Pisgah and looked across the Land of the Promise but was not allowed into it. Perhaps his failure to express God's forgiveness to a thirsty people at Meribah had something to do with this great leader being pronounced unholy (Numbers 20). On Mount Sinai it was revealed to Moses and to Israel, what kind of person God really was. Many Christians, over the centuries, have failed to understand and reflect this revelation. Moses had already learned that the God of Israel was the all-wise and all knowing God but now He discovered that He was the One loving, forgiving and compassionate God. (Ex. 34.6, 7). Moses saw and reflected the glory of God for the rest of His life – but once or twice He found it hard to do so – so did Jonah – so do we all.

Samuel was confused when a voice called to him in the night because he had *"not yet come to know the Lord"*. The story of this great man's life shows that in after days Samuel did come to know the Lord. So also did the King that the prophet anointed at Bethlehem. This was the man who had been a shepherd and was able to write the Shepherd Psalm – 23. He had walked through the Valley of Shadows with his Shepherd; he had known the 'still waters' and the 'prepared table' and wanted nothing more than to spend all his days with his God in His House (Psalm 27). He fell from grace in a big way more than once but Psalm 51 shows that David understood God's mercy.

Elijah seems to have relished the public drama of a contest with King Ahab on Mount Carmel but it was on Mount Sinai he came really close to God. Elisha was a man of strong determination to root out evil yet he showed God's mercy when he told the King of Israel not to slaughter his enemies but to give them a meal and send them home. *"From*

that time on Aramean raids on Israel ceased." Elisha had discovered how God intended man to treat man. Violence only breeds more violence – oh that men would learn God's way of peace for that is the only way that 'works'.

How difficult it must have been for Hosea to learn about God's compassion when dealing with his unfaithful wife. Yet there can be few more telling lessons than this prophet's forgiveness and restoration of Gomer. He must have gone through mental agony, seeing his wife run away to another man, then to find that she had been made a slave and finally to buy her back and ultimately redeem her as his wife again. Hosea must have spent much time with God to learn that lesson. God has dealt and will yet deal with Israel as Hosea dealt with Gomer. And this is how He deals with His children now. Campbell Morgan wrote that God makes no terms with His people's sin but stays no sacrifice to heal their backsliding. Jesus quoted Hosea twice – at the tax-collector's supper for his former colleagues and in the cornfield when the disciples 'milled the grain' and broke the Pharisees' rules. *"I wanted mercy, not sacrifice"*.

Jeremiah commended Josiah when he wrote of him as *"He did what was right and just ... He defended the cause of the poor and needy, so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?"* To know God is to be like Him and this means that every word and every action must be beneath the control of the Spirit and from that **kindness and generosity must result**.

How are we to learn what God is really like? The writer to the Hebrews in his first few verses tells us that Jesus *"is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being"*. So if we keep *"looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"* we shall be like the Father. When Thomas Carlyle was asked by a young pastor what his parish needed most, the old sage replied "What this parish needs is a man who knows God otherwise than by hearsay". One of the saddest comments in the whole of the Bible are the words of Jesus when He said *"I never knew you"* (Matt. 7.23; 25.12).

Does He know us?

(To be concluded)
DN

1 PETER 5.7

CASTING all your care upon Him –
What contentment this would bring:
Handing over to the Father
Trials, troubles, everything.

Casting ALL your care upon Him –
Keeping nothing, yielding all;
Only those who trust completely
Rest in His complete control.

Casting all YOUR care upon Him –
Problems known to you alone;
Yet your Father sees your burden,
Longs to bear it as His own.

Casting all your CARE upon Him –
Why be overwhelmed by fear,
When this crushing weight of worry
In His love would disappear?

Casting all your care UPON HIM –
See the One who claims your cares!
God so strong and wise and loving,
God so swift to answer prayer.

From 'The Quest' M.K-S

Copies of 'The Quest' are available for £2 cheque payable to CART

TRUST

"Dear Lord, the way seems very dark,
I cannot see."

"Yes, child, I know, but I will be thy light –
Come, follow Me!"

"Dear Lord, so lonely is this way –
Where are my friends?"

"My child, dost thou forget how far from Me
Their pathway tends?"

"Dear Master, I am growing weak,
I scarce can stand."

"O, foolish child, trust not in thine own strength,
Come, take My hand;

For I have trod this way before,
So dark to thee.

I know each step, its weariness and pain,
Wilt trust in Me?"

"Yea, Lord, though friendless, lonely, dark,
This way may be,

I will be strong. Beloved Guide, lead on,
I follow Thee!"

‘HEBEL’ – THE PREACHER’S VERDICT ON HUMAN AMBITION

No one can doubt the importance of being a success in this world. It is a universal human objective – the housewife wants to be a successful housewife, the sportsman strives to be successful, the nation esteems itself as being successful. Anyone not anxious for success must be lazy or lacking in ambition. But if we believe the Preacher, success is illusory.

"The Preacher", "Qoheleth" in Hebrew, "Ecclesiastes" in Greek, is responsible for twelve chapters of almost unadulterated pessimism in the Old Testament. The Hebrew in which he wrote, it is said, is characteristic of the period two hundred years before Christ. If this is so, who was he? He describes himself as a son of David, king in Jerusalem, who sought wisdom, who created houses and parks, possessed slaves and herds, gathered gold and treasures, and had all the women a man could ever want. Surely this must be King Solomon who lived a thousand years before Christ. It is possible that words from Solomon were included in a work compiled centuries later. Or it has been suggested that someone put this sermon into the mouth of Solomon for the sake of effect, as was done in those days. He was a preacher, a teacher, a philosopher, a speaker. As such his words would have been directed, not to insiders within the temple, but to the world outside. His message here, one of profound pessimism, is *"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."*

'Vanity' in the AV is the Hebrew word *hebel*, so translated 54 times in the Old Testament. Of these 54, 30 are to be found in this little book written by the *ecclesiastes*. The word has various translations in modern versions, 'emptiness' (NEB), 'in vain' (Moffatt), 'meaningless' (NIV), 'useless' (GNB and New Century), even 'smoke' (The Message). Strong has 'transitory and unsatisfactory'. These renderings all point to a disillusion with human success. There's nothing in it. Pointless. It doesn't really mean anything. Like smoke, you can see it from a distance, but when you get close there is nothing there to lay hold of. The expression 'useless' points in two directions: a realisation that human endeavour fails of its objective, and does not truly succeed; and the emotional reaction when you see what your hand has grasped and throw it

away in disgust – *"Useless!"* So what price success?

The things which the Preacher describes in this way belong to his own place and time. It is life 'under the sun' – where blazing light out of clear skies exposes what men are doing. It is a man's world – no scope for the feminist here. The preferred way of life recommended by the Preacher is not ceaseless striving, but for a man to settle down happily with his wife and family. Women in this book are mere adjuncts, worse, they can be a distraction, and the Preacher does not find them to have any sense or wisdom. Men should obey God and make the best of their short lives, Then death will come as the end. And God will judge. Modern expositors see that this bleak picture reveals the need for the New Testament revelation, of Jesus who is the resurrection from death and the bringer of eternal life.

According to the Preacher, the best course for men living under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy your work in the here and now. Certainly not to live a life full of pain and struggle and sorrow, with minds that cannot rest even when you should be sleeping. If you do not enjoy your work, you might as well not have been born. It is those who please God that attain the right state of mind, it is He who gives men wisdom and knowledge and joy. If you do not please God, others will enjoy the benefit of your work. We Christians might question this view of life – are faithful Christians never persecuted, always successful, do they never lose their property, are they never anxious (as Paul was anxious about his fellow believers)? It can not mean that God is displeased with them when such things happen. Indeed, it is their calling! But they are also called to joy, love and peace, and godliness with contentment we are told is great gain. We do expect God to bless us with wisdom and knowledge and joy, both now and hereafter.

It is death, a boundary beyond which he cannot see, which most frustrates the Preacher. He would appreciate the point of what Jesus said about the rich fool who suddenly died in the midst of his prosperity, *"who will these things belong to when you're gone?"* As for the actual person who dies, can we be sure that a dead human is different from a dead animal – where has the life gone? The spirit,

the Preacher concludes, returns to God who gave it. But *"whatever work you do, do your best, because you are going to the grave, where there is no working, no planning, no knowledge and no wisdom"*. So enjoy the little transitory life that God has given you – it is all you have got. Enjoy yourself, but remember that God will judge you. You will be dead a long time. That is the Preacher's view, which the Pharisees and Sadducees were debating later on. Jesus came to save us from death.

Another frustration is the unfairness of life. Rewards in this world do not match deeds, so don't count your chickens, don't even try too hard to be good. Often the good die young. The wicked succeed. Cruel people have all the power. There is a hierarchy of oppression – an official mistreats the poor, he is mistreated by his superior, who is cheated by the governor, while the king gets his cut. In our day, the workers and the bosses? Workers of the world unite! Hardly possible in places like Mugabe's Africa. And the greatest sinners are given the best funerals! Why does God permit injustice and oppression in this world, we ask. And does He plan ever to do anything about it?

Mankind, it seems, are born to a life of disappointment. What reason is there for all our striving if it all comes to nothing. The Preacher set out to understand the world, and found it frustrating because he had no power to change things. *"If something is crooked, you can't make it straight."* Much wisdom leads to much disappointment. So he tried self-fulfilment. Alcohol? Possessions? Power? Money? Sex? After trying it all he realised that it all was empty, transitory, pointless.

Ceaseless striving is not worth it. Not striving out of envy for others and what they have done. Not striving in love of riches. Not the driving lust to get more and more. Not in the ambition that drives from rags to riches – for popularity does not last, and others will inherit the riches. So what is the alternative? *"Some say that it is foolish to fold your hands and do nothing, because you will starve to death. May be so, but I say it is better to be content with what little you have. Otherwise you will always be struggling for more, and that is like chasing the wind."* Is that how modern 'personalities' find life to be? Footballers?

And nothing is permanent. Not a reputation – you'll be forgotten. Not youthful success. Not the laughter of fools. Not health and strength, for your

powers will fail, your eyes will grow dim, you lose your marbles, and then – ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

God, on the other hand, is permanent, and so is the world He has set in place. Men need to accept His order of things. People live, and people die, but the earth continues forever. The wind blows south and north, then it turns round and repeats the same pattern, going nowhere. All the rivers flow to the sea, but the sea never becomes full. An adolescent may think that everything is boring and repetitive, and nothing is really new. And worse, there is nothing you can do about it. Old worn out people will feel the same. And everything, inevitably, will happen in its time – birth, death, planting, harvest, wailing and dancing, creating and destroying, they all go on. It is for us to discern, and then act upon, the right time: to be silent or to speak, either to love or to hate, either to fight or to make reconciliation. Because that is how things are, it is no use arguing with God about it – *"the more you say, the more useless it is."*

The Preacher's final advice is *"Honour God and obey His commands, because this is all people must do. God will judge everything, even what is done in secret, the good and the evil"*. This is salutary advice. It is the sort of thing John the Baptist was saying. It is valid advice too for our own century.

Ecclesiastes was writing against a background not of life in our modern economy, but in a situation which may remind us of what we learn about parts of Africa today. Today it may seem that the effect of technology is to increase the possibility of changing things, of making a difference, reducing the frustrations. It may seem that 'democracy' with its checks and balances decreases the opportunity for oppression. We may wish to modify the Preacher's conclusions, particularly since the word of the kingdom has leavened parts of society for two thousand years. Even so, looking around us we can see a lot of truth in what the Preacher said.

We today do not so much live 'under the sun' as in the light of the TV screen, which brings before us a panorama of life not unlike what the Preacher describes, for all the differences. Our 'stars', men and women, have their ambitions; the chariots of war trundle across the world; the demon of famine stalks into our living rooms; the great and the good come, and they go. And we, like God, have the opportunity to judge all that we see. Positively, we

are on the look out for the poor and humble, genuine folk, like Mary the mother of Jesus. We look too for men and women of wisdom, who are aware that all our striving may prove to be in vain. Perhaps we feel that this world is not our home.

Our homeland, says Paul, is in heaven, and we are waiting for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. He will change our weak bodies to be like His own glorious body *"The sufferings we have now are nothing compared to the great glory that will be shown to us. Everything God made is waiting with excitement for God to*

show his children's glory completely. Everything God made was changed to become useless, not by its own wish but because God wanted it and because all along there was this hope: that everything God made would be set free from ruin to have the freedom and glory that belong to God's children." (Romans 8.18-21 NCV) This is a hope which carries us far beyond the Preacher's perspective of meaningless and transitory human life.

GC

BIBLE CROSSWORD

You may treat this as just another crossword. Or you may take time and find stories to remember and teaching to consider. The words are taken from the Authorised Version. They are usually the same in the NIV. Other versions have not been checked, but spellings sometimes differ.

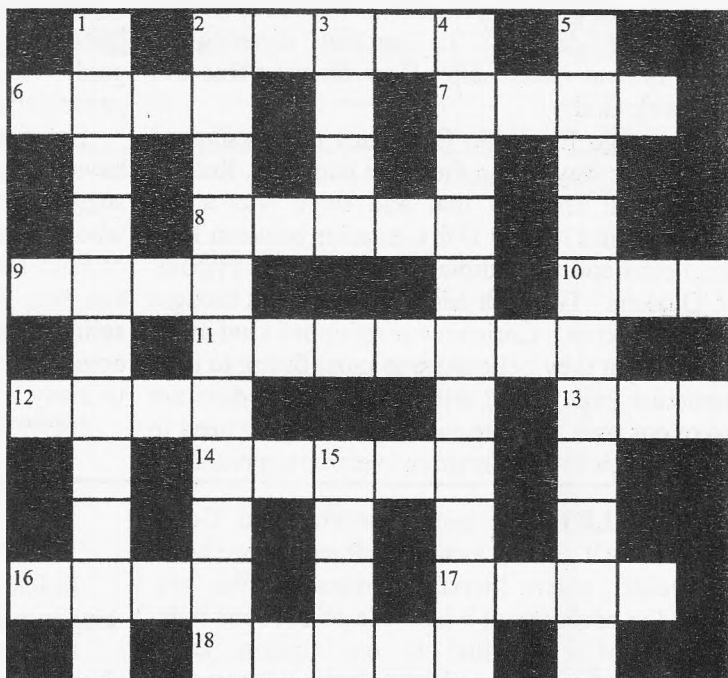
Clues

Down

- 1 A special kind of life, John 3.16 (11)
- 2 What David broke when he let Uriah be killed in battle, 2 Samuel, 12.9 (11)
- 3 The implication for God if we say we have not sinned, 1 John 1.10 (4)
- 4 Place to which the Ark of the Covenant was returned by the Philistines, 1 Samuel 6.13 (11)
- 5 Waterfalls? (Check the AV), Psalm 42.7 (11)
- 15 Sound of a tsunami? Psalm 46.3 (4)

Across

- 2 Made the people be silent before Moses, Numbers 13.30 (5)
- 6 God is this, but confusion creeps in, 1 John 4.8 (4)
- 7 Twin mountain with Gerizim, Joshua 8.33 (4)
- 8 Where the water was bitter, Exodus 15.23 (5)
- 9 Be off, the first son of Jesse, 1 Samuel 16.6 (4)
- 10 Substitute for Isaac, Genesis 22.13 (3)
- 11 Host or hostess for a house church, Colossians, 4.1 (7)



- 12 Paul's rights were not, 1 Corinthians 9.12 (4)
- 13 The city of Hadad, whose wife was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-Zehad, 1 Chronicles 1.50 (3)
- 14 Where Jabin and Jobab and a mighty host met to fight against Israel, Joshua 11.5 (5)
- 16 Some say Paul wrote Hebrews, some say Apollos, but this is what a doubter might say (4)
- 17 Where biblical archaeologists find artifacts (4)
- 18 The law of God as revealed to Moses and recorded in the Pentateuch (5)

(Answers on page 72)

CONTINUING THOUGHTS ... SO WHAT IS WORSHIP?

In ancient times worship was offered to God with sacrifice that atoned for sin and allowed the worshipper to have fellowship with God. The underlying principle has not changed but God has provided the sacrifice in Jesus and opened a much more real and permanent way to fellowship with Himself. The worshipper no longer presents a material offering on an altar through a priest but rather presents himself in spiritual worship (Rom. 12.1). Graham Kendrick (1) wrote "Worship is the response to a relationship. Within the circle of a truly loving family you will always find an increasing flow of thanks and praise and worship, as the worth of each member is affirmed by both words and deeds." The ancient meaning of 'worship' was 'worthship'. How do we value our time with God?

Long ago European Christians all worshipped in the same way and in the same language. Reform and revival changed that and there was a big difference in 17th and 18th Centuries between 'high Anglicans and the simple worship of the 'Friends' or 'Quakers'. The 19th and 20th Centuries brought further diversity. Christians worshipped God in the manner that they believed was most fitting to their particular beliefs. But criticism of others does not make our own worship more spiritual. We need to respect the way our Christian brethren approach the

one Father. Human parents find that their children approach them in different ways. Some Christians would never rub shoulders in a place of worship with those who differ from them doctrinally even although we read the same Bible and sing the same hymns. What if we spend eternity with them? What is really important is that we are aware that we are standing, sitting or kneeling in the presence of Almighty God – our Father in Heaven. What does He think about the divergences? He wants us – "warts and all". There are outward blemishes for which He will have a speedy remedy. The treatment for the inner life is more radical.

We worship Him because He delights in our joining hearts and voices before Him. May He guide us in our worship, in preparation, participation and in reflecting his glory to others.

One dear saint of God used to remind us that we have an appointment with the Lord. Another suggested that an empty chair might remind of One who is present. May He forgive our forgetfulness of Him and challenge us to greater sensitivity to His will and a closer walk with Him; there is solidarity and strength in doing things together. We come to Him as a family and our Father never turns us away.

1 Graham Kendrick – 'Worship' p.75 (Kingsway Publications 1995)

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READERS' LETTERS are welcome but time limits our reply. When writing please quote the reference number on the BFU address label or send the whole label.

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD

Down 1 Everlasting, 2 Commandment, 3 Liar, 4 Bethshemesh, 5 Waterspouts, 15 Roar
Across 2 Caleb, 6 Lveo, 7 Ebal, 8 Marah, 9 Elia, 10 Ram, 11 Nymphas, 12 Used, 13 Pai (or Pau), 14 Merom, 16 Anon. 17 Site, 18 Torah

BLESSED ATTITUDE (Matthew 5.1-12 paraphrased)

Rejoice, you who are childlike, the heavenly kingdom is yours.

Rejoice, you who mourn, like (collared) doves, God's comfort is yours.

Rejoice, you who are as meek as a cart-horse, the earth shall be yours.

Rejoice, you who ruminate on righteousness, you shall never be hungry.

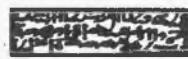
Rejoice, you 'guide dogs', trained to help the needy, you too will be helped.

Rejoice, you with hearts as innocent as lambs, you shall meet God.

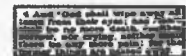
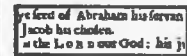
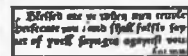
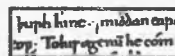
Rejoice, you 'doves' who bring peace, the God of peace is your Father.

Rejoice, you are harried by 'hawks', the kingdom of heaven is yours.

It is a blessing to be hated and hunted for my sake, so rejoice and dance. Yours is a great reward in heaven. God's spokesmen were ever ill-treated.



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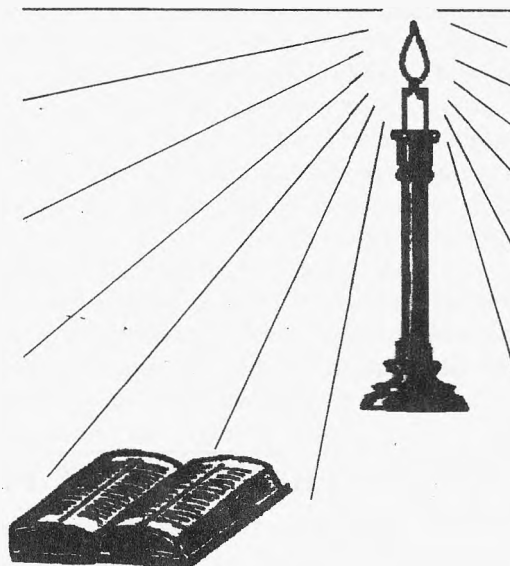
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Literature sent Overseas is sent to many countries. BFU normally handles only its own literature and we do not stock new Bibles. BFU does not supply literature in bulk to new readers and normally we only send sample copies for such enquiries.

If readers can send us **Bibles and Bible study helps** which they no longer need, we will gladly send them to readers who have a need.

Booklets are being **reprinted** and we hope to have a stock of 'Spirit of Prophecy' and 'The Cup of the Lord' available later this year. These will be followed by reprinting 'Samuel, Greatest of the Prophets' and possibly 'The Tragedy of Samson'.

We are greatly encouraged by 'feed back' on recent articles. We will endeavour to maintain high spiritual value in published material but members of the BFU team may not always agree with every expression of thought.

BFU will gladly send bulk supplies of 'Future Probation in Christian Belief' to those who can use them. All BFU dispatch parcels must be limited to 5 kgs. All literature is sent surface - printed paper rate which may take several weeks to reach readers overseas. Help with postage on literature

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Tell a friend - if you have found the Bible Study Monthly a blessing in your Christian life tell others about it. We will gladly send the magazine as a trial or regularly upon receiving names and addresses.

Gainsborough House continues to serve its six permanent residents and any visitors that request accommodation. Milborne Port is a very pleasant centre to explore Dorset and Somerset including two coastlines. Many places of interest are within easy reach. Visitors are accommodated in self-contained flats and a mid-day hot meal is available if requested. Gainsborough House also has two communal lounges one of which has television. There are opportunities for formal and informal fellowship. All enquiries should be made to the resident housekeeper, Mrs. Corrinne Vaughan - telephone 01963 250684.

Gone from us

Sister Bertha Ackerman (Ashford, Kent)

Sister Ethel O'Grady (Romford)

Sister Maureen Elliott (Stevenage)

'Till the day break and the shadows flee away'

ST. PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH - a reader's suggestion 25 years ago

The Bible statement in Acts 9.12 reads *"Ananias coming in and putting his hands on him, that he might receive his sight"* not that he only partly received it. V.17 goes on *"Ananias entered the house and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto you in the way as you came, has sent me that you might receive your sight"*. Can one say that Ananias failed to give Paul back his sight as authorised?

2 Cor. 10.10 reads *"For his letters, say they are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is*

weak, and his speech contemptible". If they praised his letters, which we know to be true, why lie about his speech when all were there to hear? In 1 Cor. 2.1 he says *"When I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech"* and again in 2 Cor. 11.6. *"But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge"*. So in Gal. 4.13 *"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel to you at the first, and my temptation (trial) which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected"*. This could not be referring to sight; it clearly referred to his preaching and that would mean his voice. Paul did

not speak the Truth with his eyes; the 16th verse declares *"Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"* Does this not clearly declare that it was not his eyes that offended them

but his tongue, suggesting that this thorn in the flesh that Paul prayed three times to have removed was an impediment in his speech?

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH: TOMORROW

Tomorrow! Oh, the bogey of tomorrow, and the unrest it brings into our little day! It needed all the persuasive powers of our beloved Lord to dispel the spirit of disquiet from His disciples' minds and set their hearts at rest. Of course there seemed to be every reason in the world why they should think of their future days. Were they not leaving everything to follow Him; to go without purse or scrip or other entanglement, with nothing more than a questionable hospitality awaiting them? If an hospitable host accepted them and welcomed them, then let them call down the blessing of the peace of God upon that house, but if no hospitable host awaited them, that was just it! Supposing there was no such host in the whole city or countryside? Assuring them that all their needs were known and that He who clothed the lilies could find them clothes, and He who fed the sparrows could find them food, the Lord advised them to leave their tomorrows alone. Oh yes! tomorrow would most certainly have its cares and perplexities; its refusals and rejections, but He would have them let tomorrow be anxious for itself. Then said Jesus *"Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day"*. (Matt. 6.34 RSV). There was not always an overflowing purse for those first pioneers of our faith; sometimes they would have enough to 'abound', at other times they knew what it was to be in 'want'.

Contentment in every state was a lesson that needed to be learnt. It is a perquisite of man's superior mind that he alone of the whole mundane creation can visualise tomorrow and its needs. The squirrel, by inborn instinct, may hoard up its nuts - a supply for a later day; but it is not within its power to wonder what will happen when the store is gone. Strange to say, it is the thrifty careful man who is likely to look through the bars of the morrow. The spendthrift, careless, easy-come-easy-go type will often say "tomorrow never comes", or *"let us eat and drink today, tomorrow we may die"*. Naturally the Christian believer will be of the thrifty rather than the spendthrift type and finds the natural propensities a handicap if not a hindrance to his rest of soul. And while there is no

prohibition against a "proper thought" for coming days, it is so easy to exceed the range of "proper thought", and expand it into anxious care. The dividing line between pleasure and pain is very thin; what may have been intended as a love-tap may reach its target as a hurtful blow. It is all a question of degree. So with the exercise of "proper thought".

With a big D.V. (Deo Volente) controlling it, the exercise of "proper thought" enables one to stand up to life's opportunities, and this is as true of Christian work as of the daily round. But without that submission to the "If God Will", even the common round of this very day can abound with anxious care, while tomorrow will be full of ghosts and fearsome shapes. "One day at a time" is the Saviour's rule of life; it is still a "lesson" that must be learned. It reduces itself to a question of "faith" or "little faith"- of "trust" or "little trust", of the childlike dependence (or lack of it) in a loving Father's care.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" Jesus said. Over against that "Sufficient" we should learn to place another: *"My grace is sufficient for you"*. Sufficient grace will then cancel out "sufficient" evil.

Perhaps the poet was right when he said,
*You're groaning today 'neath a burden of care,
 'Tis more than your sad fainting spirit can bear,
 Don't seek from the future new trouble to borrow
 But leave in Christ's hands the keys of tomorrow.
 Your way may be clouded, your future
 concealed,*

*And scarcely the present is clearly revealed;
 'Twill strengthen in weakness and comfort in
 sorrow*

To leave in Christ's hands the keys of tomorrow.

It is a big step forward in the Christian life when we have learned to sing,

God holds the key of all unknown.

And I am glad

If other hands should hold the key,

Or if He trusted it to me,

I might be sad.

MAN OF SORROWS

A Study in Isaiah 53

2 - A Tender Plant

"Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isaiah 53.1).

It is an appealing question. It almost implies that none can be found to believe, and yet the story is a true one and the revelation waiting to break through to those who will bend their minds to consider. The speaker has changed his standpoint very rapidly from the one he occupied in chapter 52. Then, he gloried in the prospect of kings and great men shutting their mouths and giving heed to the coming of the Servant for their salvation and their instruction. Now, he bewails the fact that none will listen to the good tidings nor lift their eyes to the glorious vision resplendent in the skies. Very evidently the prophet has turned away from his contemplation of the glories due to be revealed in the Millennial Age. Now He has bent his gaze again upon the nearer prospect, the darker days of the First Advent, with all that they hold of sorrow and suffering and death for the Anointed Deliverer.

The word rendered 'report' means tidings or news, and is so translated in Psa. 112.7 and Prov. 25.25. Here it quite certainly denotes the declaration of the office and work of Jesus and the preaching of His Gospel, as is evident from Rom. 10.16 *"They have not all obeyed the gospel, for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report"*. The prophet, coming back as it were from the world of the future into the world of the present, is suddenly struck with the realisation that the glories which are so real and so precious to him and his fellows, mean nothing to the world in general. He does not claim the message as his alone; he has fellow-believers and fellow-prophets. It is not 'my' report, but 'our' report. He pictures himself as one only of a dedicated company who have seen the light themselves and want to make it known to all and sundry. After all, Israel was a consecrated nation, intended by reason of election and training to receive the Servant when He came, in the way He should come. Isaiah really had a right to expect that the joyous declaration would be received with acclamation by his countrymen. Their ritual sacrifices on the Day of Atonement had pointed forward to this reality. They should know by now that only by suffering and sacrifice could there be cleansing from sin. But Israel did not believe, and Isaiah and his fellow-prophets found themselves

but voices crying in the wilderness.

We often find ourselves in the same position. The Faith is so real and logical and convincing to us, we fail to realise that it does not seem so to others. The promise of future restitution and, above that, the glories of the High Calling, take clear and definite shape in our minds but to others it oft times appears fantastic and improbable and all our arguments unconvincing. And we find that hard to understand. Why cannot these people see the same things that we can see so well? That is an old question but it will not be fully answered until we are beyond the Veil. Suffice it now to realise that, as with Jesus during His life on earth, so with His followers since, "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not".

So Isaiah is driven to proclaim his message to an unbelieving generation, knowing not to what extent his words would ever find lodgement and bear fruit. He must have thought of it as a witness to the people, a prophetic foreview that would be better understood and appreciated after the fulfilment had come. He could not have known of the Divine purpose that his inspired and glowing words should be preserved and recorded for all succeeding generations and taken by other zealous servants of God to the uttermost ends of the earth. Yet so it has been. Wherever the Gospel has been preached this 53rd chapter of Isaiah has been preached too, one of the Scripture's brightest jewels.

By way of doctrinal digression, it has been pointed out that there are no less than eleven expressions in this chapter referring to the vicarious nature of our Lord's sufferings while in the flesh. The modern schools of thought which portray our Lord as an inspiring example of right living but deny man's fall into sin and the need for a Redeemer must dispense entirely with this chapter and blot it out from the Divine revelation before they can begin to sustain their contention. The eleven points are:

"He bore our griefs."

"He carried our sorrows."

"He was wounded for our transgression."

"He was bruised for our iniquities."

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him."

"By his stripes we are healed."

"Laid on him the iniquity of us all."

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken."

"Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin."

"He shall bear their iniquities."

"He bare the sins of many."

All of this is very closely associated with the typical ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, and the Priesthood that conducted those ceremonies. *"Transgression"; "Iniquity"; "Sin";* these are words that are frequently used in the Leviticus accounts of the laws concerning the offerings, and it is appropriate that we should meet them again here. If we could only but realise it, the whole of the complex ritual associated with the Day of Atonement has the reality, toward which it pointed, clearly set out here in this chapter. Isaiah 53 is in very truth the prophetic counterpart of Leviticus 16, and all that there is in that 16th chapter is presented in new guise here in Isa. 53.

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." (v2). The word translated *"tender plant"* comes from *"suckling"* as in *"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings"* in Psa. 8.2, and refers to the young saplings that grow up from the stump of a tree which has been felled. In our own day such shoots are still referred to as 'suckers'. This is a picture of the coming of Christ which is similar and yet in marked contrast to Isa. 11.1.

"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots". In that chapter the *"Branch"* comes forth to glory and power, the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him leading Him to judge the poor with righteousness and slay the wicked with the rod of His mouth. Isaiah has passed over the day of humiliation and suffering and sees only the triumphant Kingdom beyond, when Messiah shall reign gloriously and all the nations flock to His banner. In this verse of the 53rd chapter, the same *"rod of the stem of Jesse"* is depicted as a sapling growing out of dry ground to disesteem and spurning. Its growth and development is to be under unfavourable circumstances. But it is the same shoot. It will go on growing until it has survived the winter and passed into the light and sunshine of the spring, and it is then that the fully grown tree will spread abroad its branches in invitation to all creatures. The stone that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision became a great mountain that filled the whole earth, so here we have the picture of a tender sapling

which thrusts its roots into the soil and its leaves into the air until it has filled the whole face of the land. Like Israel in her own destined times, it blossomed and budded and filled the whole world with fruit.

The background of the picture is the allusion in Isa. 10.34, to the fall of the Davidic kingly rule under the symbol of the cutting down of a great cedar in Lebanon by the ruthless invader. The cedars of Lebanon were the mightiest trees known to the ancient world. It was only fitting that these proud monarchs of the forest, standing erect in their towering majesty over all the other trees, should be chosen to picture the royal authority of the house of David, who *"sat upon the throne of the Lord"* and ruled Israel in the name of God.

The apparent permanence of those cedars told fitly of the throne that was to endure for ever before God. But Isaiah in his day knew that because of faithlessness the throne of David must be overthrown, the upstanding cedar be cut down. That was the theme of his prophecy but he did not end there. The throne of David would one day be re-established, when *"he whose right it is"* appears to claim His possession. So in verse 34 of chapter 10 the prophet sees the Assyrian and Babylonian invaders ravaging the land and taking the people captive and destroying the kingly power and he says *"he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one"*. Immediately following, in the first verse of chapter 11, comes the golden sequel *"and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse"*... Like the tree of the Babylonian king's vision, which was cut down until seven times had passed over it, and then was to sprout again, so it is here. The great cedar of Lebanon which was the kingship of David's line was cut down by the oppressors of Israel. Zedekiah was the last king; but a tender sapling out of that cut-down stump would one day arise to grow into a cedar mightier by far than that which had flourished and perished.

So out of the apparent barrenness and failure of God's promises there grows the *"root of David"*. Christ is to be as a root out of dry ground. The learned men of our Lord's day were quite unable to understand how Christ could be both David's son and David's Lord, even though Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures to that effect and they had prided themselves on understanding the Old Testament Scriptures. This *"rod out of the stem of*

Jesse", this "tender plant" or sapling from the cut-down stump, is also the root itself! *"I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star"* (Rev. 22.16), *"All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1.3). Unless Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Lord from heaven, is the root of David as well as his Son, the whole of our faith is founded upon a falsity and we are of all men most miserable. The only possibility for salvation of this fallen race of which we are members lay in the active intervention of God from heaven. *"God, sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh"* (Rom. 8.3); *"He who was rich, for our sakes became poor"* (2 Cor. 8.9). Without the root there could never have been the tender sapling growing up into maturity to the lasting benefit of mankind.

The 'dry ground' is the *"dry and thirsty land, where no water is"* of Psalms 63.1. The Psalmist longs and seeks for God but sees no evidence of His presence, until he finds Him in the sanctuary and remembers Him on his bed, meditating on Him in the night watches. Unless we search for God, and finding Him, hold Him fast, even the promises and plans of God are as dry ground to us, barren and profitless. But for those who will have it, there is a root in that dry ground that contains within itself the springing life that is to burst forth into the light of day. This brings life and immortality to light through the Gospel, and causes, at last, the desire of all nations to come. To those who know these things, the dry ground has indeed become a pool, and the thirsty land, springs of water.

"He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (v.2).

This is the idealised form, comeliness, beauty of the Messianic King of Jewish hopes, that the prophet declares is absent from the Man who has at last fulfilled the prophecy. It is manifestly illogical to take these words as descriptive of our Lord's personal appearance when one remembers that He was humanly perfect as was Adam before his transgression, and that the physical aspect of Jesus must have been one of overpowering beauty and majesty. It is unthinkable that the Son of God should walk this earth in any form other than one suited to the fact that He was indeed the Son of God. It is a significant fact that the alleged descriptions of Jesus dating from the days of the

Early Church all present him as possessed of grace and beauty. It was not until later centuries, when the dark influence of a gloomy asceticism was fastening itself upon the Church, that the conception of Jesus as physically unlovely and even repulsive took the lead, and texts like this were taken out of their poetic setting and interpreted in a grossly literal sense.

The glory of Jesus was not of this world. That was the great truth over which Israel stumbled and fell and that is why they saw no beauty in Him to desire. A king must, in their eyes, be possessed of outward majesty and glory; he must be arrayed in costly raiment and flashing jewels; he must have courtiers and servants and a shouting crowd to attend him wherever he went. There were three things, yea, four, said the Wise Man in Proverbs, which *"go well"* and are *"comely in going"*. A lion, which is strongest among beasts, took his admiration; a greyhound, a he-goat, and a king, *"against whom there is no rising up"*. (Prov. 30.29-31). He looked on the outward appearance and marvelled at the strength of the lion, the speed of the greyhound, the irresistible force of the he-goat, and the power of the king. These things, he said, are *"comely"* – but there was none of that comeliness in the demeanour and the life of the Prince of Peace.

Neither was there the kingly glory and power which shall in truth be manifested in the days of the Kingdom. *"Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness"* (Psalms 45.3-4). These are words spoken of this One who *"had no form nor comeliness"*, but they are words which wait yet for their fulfilment. Isaiah saw in vision the glory of Lebanon, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, resplendent earthly reflections of the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God (Isaiah 35.2). That again was a vision of the far-distant future, and there was no glory of Lebanon and no excellency of Carmel and Sharon when the Man of Galilee climbed their slopes and wended His way through their valleys. The time for His glory had not then come and there was no reflection of that glory on the earth. So it was that men, gazing upon Him, saw no form nor comeliness, no beauty that could make Him desirable in their eyes.

(To be continued)

TH

ANNA

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she, coming in at that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spoke of him to all them that looked for deliverance in Jerusalem" (Luke 2.36-38).

So short a passage! So little said but how eloquent! She comes in without having been previously introduced to the reader of the sacred story. She goes out – and is never heard of again. But within that short space of a few minutes during which she occupies the Scripture stage, she does something, that makes her brief appearance immortal for evermore.

Anna is the only one of that name in the New Testament. One in the Old Testament, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, has the same name in its Hebrew form; Anna is the Greek form. In both languages the word means graciousness. Both women "*spoke of him*". Hannah was the first in all the Scriptures to use the name "Messiah" to describe the one that should come. Abraham and others in earlier days had rejoiced to see His day and Moses had spoken of the Prophet that should arise, like unto himself but greater. No one before Hannah applied the word "Messiah" to Him and that is significant. Hannah was as truly a prophetess as was Anna a thousand years later. "*The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth*" she sang "*and he shall give strength unto his king and exalt the horn of his Messiah*" (1 Sam. 2.10). Now the latter Anna stood in the temple courts holding in her arms the tiny babe that was the fulfilment of the prophecy, Messiah had come, and Anna knew it!

How did she know? By what process of reasoning did this aged saint connect that helpless child with the Messiah of prophecy, the One coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, travelling in the greatness of his strength, proclaiming his mightiness to save? What convinced her that here in this little family group lay, not only the doom of the mighty empire of Rome, but also of all the "kingdoms of this world" and all the forces of wickedness and powers of evil everywhere? In what way did that small innocent

face show her the lineaments of a King?

It could only have been, as it was with Simeon on the same occasion, a direct revelation of the Holy Spirit. God had answered her long-continued prayers and fasting, her patience and expectation, with a word from Himself. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord Christ – the Messiah. He came "by the Spirit" – by the direct leading of the Holy Spirit – into the Temple just at the time Mary and Joseph were there with her first-born child. In that moment, as Simeon's old eyes fell upon the little group, there came an inward word, and his heart overflowed with reverent joy as he realised the dream of a lifetime fulfilled. So it must have been with Anna, coming in just as Simeon was pouring out his heart in his wonderful praise – prayer – prophecy, the Spirit spoke to Anna and she too knew that the consolation of Israel had come. The time was fulfilled; the hope for which the twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, waited to come was realised. God at last had visited His people, Anna had spent a long life waiting. Eighty four years a widow, seven years a wife before that, for such is the meaning of the Greek expression: not that she was merely eighty four years old. She had been married at the age of sixteen, a common age for Jewish girls to be married at that time, so Anna must have been one hundred and seven years old at the time of this incident. It is not stated, but it is implied and may reasonably be accepted as a fact, that she had served God in the Temple and waited for the promised Messiah for at least the major portion of that time. What had she seen in all those years?

Anna was born when Judea was very different from its condition at the birth of Jesus. Rome had not yet appeared on the scene. Judea was an independent State under the rule of John Hyrcanus, the son of Simon, one of the Maccabean patriots who delivered the country from its foreign oppressors. She was perhaps five years of age when Aristobulus succeeded John, and then in the following year, Alexander Janneus succeeded Aristobulus. That part of Jewish history, lying as it does between the Old and New Testaments, is not so well known to many of us as the days before Malachi or after Jesus. In the reign of Alexander the boundaries of Judea were extended, by means

of conquest or treaty, to the limits that had been reached by David and Solomon in olden times. In Alexander a Jewish king reigned from Sinai to the Euphrates, and Judea was the most powerful State in the Middle East. So influential, was she, in fact, that the Roman Empire entered into treaty alliance with her. The text of the treaty is still preserved and is curiously like modern ones, both nations binding themselves not to make war upon the other and to help each other with military assistance should one be attacked by a third party. Jewish ambassadors were resident at Rome. It was a time of high hopes on the part of all true Jews that the Kingdom of God, the day of Israel's triumph, was at hand. It only needed the appearance of Messiah to take over the reins of government. The Land of Promise as defined to Abraham – from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates – was under their control. Greek power was declining, and Rome, the only other great Empire, treated Judea as an equal. Surely it could not be long now before the great Senate of Rome would listen with dignified respect to the orders of King Messiah, transmitted by the Jewish ambassador in the city, and Jerusalem replace both Athens and Rome as the world's seat of government. In those stirring days, ninety years or so before the angels sang at Bethlehem, men went about in daily expectation of the revelation of Messiah.

Some there were – as some there have been in every age – who knew from their deeper understanding of the things of God that the coming of the Kingdom could not be thus. History reveals, the fact that behind the pomp and glitter of the rapidly growing State, the marching and shouting of armed men, the glowing speeches and lavish promises of Judea's politicians, there was a nucleus of devout souls, chiefly the poor of this world, looking for a Messiah who would be first of all a Teacher of righteousness. They knew that all was not well with their homeland and its people. They knew that sin covered them with its heavy hand, and that not until sin was removed could the glowing promises of the prophets be fulfilled. So they studied the old prophecies and told each other of the golden time that would come when God arose to shake terribly the earth and reveal to all men the King who would reign in righteousness. Even then their vision was limited and they could hardly begin to see how these things could be. But they would have nothing to do with the politicians,

nor yet very much with the established forms of religion, insincere and corrupt as they had become with the nation's rise to temporal prosperity. Zadokites, as these faithful few were called in their day, had found a substantial following among the ordinary people in that time, a century before the Messiah whom they believed was to manifest himself.

It is very possible that Anna came of a family that adhered to this faith and expectation. Her steadfastness through the years might very well have been due to parental influence and training. Phanuel might possibly have been an early leader among the Zadokites. If so, and Anna grew into early womanhood, married and widowed before she was twenty four, neither she nor her fellows would have been unduly distressed or cast down at the rapid change of fortune which befell the triumphant State when Alexander Janneus died in BC 75. Then war, disruption and anarchy set in. The enemies of the nation were not laid low after all; they had only been quiescent. Men who had so fondly imagined that their victorious military Messiah was coming soon to place himself at the head of the nations saw their territories invaded, their conquests wrested from them, and the ever growing threat of foreign oppression looming over them more menacingly every day. In another eight years, when Anna was in her early forties, the crash came. The death of Queen Alexandra of Judea was followed by the submission of her sons to Pompey, the victorious Roman. From that time Judea became a Roman province, and hopes of the Messianic Kingdom were rudely dashed. But the Zadokites still believed, for their faith was not founded on the fortunes of war or the virtue of political arrangements. As Anna quietly went about her duties in the Temple she prayed and fasted and waited still for "He that should come", not knowing how much longer He would tarry. Another ten or twelve years went by with Judea helpless in the grasp of her Roman master. Away in the far north-west Julius Caesar was invading Britain, and our own ancestors in these islands were undergoing their first experience of the power which already held Judea in a grip of iron. Anna, past fifty years of age now, endured the horror of seeing the Temple itself, the centre of all her hopes and those of her countrymen, desecrated and plundered by Crassus the Roman general. Would Messiah never come? Had God forgotten to be gracious? The

question must at times have come to her mind but she put it from her knowing that the word of the Lord could not return to Him void, but must at the end prosper in the thing whereto it was sent. So through the years, until Herod the Edomite came, to rule the country under title from Rome, a would-be king even though a tributary king. Perhaps at that the hopes of some began to rise again. When, eighteen years before the birth of Jesus, Herod announced his intention of pulling down the decaying fabric of Nehemiah's Temple, which had stood on Mount Moriah for five hundred years ever since the return from Babylon, and erect a magnificent new Temple in its place, many must have wondered if this was indeed a preparation for Messiah. Anna and her friends must often have talked about it. There would be Simeon, like herself, well in the eighties; a middle aged couple, Zachariah and Elisabeth, hoping against hope for the child that never seemed to come, but hoping with greater intensity for the coming of Messiah: Jacob and his small son Joseph, and another Joseph, a wealthy young man from Arimathea, all waiting for His appearing and His Kingdom. As the splendid structure of the Temple grew under the industry of Herod's builders and stone-masons their hearts would swell with anticipation and they would say one to another "Surely He will come soon!"

Then one day, coming into the Temple court, Anna saw a little group. Simeon, the friend and counsellor of many years, was holding a little child in his arms. His face was upturned to heaven as if in thanksgiving and praise. Anna recognised the parents in an instant; Joseph the son of Jacob, grown to manhood now, and his seventeen year old wife Mary, both zealous and devout believers in the coming of the Lord, both of them brought up from childhood to look and wait for His coming. Anna had known them both since they were born – it seemed only yesterday. She had known their parents, too. She had known their grandparents. Her tired old mind travelled back over the years and she thought of her own friends of youth, long since laid aside to sleep in the hope of a promise of which they had never seen the realisation. She saw the new generation before her, the young people who were destined to carry the hope of Messiah onward into the coming years, years which she knew she herself would not live to see. A thought dashed into her mind; she looked more closely at the little group, at the rapt expression on Simeon's countenance, the sweet, eager face of the young mother, the grave, reverently proud features of Joseph; and she looked at the Babe.

And in that moment she knew that the Messiah had come.

AOH

PRAYER

"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4.8 RSV).

"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things which you have not known." (Jer. 33.3 RSV).

"Evening and morning, and at noon, I utter my complaint and moan and he will hear my voice." (Psa. 55.17 RSV)

If we are to grow in our prayer life, there are five things that are necessary:

The first of these is TIME. Like everything else, prayer requires time; daily time, like the other essentials, eating and sleeping. It needs to be time enough to forget how much time it is, even though duties call you away. So it must be planned for, sometimes well ahead, so no duty is slighted. One must take time. No one worth while has time for all that comes crowding to his door. Something must be left out, so time must be taken from something else, yet less important. Prayer does need time.

The second thing prayer needs is a PLACE. You can pray anywhere – on a train, walking down the street; doing jobs in lounge or kitchen, buying groceries in the shop. But you are less likely to, unless you've been shut off in some quiet place with the door shut. Jesus said: *"When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret;"* (Matt. 6.6. RSV) – the world is shut out but you are shut in with some One unseen. It does not matter where the place is. The corner of a kitchen is as good as the cloistered corner of a cathedral. It is the recognised presence of our blessed Saviour that makes holy ground, whether kitchen or cathedral. And the real rare blessing of the daily quiet place is not only that you actually pray, though you will; not only that you read the Book, though you will: it is this: There is some One else there. And to sit quiet in His presence, thank Him that He is there, and that He died for you in the love of His heart; maybe to sing

Him a soft hymn of praise; this is the real blessedness of that bit of quiet time in the shut-away corner. Prayer needs a place, and prayer hallows the place – any place.

Third – prayer needs a book. **THE BOOK.** The Book is the basis of prayer. Bible reading is the listening side of prayer. In the Book, God speaks to us. In prayer we speak to God. What He says to us radically affects what we say to Him. Prayer needs three organs of the head – an ear, a tongue and an eye. The ear to hear what God says, the tongue to repeat His promises as our petitions, and the eye to look out expectantly until the result comes. Thoughtful Bible reading is giving God our ears. What goes in at the ear, warmed up as it goes through the heart, comes out at the tongue in simple, expectant, warm prayer, communion and petition and intercession. Give this Book a place in your prayers. What God says here will change what you say, and so wholly change the results. The Book will shape and mould your praying. Let it!

The fourth is particularly important – **LET THE TEACHER TEACH YOU.** There is One who is peculiarly the prayer Teacher ... It is He who puts the desire to pray in our hearts. He will direct all our praying (through the Holy Spirit) as a wise father directs his son.

Where is the Holy Spirit?... In every one whose heart has opened to the Lord Jesus – not because we are good or deserving or saintly, but because He is faithful to His promise. Yes, let the Holy Spirit teach you... When you go into the quiet schoolroom, with the school Book open, ask this Teacher to teach you. And He will. You may be a bit slow and stupid – most of us are. But He is very gentle and patient.

You will find your praying changed. It will become simpler – more confident, and personal, and practical. Some things you will stop asking for – they will slip out of your thoughts in that Presence. Other things will come in – certain things you will pray for more boldly and confidently and expectantly.

The fifth need is to cultivate an **OPENNESS OF SPIRIT** – the habitual openness of mind that opens up more and more as clearer light breaks in. It begins with that first surrender to Christ as Master, but must continue to be an habitual surrender in the actual practice of daily life. As clearer light comes in on this habit, that line of conduct, that problem, you yield and actually live the surrender you made in the initial act. Stubbornness, sifted down, is simply refusing to yield to the new bit of light that comes. Openness to light is the one doorway to growth. We will welcome the light by obedience, we will pore thoughtfully over the Book, to get its meaning clear. We will cultivate thoughtful meditation, to get things clear and clearer.

So these are the needs of praying – prayer **TIME**, a prayer **PLACE**, a prayer **BOOK**, the prayer **TEACHER**, the Holy Spirit, the **HABITUAL OPENNESS** to more light. Let us all start into school fresh.

Lord Jesus teach us to pray. Help us to learn how. You know both ends of prayer; the praying down here and the answering end up yonder. We would be good students in your school, punctual in attendance, keeping the door shut, and the Book open, and the knees bent, and the will to do. Teach us – in Jesus' name. Amen.

This article has been updated from one printed in a 1986 Bible Study Monthly, originally appearing in the 'Herald of Christ's Kingdom'

A Question: There will be a day when the Master will look upon us with eyes that pierce through to the naked soul and will say "I gave you a marvellous opportunity such as millions of earth's multitudes never received. I gave you a knowledge of my Truth such as many of the first disciples never had. I gave you the key to every problem which distressed mankind in your day, and I gave you the privilege of being heralds of my Kingdom. I gave you the opportunity that my followers in every century since Pentecost dreamed of and prayed for. What have you done with it?"

Gratitude. How grateful we should be to God for those who have been used to give us the many Bible 'helps', translations, concordances, etc in these days at prices within the reach of almost all. What would John Bunyan have given for such advantages to his study of God's Word? He sought a whole year for a certain passage of Scripture; he writes "thus I continued above a year and could not find the place ... I looked but found it not; then I did ask first this good man, and then another if they knew where it was, but they knew not the place, but I doubted not but it was in holy scripture; but at last I found it."

THE NATURE, ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

Part 2 - The Role and Importance of Hope

A conference address

Hebrews 11.1 says: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"*. That verse defines two grounds for faith. One of them is historical and one relates to the future – *"things hoped for"* relates to the future while *"evidence of things not seen"* relates to the historical. Regarding the *"evidence of things not seen"*, our faith is based on the evidence around us that testifies to their truth. One example is creation as stated in verse 3: *"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear"*. The "things" that created the worlds is not visible to our naked eyes – none of us saw God create the earth and fashion it for our habitation, but the evidence that He did so is all around us. Psalms 19.1 says: *"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork"*. Electric lights have tended to decrease our awareness and appreciation of the glory of the heavens because we can use artificial lights to illuminate our path and this may cause us to lose sight of the glory of the firmament above us. Viewing the heavens makes one feel subordinate to a superior creator. Although we did not see Him make the heavens their evidence is that they were made by Someone far superior to us. The evidence is that they were made by a power that we cannot see. Observing the heavens leads us to have faith in a creator.

The glory of God is also manifested in the earth as well as in the heavens. Romans 1.20 says: *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse"*. The manifestation or evidence of God's creative power is clearly seen in the earth around us, the heavens declare the glory of God and they are a wonderful testimony, but so also do the things on the earth. The invisible things of Him (His eternal power and Godhead) are clearly seen by observing His earthly creation. This power is apparent in farm animals as the mothers automatically care for their off-spring, without any training from their forbears – to observe such things provides compelling evidence that there is a creator, a mastermind behind all of

these natural (magical) instincts. These observations instil in us faith in God. Truly *"the evidence of things not seen"* is one foundation for our faith.

The other foundation of our faith is *"the substance of things hoped for"*. This foundation of our faith relates to things yet future. Strong's Concordance defines 'substance' as 'essence' or 'assurance' and the Diaglott uses the word 'conviction'. So faith may be understood as *"the conviction of things hoped for"*. This is a very powerful definition when it is combined with a consideration of the importance of faith. 1 John 5.4 says: *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"*. Inserting the Diaglott definition of faith into the verse gives *"this is the victory that overcometh the world even our conviction of things hoped for"*. Hope is a crucial part of the Christian's armour in his endeavour to overcome the world. And "overcoming" is what the Christian pilgrimage is all about. In Revelation, the message to every church concludes with a promise to them that overcome (Rev. 2.7, 11, 17). It is the conviction of things hoped for that helps us to overcome the world. Could hope be more important?

Another aspect of the role of hope is that it distinguishes wholesome doctrine. There are many agencies in the world today that preach proper Christian conduct. However some of them do not preach any hope for the future. Their preaching exhorts consideration of their neighbours, living harmoniously and doing good to all men. They are meritorious aspirations but they do not preach any hope. Some mainstream churches regard the first six chapters of Genesis as a myth. They dismiss them. However not only do they dismiss the first six chapters of Genesis but they dismiss the promises of God also. Are there any today who dismiss the Biblical account of creation and yet preach the promise of *the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness*? Generally those who dismiss creation have lost their conviction of the promises of God. So a second aspect of the role of our hope is to enable us to distinguish who is preaching the whole gospel –

those who believe in the promises of God – and those who do not. The challenges to our faith that we get today are more easily dispensed with if we realise that there are those who have faith in the promises of God and those who do not. Let us not let our hope waver.

The third and last role of our hope is expressed in 1 John 3.1-3: *"Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. Therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not. Beloved now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that, when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."*

Our hope is a great source of motivation for us to keep on in the narrow way – *"to purify ourselves"*. Jesus was helped in His ministry by the hope set before Him. Hebrews 12.2 says *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"*. He didn't have that joy when He was on earth. When on earth He was *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"*. (Isaiah. 53.3) The joy was ahead of him; it was still future. But it was that prospect that enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame, and consequently *"He is (now) set down at the right hand of God"*. The thought of His reward was a source of motivation for Jesus and so it surely can be for us also.

Further, in 1 Corinthians 9.24 the apostle Paul says: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain."* In temporal pursuits all competitors run to come first and receive the prize. No one runs with the thought of coming second. Verse 25 tells us that the hope of the reward is a great help to us in our pursuit of our spiritual reward: *"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible"*. How precious is the thought of an incorruptible crown, one that will never decay or fade away. This hope was Paul's motivation also (verse 26): *"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the air, but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by some means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* Paul was unashamedly running for the prize, and he used the thought of the reward to exhort the Corinthians to run diligently for the prize also. And at the end of his course he was able to say: *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"*. (2 Timothy 4.7-8)

So let us all pray that *"the God of hope (will) fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."*

GS

It is sometimes suggested that spiritual progress is best made by discarding all human help and expecting Divine guidance through reading the Bible. It is a mistake. God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, says Paul to the Ephesians, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all come to maturity in Him. We are exhorted to build up one another in the faith and to esteem the servants of God for their works' sake. From the beginning of the Church God has raised up in its midst some who have special teaching ability for ministry to all. Jesus commended the minister who at his appearing is found giving meat in due season to the household. Christians are members of a body of which Christ is the Head.

Each member of that body, says Paul again (1 Cor. 12) has a function to perform for the well-being of the body as a whole. If one member fails to play his part the whole body suffers. Conversely we all need to accept graciously from our fellows that which they can contribute to our own spiritual wellbeing. *"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the foot, I have no need of you."* The Bible is certainly the authority and basis of our faith but the accumulated knowledge and experience of the past and present in its understanding and exposition is an essential factor in our own Christian growth.

AOH

THE ROUNDED CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

What is a rounded Christian character? Immediately there comes to mind a plump cheerful gentleman who is for ever busy doing helpful things – he's certainly a Christian, his appearance is gently rounded, and as a person he is unique – quite a character! But this is not what we are thinking of. Each one of us lives in a characteristically Christian way, we are distinct people who can be recognised because we are what we are, we all have our strengths and weaknesses, we have developed in different ways, we have a character. One person may be immensely loving and horribly bossy: another, utterly loyal but coldly unemotional. Ideally, we should grow out of our weaknesses and extend our strengths, until our character is not one sided but rounded.

Like an apple, for example. The apple grower aims for perfect fruit. A full, even shape, without kinks or blemishes, where diseases or pests have not prevented the growth inherent in the tree's nature. Fruit moreover not starved of sunlight or rubbed by its neighbours, but coming to a ripeness and fulness and flavour which is the grower's objective – and the natural consequence of a tree being a tree.

Scripture has much to say about the fulness of Christian character, which in this article we can only sample. There is a Greek word, *teleios*, which is translated perfect or mature. It is related to *telos*, which means a goal or a limit or a conclusion or a termination or a result or a purpose – in short, an end. You can't get beyond the end. Thinking in terms of development, you can imagine the end that God has in view. So *teleios* means complete – a finished piece of work, a completed process of growth, a developed understanding and moral character, a person of full age, perfect, who has reached the state that God intends for us all. Admittedly, like a growing apple we may have picked up a few outer blemishes and scratches through life's experience. Inwardly we have become ripe, mature.

Within the Christian community we are at different stages of growth. The newborn infant, nurtured in prayer, lovable, perfectly formed, has not yet grown very far in terms of Christian character. The teenager, however correctly brought up, may thresh about in our world of opening opportunities with a temper fuelled by the

situations he does not understand – he has not got there yet. Young men, studies completed, venture out into the adult world, and begin to feel mature. Among the old ladies, one of them is restricted by actual physical tiredness, another peers through the mists of dementia, while a third is crying out in a hospital ward as she dies in fearful pain. These have passed beyond maturity and into decline. None of us fit the stereotype of achieving an effortless perfection; and at the last even the ripest apple will fall from the tree in autumn gales. But however various and perplexing life's experiences, we have to understand that as Christian human beings we are in God's care. "Be patient with me – God hasn't finished with me yet!" And God's purpose for us looks beyond what we experience now to serving Him in a different life and a future age.

As we progress toward having a rounded Christian character in the here and now, there is a process in which we cooperate. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5.12-24 has a list of instructions. It is not about how to be perfect but how to respond to situations in which we find ourselves. People are afraid? – encourage them. People not doing their bit? – warn them. Live at peace with each other. Respect the leaders of your fellowship. Someone wrongs you? – don't pay back with a wrong, but always try to do what is good for each other. Be joyful – always! Pray – continually! Give thanks – whatever happens! Don't pour cold water when someone is inspired by God, yet keep your wits about you, test everything. Keep what is good. Stay away from what is evil.

It is in these reactions to circumstances that character is formed. In our obedience to Him, God works. *"Now may God himself, the God of peace, make you pure, belonging only to him. May your whole self – spirit, soul and body – be kept safe and without fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes. You can trust the One who calls you to do that for you"* (1 Thessalonians 5.23-4 NCV).

The apostle Peter pictures us not as simply reacting, but as consciously building on to what God has done for us (2 Peter 1.3-8). The basis for us is provided – power, because we know Jesus in His glory and goodness – promises, to clutch hold of and so become like God! On this basis, it is our job to build, do our best, apply all diligence, do our

true best. We already have faith. So add to it goodness – knowledge – self control – patience – service and worship – kindness to our brothers and sisters. Add love. *"If all these things are in you and are growing they will help you to be useful and productive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* All this conscious effort means being aware: aware when we 'blow our top', aware of when our goodness is tarnished, aware of when our worship is defective. Aware most of all of what is meant by love. And the end of the process is a great welcome into our Lord's kingdom (v.11).

The process may seem a struggle at times. We need to be aware of the help available. All Christian leaders and workers are God's gift, to help us grow into maturity. The carers and teachers, the evangelists and the apostles, are all there to assist the miscellaneous but holy people of God. *"This work must continue until we are all joined together in the same faith and in the same knowledge of the Son of God. We must become like a mature person, growing until we become like Christ and have his perfection"* (Ephesians 4.13, 14). This implies accepting one another, listening to one another – speaking the truth with love. It is growing together into Christ, who Himself is the head of the Christian body in all its parts. The whole Christian community needs to grow and be strong with love. Within a mature community, we are helped to become mature individuals.

The process is not just one of us talking and listening as Christian people. Over and above this, we find that God is working. When there is joy, peace and patience, it is His Spirit at work. Where there is kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, love, it is not just us working to be better, it is God using our obedience

and producing more obedience as we become mature. The Spirit gives us power to be strong inwardly. As we learn about Jesus and appreciate Him, Christ takes up residence in our lives. As we understand God's universal unimaginable love, we are filled with an empowering fulness, with consequences far greater than we could expect. To experience God's love makes our character to be full, rounded and fully ripe.

Being '*teleios*' has various practical consequences mentioned in the New Testament. If I am '*teleios*' I go beyond the facts of Christian doctrine and get a feel for God's Spirit in my mind and heart (1 Corinthians 2). I can rise above controversies or unwise Christian behaviour and appreciate what God is saying (1 Corinthians 14). I can tell the difference between good and evil (Hebrews 5.14). Problems will bring me patience (James 1.4). I shall control my tongue (James 3.2). I shall prove by experience what it is like to obey God's will, which itself is '*teleios*' (Romans 12.2). I shall put everything else to one side as I follow Christ, as the rich young ruler was sadly not prepared to do (Matthew 19.21). In having no limits to the love I give to others, I shall be like my perfect Father (Matthew 5.48).

Mulling all this over, we may be tempted to ask "Is this me? Am I getting anywhere near this state of maturity?" Perhaps we are not getting there, not yet. Perhaps not fully, as we begin to wish we were more completely mature. Perhaps we shall never get to be pleased with ourselves because of our rounded Christian character? Be it so. We must just rely, not on ourselves, but on our Lord, whom we love, and trust, and sincerely aim to obey.

GC

For a correct estimate of the present times, and a true conception of future events, we must have a clear understanding of the things that are past. We are in danger of living too much in the present, and of looking upon the Divine activities as if they were haphazard or accidental, as our own always are, save as we are under the control of the Spirit of God. We seem to have contracted the idea that in the history of the race God has been making experiments with men; and that when one plan has failed, He has adopted another. Such false conceptions arise from the fact that, mentally and

spiritually, we live too much in the circle of our own times, and are forgetful of all that has gone before. The corrective is found in studying history from the Divine standpoint. Nothing yields a more chaotic, uncertain, and unsatisfactory result than a view merely from the human side; while, on the contrary, order, beauty, and progress are seen only as we take the Divine outlook.

Rev. G. Campbell Morgan -
God's Methods with Man -
Morgan and Scott

AFTER THE FLOOD

11 - The coming of the gods

With the deaths of the patriarchs Eber and his son Peleg within a century of each other, the Golden Age of the sons of Noah ended. For more than eight hundred years the people of Shinar had remained faithful to the God of Noah. The evidence lies in the form of innumerable inscribed clay tablets that have been unearthed and deciphered. Those which are later than about 2000 BC, roughly the times of Abraham, abound with references to the names of the many gods of Babylon, anything up to a hundred in number. Tablets earlier than that date refer to fewer and fewer names of gods, the farther one goes back in time, until by some four centuries earlier there are only three gods worshipped. Before that for as far back as any written records exist there is only one God known - they called him An, the God of heaven, the Most High. Even in the later days of many gods An was always the supreme God, the creator and controller of all things. Strangely enough, the same tablets reveal no signs of war or warlike weapons until this same period. The evidence is that paganism and war came into the world together. One of the leading archaeologists of the last century, Stephen Langdon, expressed this fact in his book "Semitic Mythology" saying "both in Sumerian and Semitic religions, monotheism preceded polytheism and belief in good and evil spirits. The evidence and reasons for this conclusion, so contrary to accepted and current views, have been set down with care and with the perception of adverse criticism ... the history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism". Writing during the early years of the last century, Langdon - who died in 1937 - never knew of the many modern finds which have confirmed his deductions. In the 19th century it was fashionable to insist that monotheism, the worship of one God, developed from preceding belief in many gods and is still asserted by many text-books which have failed to keep up with research. Today, there is abundant documentary proof, which cannot be denied, to the contrary. One of the most telling evidences in this connection is due to excavations in 1930 at the ancient 25th BC century city of Eshnunna, not far from Baghdad, by Frankfort. He found a mass of inscribed tablets and cylinder seals, some from the temple and some from private

houses, which, he says "can all be fitted in to form a consistent picture in which a single god worshipped in this temple, forms the central figure ... At this early period His various aspects were not considered separate deities in the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon" (Excavations at Tel Asmar-Eshnunna). In other words, the various attributes of the Most High, His love, justice, wisdom, and His methods of operation in the powers of Nature, the sunshine, the storm, the seasons, and so on, were gradually viewed in separation and personified under individual names. In this manner men became accustomed to the idea of a plurality of gods. Almost every modern excavation of 3rd millennium BC sites is now providing confirmation of Frankfort's findings.

The taint of idolatry affected the line of Abraham. Joshua, addressing Israel just before his death, told them that their fathers dwelt beyond Euphrates in the remote past, and "*served other gods*" (Josh. 24.2). The "Book of Jubilees" declares that Serug, Nahor and Terah were all idolaters; this might be an old legend without foundation, nevertheless these are the only three before Abraham who could thus have worshipped pagan gods. This brings us to the introduction of those gods amongst men. Like so many later human philosophies, the development of the gods was inspired by a desire to explain the unrevealed things of God by means of human analogies. The first was an endeavour to explain how the world was created and life arose upon it. Genesis chapters 1 to 9 were certainly in existence in written form for two centuries before mythology began. Throughout mythology there are thoughts that suggest the remains of an earlier clear understanding of the Divine Plan.

So how did God bring life to the earth? Eve said when her first son was born: "*I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord*" (Gen. 4.1) Next there had to be defined the power by which the earth itself, with all its vegetation and its animal wealth, was brought into being. Genesis says "*the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*" and the work of creation proceeded apace. Just so, said the Sumerians and the Semites of Serug's day; the invisible power of An, the Most High, a silent and unseen energy like the wind, executed His

commands. In their language that power was denoted by the word that meant wind, breath, spirit, exactly as does the Hebrew '*ruach*' and the Greek '*pneuma*'. So the unseen power of the Spirit of God became personified under the name of Enlil, meaning Lord of the Spirit, or Lord of the air. This conception first arose in the Sumerian holy city of Nippur. Enlil became Says the special god of that city.

Enlil in later times was depicted as a fatherly, beneficent god, always solicitous for the welfare of his creatures. He gradually assumed the prerogatives of An his father, so that An the Most High God receded into His heaven but Enlil was more immediately at hand to see to man's interests. One of the hymns of praise chanted in his honour says "without Enlil, no cities ... no sheep folds, fish would lay no eggs, birds would not build nests, plants and herbs would fail to grow ... grain would fail to flower, the trees would not yield their fruit". Enlil became a manifestation of the Most High God in so far as his creative spirit was concerned. Down in the south country, on the shores of what is now the Persian Gulf, men's minds were working in a different manner. Men of Eridu and Ur of the Chaldees were traders, merchants, seafarers, artisans. Their ships went as far east as India and Ceylon and down the coast of East Africa and brought the products of those countries back to their own. They were practical, hard-headed, men of the earth rather than the heavens, and they began to think of God in more concrete terms than the more visionary form of Enlil. So just as Enlil was the god of the spirit, of the air, and eventually of heaven, so now men in the south began to talk of God manifest in a more practical manner as the god of earth, sea and the world of the dead. They called him Enki, the lord of the earth and they too made him the son of An the supreme god.

In the days of Serug there were four gods instead of one and in later days were known as "creative gods". But Enki was not pictured as a benevolent, fatherly deity like Enlil; he was a rather brusque and short-tempered god, usually taking up an antagonistic attitude to Enlil. He was credited with inventing more than a hundred laws by which the civilised life of the community was to be regulated, and responsible for the development of agricultural and mechanical devices wherewith life became easier and the community richer. In these two deities, thinking men saw the two spheres of

Divine power extended towards man. One, the spiritual and the other earthly, practical. That is how it must have been in the beginning; only later did they take on the form of distinct personalities.

The process did not stop there. Men were looking for something visible to the natural eyes in which the invisible God could be manifested. Men have been doing that ever since and this is the source of all idolatry. Faith in the unseen things does not come easily to the natural man. So they turned their attention to the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and planets, and pictured them as the eyes of the Lord, watching everything that takes place on earth. In a fanciful way they considered those heavenly bodies as attributes of Deity and before long were venerating them as manifestations of the personal unseen God. So they gave Enlil five sons: Nannar, the Moon; Nebo, Mercury; Nergal, Mars; Niburu, Jupiter; and Adar, Saturn. Then they credited Nannar the Moon-god with a son and daughter, Utu, the Sun, and Inanna, Venus. These seven were termed the "immortal gods", the "watchers". They formed a second level of gods, whose duties were generally to oversee matters occurring on earth. A remarkable reference to the continuance of this belief into future ages is provided in the Book of Daniel (4.17). Nebuchadnezzar the king, recounting his dream of the tree to Daniel, says that "a watcher and a holy one" came down from heaven to declare the decree and told him *"this matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, to the intent that the King may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men..."* Here is a singular evidence that the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, two thousand years after the emergence of idolatry, accepted the existence of the seven "watchers", their overlords, the "creative gods", the "holy ones" and above them all, the Most High God who, worshipped since the days of Noah, still retained His position as the supreme God of heaven. Even the Jews in later time were not immune from the same failing; Jewish legend had it that there were seven archangels in attendance upon God, overseeing various departments of world affairs. Michael – the only archangel mentioned as such in the Bible – was the champion and defender of Israel and Gabriel the messenger of God, just as Utu was the champion of the Sumerians and Nebo the messenger of An; and there were five others. It would seem there are no

bounds to the ingenuity of men once they begin to depart from the living God. Tablets belonging to a couple of centuries later begin to reveal new gods, one after another, lesser gods, each devoted to the welfare of one particular sphere of human activity or one particular calling amongst men. Thus there suddenly appears Kulla the god of the brickbuilders, Ninkurra of the stonemasons, Ninilda of the carpenters; Adad the god of rain and storms; Ninurta of war; Arazu of prayer; Symugan of cattle and vegetation; Ninkurrak of medicine and healing. There were fifty of these altogether, known as the "great gods", all created by An. The individual citizen was expected when in difficulty to go to the appropriate god for help and only when that failed to go higher up the scale to one of the "watchers" or even to Enlil or Enki or An as a last resort.

As if this motley crowd of gods and goddesses was not enough, there next came, on the fourth level, three hundred spirits of earth and three hundred spirits of heaven, together with a multitude of fiends and evil spirits bent on harassing and persecuting defenceless humans. Much of the said humans' time was spent in supplicating the gods for deliverance from these terrors. The decline from monotheism into paganism was remarkably rapid. A matter of two centuries saw the entire pantheon of gods established: temples and ziggurats (temple-towers) which had been sacred to the Most High God from their foundations were re-named and made sacred to one or another of the new gods. For another five hundred years the system grew increasingly elaborate and complex to the point where every city and community had its own system of gods. This occurred to an extent that modern investigators are in despair endeavouring to make some sense of the often mutually contradictory beliefs of the ancient peoples. Eventually, a little before the time of Abraham, Marduk the deified Nimrod was introduced as the son of Enki and became particularly associated with Babylon, which by that time had become the capital of the whole country. Marduk was hailed as the world's redeemer and champion of all men and eventually superseded most of the others, except An the Most High. Millenniums later, a century before Christ, when the glory and power of Babylon had passed away and the great city lay in ruins and deserted, travellers found a decaying priesthood in the ruined Temple of Babylon

continuing a ritual honour of An and Marduk. The Most High God of Noah was never completely forgotten.

It is possible that this incursion into idolatry did not go unchallenged. There must have been some who, like Eber and his fellows, would have none of it. In the 22nd BC century, by which time idolatry was firmly established – and the birth of Abraham was to be only two more centuries away – there began to appear in all the city-states of Sumer an element of the Semitic part of the population known as Hebrews. They were notably conspicuous as merchants and traders and this at a time when communication with countries was opening up and goods being transported and exchanged meant they became well known throughout the Middle East. Students of Genesis will of course recognise them as descendants of Eber, from whom they derived their name. Abraham, one descendant of his, is referred to in Gen. 14.13 as "*Abram the Hebrew*". Now people in that 22nd century BC and onwards referred to God as "El" a word which in the Hebrew language means powerful or mighty. It is derived from the Semitic *ilu* which from earliest times meant 'God'. The Sumerian proper name "An" (Semitic 'Anu') for the Supreme Being was derived from the conception of His being the God of Heaven – the Sumerian word for heaven or the sky is also An, This name 'El' for 'God' is found to have been in general use among the Canaanites of Canaan up to the time Joshua and his hosts entered the land a thousand years later, and is in fact the same word that denotes God in Arabic today – Allah. The expression 'el elion' – 'God Most High' occurs in Genesis and again in the Psalms. Perhaps this had its origin at this time in an effort to maintain the authority of the One True God of Noah against the rising tide of "gods many and lords many" which was being created by the ingenuity of man.

But the odds were too great. The number of false gods continued to increase and the corruption of their religion multiplied, until the Lord looked down from heaven much as He had done in the days before the Flood and knew that the time had come to intervene. In Abraham He found the man whose faith would set in motion a chain of events which at the end would bring about the execution of His purpose.

(To be continued)

AOH

KNOWING THE ONLY TRUE GOD

"This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17.3 NIV).

As we think about knowing God we must ask the question, 'what is He like?' Perhaps there is no better answer than that given by the writer to the Hebrews as he commenced his letter. *"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power."* The Jews who wrote and spoke about Him in Old Testament days could read the records of those of their faith who had gone before to which they could add their own personal encounter with God. In many respects it was like looking at 'puzzling reflections'. In the New Testament the revelation through the Son was a true reflection of the Father. In Jesus we have the complete answer to the question. Those who watched and listened to Him and those who believed their record, recognised Him for who He was. The Jews who saw Jesus, but had never been properly acquainted with the God of the Old Testament, failed to recognise Jesus as the one who had come from God, so they wanted to destroy Him. His life was a judgment upon their ungodliness. In Old Testament times, knowing God was a major part of the lives of those who served Him. In the New Testament it was everything. In the first century people wanted that quality of life which would continue forever. Jesus was the only way to discover that kind of life, by coming to know the Father through Him. By observing Him they could really see what God was like, but the religious leaders of Jesus' day were unable to identify His Son when He arrived.

In the last two thousand years, human perception of what the Almighty Creator is like has not greatly improved. Israel stumbled over the Law that was just and good. Similarly, leaders of the Christian Church have stumbled over the teaching of the New Testament. Old and New Testaments were given by God, through faithful writers, and they covered every phase of spiritual life. Small 'sects' are as much to blame for this confusion as large denominations. They failed to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus and 'knowing God' has not been their

priority. Jesus referred to His Father, as *"your Father"* making those who are 'born again', brethren in Christ. Jesus said that His people were to offer 'the other cheek' to their enemies but they have more readily turned their back on their brethren.

For those who truly accepted the 'family likeness' in recognition of God as their *'Father'*, values began to change. It also changed their relationship to God. One of the most important aspects of this change was that following Jesus meant shedding the characteristics of worldliness. But with the passing centuries separation from the world became confused. Some became so separated that they could no longer bear witness to their faith – they lived monastic lives; a characteristic not confined to monasteries. Others made no real difference from the world and so the Christian Church became worldly. But there has always been a tiny minority, one here and one there, who alone sought the friendship of God.

Jesus demonstrated what God is like in His teaching and in His way of life. It was this that appealed to some of the Jewish nation and attracted them to Him – and to His Heavenly Father. As they accompanied Jesus, becoming His disciples, they began to change and become like Him. His compassion and meekness was shown by His concern for those He healed and for the relatives of those He raised from the dead. As He moved among ordinary people, and expressed His sympathy with the poor and outcasts of society He demonstrated the real meaning of the word 'love'. He sought the lost sheep of Israel. William Barclay lists the qualities of a 'good shepherd' as strength and courage, ceaseless unsleeping vigilance, infinite patience, unwearied kindness and the spirit of self-sacrifice. An example of the way in which these qualities can be transmitted by example is given in Phillip Keller's book 'Lessons from a Sheep Dog'. He describes how a totally mixed up 'border collie', verging on being a wild animal, was transformed into one of total loyalty and love by being treated with the real love. Keller wrote about the Good Shepherd. *"In reciprocation of affection, in genuine gratitude for His generosity, in profound appreciation for His tender touch upon my life, there is born within me the desire to be His love-slave. 'We love him because he first loved us'.* This

interchange of loving concern and real care for each other was the bedrock upon which trust and confidence was built between this beautiful dog and myself."

In the Gospels we discover what God is like as much by the way Jesus lived as by what He said. In the synoptic Gospels – the first three – we see Jesus at work, endearing Himself to people by the outpouring of His love in action. Yet the greatest act of His love in suffering and death was hardly recognised by most of His friends until it had passed into history. Those that stood round the cross and were first at the tomb three days later had best absorbed the reality of that love. John appears to have recognised the depth of Christ's love more readily than his fellow apostles. Known as 'John the beloved', his gospel and letters reveal how much the relationship had developed between the Lord and himself. Many years elapsed between the time of our Lord's ministry and of John writing his gospel. During that period he had time to reflect upon why the Jewish people and leaders had failed to understand their Messiah – they did not know the Father (16.3) as Jesus did. He also spoke of how some might boast of how much He had done in their streets and how many great things they had done in His name but His condemnation of them is the saddest in Scripture – *"I never knew you"* (Matt. 7.23). Knowing Christ has little to do with superficial or academic knowledge of Him but is the intimate knowledge of friendship. His followers must know Him really well. This is important knowledge – the kind of knowledge that will remain when theoretical knowledge "vanishes away" (1 Cor. 13.8).

Paul began His Christian life by an experience that taught him how Jesus regarded the relationship between Himself and His disciples. The Lord said to him *"Why are you persecuting me?"* In that question Saul of Tarsus realised the oneness between Jesus and His people. In the days to come Paul pondered those words and he too entered into a friendship with Jesus that he described to the Philippians. He was prepared to sacrifice everything for His sake; *"I consider everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and*

the fellowship of his sufferings." (Phil. 3.8-10).

Paul was a great missionary evangelist, and a wonderful pastor to those he converted and visited. But the most important thing in his life was 'knowing his Lord' – in fact that was the central point of his message and that which drove him on to serve and preach as he did. Paul was no abstract theologian, brilliant as he was in explaining the Hebrew Scriptures. His theology was typically Hebrew – practical and concerned with the great realities of life. Towards the end of his life he wrote to Timothy *"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day."* Later in that same letter he wrote of his first trial before the Emperor and said that *"all deserted me. But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully"*.

In John's first letter (2.4, 5) he wrote *"By this we may be sure that we know him if we keep his commandments. He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him"*. The Apostle makes it clear that Jesus' commandment was to love, and described some examples of that love. This is the identification of those who know Christ – those who are our brethren in Christ. That love can only develop through the power of the Spirit, bringing us ever closer to Him and His people.

'Knowing Christ' means deliberately spending time every day in His presence – some would say at the beginning of the day – in prayer and meditation upon His Word. This sets the pattern for the hours that follow as we go out to the world. Work can never be boring if we do it for Him and with Him. Wherever we are, whatever the kind of problem or situation we face, we do so with Him. All our relationships, with everyone we meet, are governed by the unseen 'presence' with us. If we cannot share an experience or a friend with the Lord we had best terminate that experience and that friendship quickly. No matter where we are or what we are doing He is at hand to guide and strengthen us for the occasion. Abstract philosophy or a particular interpretation of certain Scriptures can only be of value if they guide us in the ordinary, everyday things of life. But if we are obedient to the will of God, as He has so far revealed it to us, then we can be sure that He will increase our understanding of the Word and guide us still further

in living totally for and with Him. Then when faced with temptation and we meet circumstances that are confusing, He will show us the way out. But it is important to stop and look to Him and be obedient.

"If to the right or left I stray,
That moment, Lord, reprove;
And let Thy goodness chase away
All hindrance to Thy love.
O may the least omission pain
My well instructed soul,
And send me to the blood again
That makes and keeps me whole." – BSH 178

As we become closer to the Lord, there will be a whole lot of circumstances in life that will no longer be acceptable to Him. We live in a very stimulating environment in which the media are determined to attract our attention and make us listen to the 'siren calls'. But they will not save us. Politicians and entertainers alike have but one object – to woo our interest and support for them. We have the choice – and if we feel uncertain –

don't! It takes absolute honesty and determination to make certain that He alone is what matters in our lives. He promised there would be denial of selfish ambition and desire, at the beginning of our walk with Him. As the reality of who and what He is becomes stronger, the world's tinsel and tawdry toys lose their attraction. The difficulties of life become easier to bear and its problems more readily solved as we turn them over to Him. Those who are not walking our way, will not understand. But our love for Him will grow stronger and our desire to express His love to our brethren – and the world in general – will increase until at last we shall be like Him – and see Him as He is. May God who loves and gave His dearest and best for us, help us so to do – because walking with Him will make us better spouses, better parents, better neighbours and friends, better at whatever we do all day long – because we shall be doing it with the Lord.

DN

Jael And Sisera

Jael was the Kenite woman who slew Sisera the Canaanite chieftain after inviting him into the sanctity of her tent, and in so doing gave cause for a controversy over the ethics of her action. The story bears all the marks of an act of treachery but the whole-hearted endorsement of the affair by Deborah the Israelite prophetess has often been taken as indicating Divine approval.

The narrative is found in Judges 4 and 5. The time, the troubled period, a century or so after Israel had entered the promised land, when the 'Judges' ruled, and *"every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 21.25). The scene, the fertile valley of Esdraelon in the north and mount Tabor, near which Nazareth was afterwards to stand. Some of the northern tribes, Naphtali, Zebulun and Issachar, had become tributary to a Canaanite king, Jabin, and they groaned under his oppression. The acknowledged leader of Israel at the time was a woman, Deborah the prophetess. Israel *"cried to the Lord"* for deliverance, indicating contrition and a return to God (Judges 4.3). Deborah roused herself to action. Summoning Barak of the tribe of Naphtali, apparently the best military leader the nation possessed, she encouraged him to raise a force of ten thousand men to challenge the oppressor. Descending from

the slopes of mount Tabor upon the Canaanite host assembled in the valley, Barak gained a decisive victory and put the enemy to precipitate flight. Sisera, the Canaanite commander, became separated from his men and chariots, and fled in another direction on foot to find sanctuary with a friendly community. The battle had been fierce and long. The Canaanites apparently considerably outnumbered their opponents and had in addition the advantage of nine hundred war chariots. Israel was armed only with bows and spears. Barak, however, was evidently a strategist. He chose to launch his attack from the flank of Mount Tabor, two thousand feet high, whence he could descend upon the enemy arrayed along the river Kishon in the plain at Megiddo, down a relatively narrow valley protected from any out-flanking tactics by the high ground on either side. Thus the Canaanite host met the full force of a closely-knit solid body of men striking at the very centre of their rather long drawn out defences. From Deborah's song of triumph after the event it seems the impact of Barak's attack demoralised the Canaanite army and that many were drowned in attempting to get across the river to safety. The survivors finally took to headlong flight through the plain towards their principal fortress town of Harosheth twenty miles

away, with the jubilant Israelites in hot pursuit. By the end of the day the chariots were all in the possession of Israel and the whole of Sisera's vast host had been put to the sword. The victory was complete. Sisera plodded wearily across country the four or five miles that separated him from the encampment of Heber the Kenite, where he hoped to find refuge. And this is where Jael comes into the story. Jael was Heber's wife. She was not an Israelite. The Kenites were the people of Jethro the father-in-law of Moses and had thrown in their lot with Israel when Moses led that nation to the Promised Land. Of Midianite extraction, they retained the fierce Bedouin instincts of their ancestors. This fact has to be borne in mind when assessing the later developments in the story. Judges 4.17-22 is a straightforward narrative of what actually happened, relating sober facts, and this is history. Judges 5.24-27 is part of Deborah's later song of triumph exulting over the incident, and this is poetry. This also has to be borne in mind, for poetry should not be viewed so literally as history. So Sisera approached Heber's little settlement. It seems that Heber himself and all his men folk were away, for it was Jael who went out to greet the fugitive. It could be that they were out in the fields with their flocks; it is not likely that they were in the battle with the Israelites, for ch. 4.17 says that *"there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle"* (ch. 4.18). Now this was a very risky proceeding for the Canaanite captain; a man discovered inside a woman's tent in that Bedouin society would meet instant death at the hands of the outraged husband and his relatives. If the woman was found there in his company she would share his fate. It is evident that Sisera took the risk in order to find a place of concealment from his pursuers, but why did Jael put herself in such jeopardy? It has been suggested that he forced his way in but this is neither likely to have served his purpose nor does it agree with Jael's apparent invitation. Verse 18 can hardly be construed as other than a direct free-will invitation. Dr. Thomson in 'The Land and the Book' suggests that the 'peace' between Jabin and Heber need only mean that no state of war existed. The Canaanites

almost certainly oppressed this little Semitic colony in their midst and Heber had no cause to espouse Jabin's side. Jael seeing Sisera approaching in the distance and in the knowledge that her own men folk were away, faced the alternatives of giving shelter to Sisera and risking the vengeance of the pursuing Israelites if they discovered him or rejecting his plea for shelter and risking death at his hands.

The outcome of the situation was the solution she found to her problem, and this may well explain her apparent later treachery. At any rate, Sisera laid himself down in her tent and suffered himself to be covered with a "mantle" or more properly, a rough skin blanket. He asked for a drink of water, *"for"* said he *"I am thirsty"*. He had been fighting a losing battle all day and had lost his army. He had been pursued at least twelve or fifteen miles over rough country, and he was exhausted. Jael gave him, not water, but milk, and thus refreshed, he settled down again under his blanket. Before so doing, however, he gave Jael an instruction. *"Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee and say, is there any man here, that thou shalt say, No"* (ch. 4.20). The words as they stand would seem to indicate that the men folk of Jael's own tribe were included in the prohibition. It could well be that Sisera was not prepared to trust any of them – but in any case his request put the woman in a very difficult position. By the code under which she lived she could expect no mercy from her own folk if after such an answer her word was found to be false. Jael might well have felt at this point that Sisera had betrayed her hospitality and forfeited any claim to protection and that the preservation of her own reputation might now only be secured by the death of her visitor. Jael's response was immediate. *"Then Jael, Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground, for he was fast asleep, and weary. So he died"* (4.21). The Kenites were nomadic tent-dwellers; the "nail" was a sharp-pointed hardwood tent peg and the 'hammer' the wooden mallet used for driving the tent pegs into the ground. It was a cruel and terrible act, and by modern standards a deed of treachery. The man was her invited guest and had gone to sleep in trust that she would protect him and she betrayed that trust.

Sisera had come in worn out and exhausted from the battle and subsequent pursuit, desiring nothing more than a place in which to sleep in safety. The account says *"he was fast asleep, and weary"*. If the dispassionate, matter of fact narrative in ch. 4 is given preference over the poetic licence of ch. 5 the details of the incident are plain, Jael went in to him *"softly"*, ascertained that he was fast asleep, crouched down over him perhaps with her knees on either side of his recumbent form, the tent peg and mallet in her hands and the gruesome deed was done. It would seem then, that Jael's treachery was inspired by one of two factors. Either she was in fear for her own life as suggested by Dr. Thomson, or perhaps more likely, she regarded Sisera, probably with good reason, as an enemy of her own people. His destruction would justify her violation of the laws of hospitality. Something of her animosity is revealed in her words when, a little later on, Barak arrived at the settlement searching for Sisera; *"Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest"*. It might well have been that there was some unavenged wrong Sisera had done Jael or her people, not hinted at in the story, and that she took advantage of this opportunity for revenge. If so, the entire story is consistent with what could be expected of a fierce Bedouin woman. What value then is to be placed upon Deborah's impassioned praise *"Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent"* (ch. 5.24). The obvious answer is none at all. Deborah was a prophetess and obviously a woman stalwart in her allegiance to God but this did not impart

infallibility to her utterances and neither was God bound to endorse all her sentiments. She was a woman of her times and from her point of view Jael had done a fine thing and was worthy of all commendation; but Deborah could hardly be considered completely unbiased in the matter. After all, in much later and more enlightened times plenty of quite earnest Christian people with much less excuse than Deborah have claimed the Divine blessing upon victories won in warfare involving acts no less nauseating than that for which Jael was responsible. Deborah's song was exultant, colourful poetry, conceived in the emotion of the moment, and her bestowal of blessing upon Jael need be taken no more seriously than her words a few verses earlier. *"the stars in their courses fought against Sisera."* In literal fact the stars had nothing to do with the battle; it was the irresistible ferocity of the Israelite warriors which brought about the Canaanite defeat. The victory of Israel was a good thing. It helped to replace Canaanite degradation by a better and purer form of communal life in the land, and it can be agreed that in a general way the Divine purpose was being served; but this does not necessarily set the stamp of Divine approval upon everything that was done. This is one of many Biblical stories which stress the truth that the image men make of God is oft-times far removed from the reality. *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth,, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isa. 55.8-9).

AOH

The Kingdom Within You

A Christian Church ought to be an exhibition of heaven upon earth – a manifestation of Christ below – a witness for God in the midst of the world, so that the world looking at the church may be able to say: "This is a specimen of what that which is called the Gospel can do; this is a model of what the Christian teaching can achieve." And so all with whom we come into contact in our intercourse in life will say: "That man does not say much about his Christian beliefs when transacting business, but there prevails in all that he does an integrity, a singleness of eye, a simplicity of purpose, a faithfulness to his engagements, and a superiority

to trial that proves he must have some fountain of peace and comfort and joy that we have not. We will go and hear what he hears, learn the lessons he has learned, and taste, if it be possible, the happiness which we see in his character." Such a one becomes to mankind either the salt that silently keeps a society from corruption, or the light shining on the hilltop that illuminates the earth with a ray of the glory of heaven.

(Forest Gate Bible Monthly)

BY THE WAY – A TALKING MOUNTAIN?

Things we meet along the Christian path

Have you ever heard of a talking mountain? Being a literally minded person, this was the thought that came into my mind at a recent service at our local church. Many of the Christian women in our village had got together for the Women's World Day of Prayer, and were using the thoughts and prayers prepared this year by women in South Africa. It was a good service – a small group from each church, not above thirty altogether on a freezing night in March, but united in acknowledging God's love and care and the needs of our world. There is disease, poverty, violence, persecution, false teaching In the face of this, we need to look to God's parental care and protection, and not be afraid to speak. But this state of things also reminds us of the signs of the times referred to in Luke 21.5-19. In these last days there is all the more reason to look to our Almighty Creator.

Which is where the talking mountain comes in. I looked it up afterwards in Psalm 148. In that psalm all the forces of nature are urged to 'Praise the Lord' *as if they could speak*. I take it the thought is that we human beings should consider all the wonders of creation, and praise God on account of them. Or is it really possible for inanimate things to find a voice, and in their exultant existence to show the joy of His creative work? Mountains, hills, orchards, forests, wild animals, farm animals, snakes or birds (Psalm 148.9, 10)?

There is a similar theme to be found in the apocryphal part of the book of Daniel, where in what some call the 'Benedicite', or the 'Song of the Three Young Men' Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego sing to God out of the fiery furnace in which He has protected them. Sun and moon – cold and heat – mountains and hills – everything that grows on earth are all exhorted to '*blest the Lord, give glory and eternal praise to him*' (Jerusalem Bible, Daniel 3.51-90). And at the end it all comes down to us; to praise God for what He has done. "*All you who worship him, blest the God of gods, praise him and give him thanks, for his love is everlasting*" (v.90).

So that somewhat idiosyncratic prayer from South Africa in the Women's World Day service, with its speaking mountain, was perhaps not so strange after all. What do you think? Here it is.

'We invite you to join us in this South African prayer of praise "All works of God - praise the Lord and bless His name."'

Left Side All you BIG things, praise the Lord! Drakensberg and Table Mountains, Indian and Atlantic Oceans, Yellow-wood, Oak and Baobab trees

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Right Side All you TINY things, praise the Lord! Busy red ants and lurking ticks, wriggling tadpoles and pestering mosquitoes

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Left Side All you SHARP things, praise the Lord! Cactus thorns and prickly pears, aloe leaves and high-heeled shoes.

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Right Side All you SOFT things, praise the Lord! Golden ripe mangoes, sponges and moss, babies' skin, cuddly toys and porridge

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Left Side All you SWEET things, praise the Lord! Apples, peaches and blueberry jam, young people's dreams and old people's good wishes

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Right Side All you SWIFT things, praise the Lord! Lightning and swallows flitting through the sky, traffic on motorways and speeding ambulances

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Left Side All you SLOW things, praise the Lord! Huge big elephants and bony old cows, tortoises, snails and patients on crutches

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Right Side All you LOUD things, praise the Lord! Thunder, midnight drums and taxis, hail and rain on aluminium roofs

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Left Side All you QUIET things, praise the Lord! A gentle breeze in the midday heat, sleeping babies and fish in the sea, women who care and suffer and weep

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Right Side All you SPIRITUAL things, praise the Lord! Uplifting music and singing psalms, Bible studies and gospel praise, preaching the Word and

receiving God's gifts

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

Left Side All you CREATED things, praise the Lord! Our planet earth and its orbiting moon, our galaxy with its systems of suns, all the universe - both known and unknown

All PRAISE THE LORD AND BLESS HIS NAME.

P.S. Psalm 19 refers to the heavens declaring the glory of God without using words: *"no utterance at all, no speech, no sound that anyone can hear - yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their message to the ends of the world"* (Psalm 19.1-4 JB).

GC

THE BOOK OF JASHER

Twice mentioned in the Old Testament, this book has not survived; nothing more is known about it than can be inferred from these two references. "Jasher" means just, upright, straight. The Vulgate calls it the "book of the just ones" and the LXX the "book of the upright one". There is just a possibility that the name is derived from a Hebrew word implying that it is a book of songs. The Syriac calls it the "book of praises". Less likely, perhaps, is that Jasher was the name of its author.

Joshua 10.13, after recounting the story of the sun *"standing still"* until the people had defeated their enemies, says *"Is not this written in the book of Jasher?"* It has been pointed out by scholars that Joshua's words in v. 12 and the first sentence in v. 13 are poetry whereas the rest of the chapter is prose, and that this points to these words being a direct quotation from the book of Jasher.

"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.

And thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon.

And the sun stood still,

And the moon stayed,

Until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

The other reference, in 2 Samuel 1.18, relates to David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, a poetic composition covering vv 19-27 of that chapter, and one of the most eloquent passages of the Old Testament. This, it is said in v.18, *"is written in the book of Jasher"*. On the basis of these examples it is thought that the lost book was a collection of poems or songs. It deals with the stirring deeds of Israel's ancient heroes, and other similar songs preserved in the O.T., such as Miriam's song of triumph following the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 15) and that of Deborah after the defeat of Sisera (Judges 5), had the same origin.

The book was probably written in the time of David or Solomon, since the reference in 2 Sam. dates it to David's time at the earliest. The reference in Joshua would then be an editorial insertion supplementary to the original narrative, added in the days of David or later.

Several editions of a book claiming to be the lost book of Jasher appeared between 1827 and 1840 but these all stemmed back to one published at Bristol in 1751 which was almost immediately shown to be a forgery. In fact the book has never been discovered. It is sometimes said that Josephus declared (Ant. 5.1.17) that a copy was held in the Temple archives of his day but reference to the place shows that he did not mention Jasher and probably referred to the Book of Joshua itself.

AOH

[Editorial Note: This reprint from 1986 is inserted for its interest and explanation. It should be noted that the references to Exodus, Joshua and 1 Samuel could very well have been the source of the poems from which the editor of Jasher took some of his poems, the reverse of the suggestion above.]

Paul's Poem of Patient Love (a positive paraphrase of 1 Cor. 13.4-8)

Love absorbs trouble and distils kindness,
Is contented, lowly and 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 last,
Persevering to the end,
Always successful.

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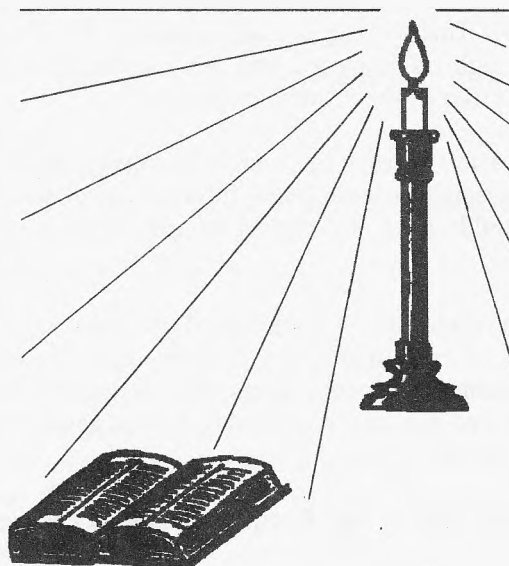
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NOTICES

Booklets - we continue with a programme of reprinting. We apologise for disappointment in that several titles are out of print. We proceed as fast as present conditions permit.

All literature is published with a view to it being as spiritually effective as possible but publication of any material does not mean that all members of the BFU team agree with every statement made.

The Talking Book Service continues to be appreciated by a number of readers and we are grateful to the one who records and dispatches the cassettes. This service is mainly intended for those whose sight is impaired and who would find it difficult to read the printed magazine.

We also advertise in several Christian journals. We appreciate receiving any information or ideas that would make this aspect of our work more effective.

The Web Site has increased its value as a means of reaching our readers and as an advertisement for new readers. We are grateful to the one who keeps this updated and helps generally with internet services

Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust Trustees welcomed about 40 friends to **Gainsborough House** at Milborne Port during the first weekend in June. This is a little town (or perhaps they prefer to call it a big village) near Sherborne on the border between Dorset and Somerset. The residential centre was the scene of a very happy Convention and those present were able to listen to two addresses and share in times of worship and fellowship that were greatly appreciated by both residents and visitors. The weather was fine and

warm, and at least one meal was taken on the lawn. The Housekeeper and her daughter provided excellent meals and the Victorian villa looked in good form. Vacancies are available for short stay holidays or permanent residence.

Enquiries to the Housekeeper at 01963 250684

Books to help you in your Bible Study - these books are not available from Bible Fellowship Union - try your nearest Christian Bookshop

New Bible Commentary - IVP

New Bible Dictionary - IVF

Vines Expository Dictionary - Nelson

Amplified Bible - Zondervan

New Revised Standard Version - Harper Collins

Marshall's Interlinear Greek English New

Testament - Bagster

"Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head.

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always 'Me first',

Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others

Doesn't revel when others grovel.

Takes pleasure in the flowering truth.

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always look for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end."

1 Corinthians 13.4-7 The Message

Eugene Peterson - Navpress.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH – REPENTANCE

"Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand".

These were the familiar words of John the Baptist as he called Israel to turn right round in their way of life. God's people were travelling in the wrong direction. In spite of their professed piety and clinging to the fact they were children of Abraham, they were heading for destruction. God had sent them a prophet and they did not believe him. He sent them a Messiah and they killed Him.

John warned the people to whom he spoke that it was no good claiming to be descendants of Abraham – their family connections would not save them. God could raise up those who were worthy of the promises made to their fathers. It is a familiar problem. We all bask in the glory of the more successful members of our families. What is much worse, we like to feel spiritually safe with certain 'church connections'. The right group or fellowship; the right doctrine and Christian work; these are the things we cling to for salvation. No matter how good our Christian upbringing or Church education, we all need to start in the same position before God – we are all sinners – in utter contrition of heart we must repent. If we have not a contrite heart – then now is the time to do so.

John however made it clear that what his listeners really needed was to *"bear fruits that befit repentance"*. This meant that the change in their lives had to be so radical that they began to produce behaviour that matched their protestation of change. So they asked John what they should do. The ordinary people were told that they must be willing to share with their neighbour what they had got and he lacked. If you have food and clothing that another lacks you must give him half. This was a remarkable preparation of the ground for Jesus' teaching - yet it is the teaching of a prophet. The tax collectors were next to confront John and he told them that they were not to defraud those from whom they were supposed to collect taxes. Those words were to have their harvest in the lives of Matthew Levi and Zacchaeus. None were outside the fold of Israel's God – John didn't turn away from those supposed to be outside the Law. But they must all change their way of life. The soldiers, probably the Jewish Temple guard, asked John what they should do. They worked for the priests, they must have been counted within the Law so

were they in need of reform? They were instantly told that they were to live contented lives, not forever seeking more of this world's wealth; *"godliness with contentment is great gain"* might have been their new slogan.

The lessons never grow old – the need today for Christians to seek the way of repentance is as great as ever. There can be no true discipleship until the heart is fully repentant nor can there be consistent growth in the Spirit while ever the human will is not broken at the foot of the Cross and God's will is not being fully done in the life. This is not a turning again to dead works but is fully consistent with the teaching of 1 John 1.9 where we are told to confess our faults and be forgiven through the blood of Jesus our Saviour. This is the true repentance, a continuous attitude of 'brokenness' of the human will and recognition that Christ and Christ alone is our Master. Total contrition of heart is a prerequisite of commitment to Christ, and following Him as a real disciple is not possible until that state of affairs exists in every department of our lives. The Call to discipleship comes when we have exposed the real nature of the wilful 'I'.

There is a foe whose hidden power the Christian well may fear;

More subtle far than inbred sin and to the heart more dear.

It is the power of selfishness, the proud and wilful I,

And ere my Lord can live in me, my very self must die. — A. B. Simpson

Perhaps there is no better description of repentance than that which Jesus put into the mouth of the 'prodigal son' in His most wonderful allegory. *"I will get up and go to my father and I will say to him, 'Father I have sinned before heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, treat me like one of your hired hands' ... But while he was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion."*

Have we really heard the 'Father' say those words of us *"for this my son was dead and is alive again"*. He is more ready to forgive than we are to say 'I'm sorry'

MAN OF SORROWS

*A study of
Isaiah 53*

3 - Despised and Rejected

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (v 3).

This is the most bitter prophecy of the Old Testament. From the very beginning, when amid the loveliness of Eden the first guilty pair stood and heard the sad tones of God passing sentence, there had always been the promise of a coming Redeemer. It is fairly evident from Eve's words at the birth of Seth that when Cain was born she had seen in that event the beginning of fulfilment of the Divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That early hope was dashed when Cain became a murderer and was banished from the company of men; but with the coming of Seth the hope revived, and from that time onwards the world was never without those who looked for the Deliverer. The ancient mythologies of Babylon, reaching back to the shadowy times before Abraham, pagan though they were, show unmistakable traces of the belief, persisting even though men's ideas of God had become woefully distorted. When Abraham made his venture of faith and left his country for the land of promise, it was because he believed in the Coming One, and so to him came the promise that from his own descendants would deliverance come. Throughout Israel's history the expectation never died down; always were they a people chosen by the Lord to hail and receive the Deliverer when He should appear, and under His leadership become a light to the nations, to declare His salvation to the ends of the earth. That was the hope that kept them separate from the nations around them, that held them, despite their many shortcomings and failures. They were a people for a purpose, fashioned and developed by virtue of many and varied national experiences for the part they would be called upon to play when Messiah should appear.

And to Isaiah fell the bitterness of proclaiming in advance that it was all to be of no avail, that when the supreme moment of Israel's existence had arrived, they would turn away from the Deliverer and fail at the moment of achievement. He would be despised and rejected of men, and all the glorious things associated with His Advent vanish

away like the morning mists. They would fail to recognise the time of their visitation, and the magnificent opportunity, pass them by for ever – for even then the Divine sentence was in process of formulation *"The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"*.

The fulfilment of the prophecy is too well known to need detailed exposition. Jesus was despised and rejected of men, and had the fate of the Kingdom of God rested with the ecclesiastical leaders and the political rulers and the bulk of the ordinary people of the First Advent, then that Kingdom indeed was doomed. But in His infinite wisdom God has entrusted the destinies of His outworking Plan, not to the great and the wise and those chosen by popular acclaim, but to an inconspicuous and uninfluential minority who at certain times in earth's history have been called "the Remnant". A remnant they have truly been, on more than one occasion when the earth has been all but in darkness and it has seemed as though the Plan of God was sinking into irretrievable ruin; but always there has been new life springing out from that remnant, a revival of God's work in the midst of the years, an upsurge of spiritual vitality that has carried the Plan of God into another phase and another dispensation. So it was when Jesus was despised and rejected by the many; there were a few who did accept Him and did realise that His coming meant salvation for the world, in due time. And from the hearts' loyalty and lives' devotion of those few is born all that we possess or know of Christian faith and hope today.

The story is not ended. It is still possible to despise and reject Him. Even today the worldly wise and great and influential, the leaders and the controllers of this world, like their prototypes of two thousand years ago, do not understand and have no use for the teachings of the Man of Nazareth. The popular voice is no more disposed to consider His claims than it was then. If we would be of those whom God will use to carry the interests of His Kingdom into the next Dispensation, we must reconcile ourselves to being of the "Remnant". But even so we may yet fail to retain the coveted honour.

Those who rejected Jesus at the First Advent, and were in consequence themselves rejected, were not so judged because of lack of knowledge, or unsoundness of theological outlook. On matters of the Law, and of doctrine, and of righteousness before God, the scribes and Pharisees had much in common with Jesus. He certainly condemned them for their narrowness and rigidity in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law but He did not dispute the soundness of the theological ground upon which they stood. It was not their orthodoxy or their beliefs which cost them the Kingdom; it was their failure to appreciate and manifest and practice the mind of God – which in our day we would call the spirit of Christ – that led to their rejection and thrusting out from the Kingdom. *"Go ye, and learn what that means, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice'."* That was the stumbling-stone. They despised and rejected Jesus because He manifested a spirit of love and tolerance and mercy, and with all their doctrinal orthodoxy they could find no room for those virtues. So they rejected Him, arrogantly, scornfully, and at the end, maliciously; so He in turn rejected them, sadly, regretfully, but firmly.

So it will be with us. Like Paul, the most intellectually minded of all the apostles, we may understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, but without love it profits us nothing. If we refuse to have our lives guided by love, tolerance, and mercy, and insist instead upon the empty shibboleths of intellectual understanding and a mechanical memorising of Scriptural doctrines, we shall end up where the Pharisees did - outside the Kingdom. Our Lord will be just as sad and regretful as He was in the case of the Pharisees, but He will be just as firm. The Millennial work of the future needs qualifications of a nature that cannot be learned out of a book. Unless we have well learned, and practised in our own lives, that spirit which pervaded the life of Christ we shall not be fitted for the Church's future work, and it will become true of us as it was of them "the Kingdom of God is taken from you". We shall have become of those who "despised and rejected" Him.

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." (v 4). This is the first of three verses each of which affirm most definitely the substitutionary character of our Lord's

sufferings. It was not just that He endured similar sufferings to those of mankind. It was that He did in truth take upon Himself the sufferings that men ought to have endured. This is not a popular doctrine nowadays. Men prefer to think of Jesus – if they think of Him at all – as an example, a mentor, a leader who shows the way, One of whom they can speak admiringly or respectfully as pre-eminent, but they do not like to acknowledge that He endured sufferings that are rightfully theirs, that they are under that kind of obligation to Him. Men do not care to admit that they are sinners, and especially do they object to admitting that they are helpless sinners, and that only Christ can lift them out of that hopeless state.

One might very properly ask at this point in what way was it that Jesus bore our griefs and carried our sorrows? Men in all ages have had plenty of their own which they have had perforce to bear and it is self-evident that Jesus did not carry the griefs and sorrows of mankind to the extent that they had none themselves to endure. The cynic might well suggest that if Jesus had never lived the net difference to any man in this respect would not have been noticeable. The truth of the matter is that all grief and sorrow arises from the presence of sin, and it was a man who sinned and men who continue to sin. Hence that which Jesus undeniably did bear was rightfully the responsibility of men, for Jesus Himself knew no sin. As one translator puts it *"It was our griefs he bore, it was our sorrows he carried"*. That reflection leads us to the realisation of another fact, that the sin of man has consequences that cannot be confined to the one who sins. The fathers eat sour grapes, but they are the children's teeth that are set on edge. It is when men comprehend that fundamental truth that they will understand why God has decreed righteousness the law of His creation and has outlawed sin. It is then that they will understand why Jesus bore their griefs and carried their sorrows. He, the sinless One, living in a sinful world, willingly sharing in all its life and all its affairs, could do nothing else but take upon himself that share of the world's distress. It is when men realise that, they will come with breaking hearts to acknowledge their own unworthiness and to render their allegiance to Him. *"In all things"* says the writer to the Hebrews *"it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful*

and faithful high priest. . . in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

And He still bears our griefs, still carries our sorrows! Does anybody imagine that because He has now been exalted "*higher than all heavens*", resplendent in the glory of His spiritual nature that He no longer feels the woes of men here on earth in the flesh? The parable of the lost sheep should quickly refute any such reasoning. If there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, as Jesus declared, then surely there must be abiding sorrow over the sinners who have not yet repented. It is true, of course, that Jesus no longer bears the sin of man in a sacrificial sense, for all that was finished at the Cross, but it must be true that He still takes upon himself the burden of our griefs and sorrows and gives us instead, if we will, that strength and consolation that can come only from Him. That was His mission from the start and remains His ministry, to bind-up the brokenhearted, to comfort all that mourn, to pour in the oil of joy in exchange for mourning, to give the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. We ought to bear in mind that in taking upon Himself the burden of the world's distress our Lord did not assume it merely for the short space of three and a half years whilst He walked as a Man upon earth. He took it for all the time that had and has yet to elapse before sin and the results of sin are forever banished from the earth. Throughout all this present Gospel Age He has carried the griefs and sorrows of all His disciples and been to them a Shepherd and an Elder Brother, guiding and guarding them in times of difficulty and danger, consoling and cheering them in times of distress and tragedy. In the next Age, the Millennial Age, there will be griefs and sorrows also, as men and women find for themselves that the consequences of their past lives of sin weigh them down like the heavy burden carried by the hero of "*Pilgrim's Progress*", until, like Christian in that immortal allegory, they cast it down at the foot of the Cross where Jesus stands waiting to bear it on their behalf. How could He be a merciful and sympathetic High Priest in that glorious Age if He did not remove the burden from humanity's shoulders and assume it Himself, if He is not

affected by the effects of sin in the lives of those to whom He has become a Mediator? It is they whom He is leading up the Highway of Holiness to full reconciliation with God. Surely this fourth verse of Isaiah's fifty-third chapter must be in process of fulfilment through all the long centuries, all the time that any of those for whom Christ died are still weighed down with the grief and sorrow that comes because of sin.

These things must be true of the Church also. Those who are the Master's disciples now, consecrated to His service, trusting in His promise that if faithful they will one day share with Him in His glory and be manifested with Him to raise fallen mankind up to the glorious liberty of the children of God; what of these? They also will bear the griefs and sorrows of mankind in that day. They also will be merciful and sympathetic priests, able to help and guide the willing of earth's unfortunates, able because they themselves have passed this way before. It is a solemn thought, that we cannot be of use to our Lord in that future unless we have in this life been made perfect through suffering as He was. That does not necessarily mean a life of physical suffering, nor yet of mental suffering, although something of both does usually enter into the experience of each disciple. It does mean suffering in the sense that we have shared in the griefs and sorrows of this sin-sick world, that in our own small way we have followed in the footsteps of our Saviour and been as He was in the world. We too must enter into the world's distress and feel deeply for all men in their sorrows if we are to be of the character needed in that day. Do our hearts ache for the injustice and oppression that comes before our notice every day? Do our minds cry out in protest at some flagrant example of misery or cruelty inflicted perhaps by heartless men or soulless institutions and governments? Do we long for the wisdom and the power to go out into the world bringing happiness and health where now there is sorrow and sickness? These are the things that must possess our inward being like a burning fire if we will be of those who in the next Age will come forth armed with all wisdom and power to do these very things. Today they are considered by men as signs of weakness, for love and mercy and well doing are despised and the contrary attributes of selfishness and callousness exalted as desirable standards by which to live. So

it is that in this day, as in that of Isaiah, the one who carries the burden of others is despised as one to whom even God is indifferent. Men in Jesus' day could not understand how such an One could enjoy the favour of God whilst bereft of all outward indication of Divine favour. They looked upon His life, spent chiefly among the outcasts and the poor, the uninfluential in earth's affairs, and His death, that of a common criminal, without any kind of spectacular deliverance such as the past heroes of their own history, Daniel, Job, Joseph, had experienced, and they could only esteem him stricken and smitten, deserted by God. They were quite incapable of comprehending how God could possibly be interested in such an one. God was, to them, a militant, war loving God, indulgent to His own people and a relentless foe to His enemies, justifying His worshippers on the basis of correctly performed ritual and sacrifice and condemning all others on account of failure to observe the Law. Temporal welfare and the favour of God went hand in hand, and the manifest disfavour of God could only mean that there was wickedness in the object of disfavour. Small wonder that, looking on the Man of Sorrows and seeing nothing of the spiritual glory, they esteemed him *"stricken and afflicted of God"*.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (v 5).

This is the second verse affirming the substitutionary character of our Lord's sufferings. He suffered these things by the hand of man and he endured them on behalf of man. Zechariah, more than two centuries later, must have remembered this passage when he cried *"They shall look upon the one whom they pierced and shall mourn for him"*. The word here rendered "wounded" means "pierced" and has the significance of being thrust through with a weapon in a manner that inevitably causes death. Psa. 22.16 uses the same word when in that noble lament that has so often been taken as prophetic of Jesus' sufferings, the Psalmist sings *"the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and feet"*. It certainly does at least refer to the sufferings of Israel as a nation. That prophecy was of course fulfilled literally in the case of Jesus on the Cross, as were so many of the other prophetic declarations of the 22nd Psalm.

It is by no means unreasonable therefore to conclude that Isaiah, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit of God, did have that Psalm in his mind as he uttered, and perhaps wrote, the splendid words of his 53rd chapter. The Lord's servant of Isa. 53, despised and rejected, is the same as the one who cries his solemn lament in Psa. 22. Just as in Psa. 22 the lament changes at the end into a joyful expression of faith in the eventual outcome, a confidence that at the end God will deliver and vindicate his loyal one, so in Isa. 53 the well-nigh hopeless strain turns at the end into a song of praise to God who has set the insignia of royalty upon the despised and rejected one, and vindicated and exalted him at last in the sight of all people. There is correspondence between Psa. 22 and Isa. 53 that is well worth studying.

When Zechariah spoke of the great mourning that is to sweep regathered Israel in the last days (Zech. 12) consequent upon their looking upon the One Whom they had pierced, it is this final vindication which he sees. Isaiah and the writer of Psalm 22 saw this final glorious outcome from the standpoint of God in heaven. The faithful servant who had endured unto death, innocently, willingly taking the place of the sons of men who themselves had merited this judgment, exalted at last to the right hand of the majesty on high, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. Zechariah, on the other hand, is standing on the earth at the Last Day. He sees the regathered and resurrected Israelites of all nations gathered around their King, the once rejected and crucified Saviour, and now they are weeping tears of contrition and repentance. Through that mourning will come cleansing, and ultimately reconciliation with God and a lifting of the burden of all their transgressions and all their sins. It is in that sense that He was pierced for their transgressions and for those of the whole world.

"Bruised for our iniquities". The Hebrew is far more forceful. *"He was crushed."* It is the strongest word the Hebrew language has to denote severity of suffering unto death. Isaiah uses the word elsewhere. In 3.15 he says *"What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces ... saith the Lord."* That was a question addressed directly to those who were oppressing the people of the Lord and destroying them by their rapacity. Again, in describing the coming doom of the Egyptians, he says in 19.10 *"they shall be broken in the purposes"*

thereof". Pierced to death for our transgressions; crushed into lifelessness for our iniquities; that was the destiny to which His great love for the world of men which God had made led Him, that He might eventually save that world. To say that He died for our sins is a simple truth but a tremendous

understatement of the facts. It was in conditions of well-nigh inconceivable suffering that our Lord gave his life in our behalf. He did not merely die for us; He also suffered for us.

(To be continued) TH

BORN AGAIN

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (John 3.3).

At first sight these seem strange words and that is what the Jewish leader, Nicodemus thought to whom they were first addressed. But he has not been the only one to be puzzled by Jesus' curious expression and many who have claimed to be Christians have not fully realised what is meant by being *"born again"*. Yet leaders in the Early Church, like Peter and Paul, based some of their teaching upon this conversation that Christ had with the *"master in Israel"*. Various religions point men to a Creator and the Hebrew faith of Abraham did so too. Israel's basic teachings were enshrined in the Law given through Moses. Further enlightenment came through Israel's prophets. The moral and spiritual commandments which God's ancient people were given did much to sanctify their lives and direct their religious worship toward God. So it has been with many people during the last two thousand years. To them Jesus has been a great moral and social reformer, and inasmuch as His precepts have been observed they have produced better men and women.

Jesus did much more than interpret Israel's religion into the life and needs of His own day. He set forth in clear and direct language a way of salvation from sin that was new and distinct from any that men had ever heard. Yet it was not so different from Old Testament teaching that those who were familiar with it should have found it hard to understand. But their spiritual life had become stagnant and useless. The religious teachers of Jesus' day were more concerned with ritual and observance of their meaningless regulations than to care about the real issues of their faith. Hence the question from the lips of a leader of the people, *"How can these things be?"*

Before anyone experiences being *"born again"* they must realise that men are incapable of obtaining release from evil. They have sought remedies by social and moral education. They have

endeavoured to explain away sin by theory. They have suggested using scientific ideas that humanity is getting better and better and therefore less sinful. Such suggestions lead men further from God, and result in death, because the only solution to human problems is to be found in the way God has provided. That way is in the teachings of the New Testament, which begin with the ministry of Jesus. This rebirth, as Jesus went on to show Nicodemus, is not birth in the natural or physical sense. It is new life, spiritual life, that begins in the heart of God and grows in the human heart.

Sometimes the translation of John 3.3 is questioned, perhaps because of the use of the Greek word 'gennao' in other places of Scripture, as for example in Acts 13.33 *"You are my Son, today I have begotten you."* which is a quotation from Psalm 2.7. This Greek word must take the meaning most fitting for its context which in Acts refers to the Father in Heaven. In John 3.3 however the reference in the context is to the mother because Nicodemus refers to the mother's womb. Williams translates the word in 1 Peter 1.3 as begotten like the AV but Rotherham goes along with several commentators by translating the word 'regenerated'. Professor Barclay comments on this John 3.3 in his Daily Study Bible. "Whatever else this means, it means that, when a man becomes a Christian, there comes into his life a change so radical that the only thing that can be said is that life has begun all over again for him". Such life can only come from God and He is our Father as Jesus taught us so to call Him.

Such life causes us to grow into the likeness of Jesus. But that life does not develop properly alongside sin. Those who follow Jesus and become His disciples must renounce what is wrong, repent and know that the only way to be saved from sin is through Jesus and His death on the cross. Then our old way of life comes to an end and we are, in a sense, resurrected into a new life in Christ.

A flagrant sinner is not the only one who is in

need of "rebirth". There are many good-living folk, who may or may not claim to be Christians, who do not make a full and total commitment to Christ in every aspect of life. Maybe they are self-sufficient even self righteous people. They may have a vague idea that when they die, if they've been good enough they'll go to heaven along with all other good people instead of going to that other place about which they don't like to think too much.

"Being born again" requires certain conditions that are not popular since they conflict with natural pride and they are for the few. Old habits of thought, speech and manner of life will need more than reformation. What is needed is not 'reform' but a complete fresh start. Life in the home, the place of work, and the place of worship take on an entirely new look. The driving force of life is no longer selfishness but as Paul wrote in Galatians 2. 20 *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me"*. Paul meant by "crucified with Christ" that his old life as Saul of Tarsus had ended forever. He died as an ordinary man when he saw Christ on the Damascus road, and although there was no physical change, intellectual and spiritual transformation began at once. So it is with all who accept Jesus as their Saviour and become new men and women in Christ. They should if they allow Christ to do His work, become dynamic personalities, full of the vitality of love that was so apparent in Jesus.

Their outward appearance to other people may not seem such a dramatic change as occurred in Paul the apostle. He had wilfully committed the most violent and terrible sins against the Christian church. He completely reversed his former life and became the greatest champion of Christ. This "turning about" that Paul experienced was due to the radical change in his allegiance from Satan to Christ and this must be so for every believer. Ultimately the spiritual and intellectual revolution within the heart will bear a rich fruitage in the life. Being born again is not some difficult academic problem. It is only hard because human nature is stubborn and selfish, preferring outward pride and respectability rather than being broken and humbled, least of all at the foot of the cross of Christ. To the human heart the cross is nothing more than an obstacle to progress or something too

debased to trifle with, yet to those who accept Jesus as their Saviour it is that which brings new light and joy into the life. It brings light because it releases men from their burden of sin, and joy follows in the discovery of hope.

What is sin? To the people of Israel sin occurred when they disobeyed God's Law. Sin is also anything that is not in harmony with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is anything that will not submit to the will of God and which hinders the new life in Christ from proper development. The uncertainties and doubts of the human mind are swept away by the realities of Christ's love for mankind. This is not just a general love, but a great, far reaching and sympathetic love for every individual sinner. This new life begins in all who seek Jesus and it continues until the day dawns in resurrection glory and it has reached its ripened fruitage.

DN

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

AFTER THE FLOOD

13 - Twilight before Dawn

The time had come, round about this twenty-fourth century before Christ, for the world of men to take on its present familiar aspect of war and strife, greed and injustice, idolatry and godlessness, which have been its characteristics ever since. For nearly a thousand years since the Flood mankind had been tolerably free from these evils, and Sumerian poets of six or seven centuries later wove into their poems and legends stories of that long-past "Golden Age". There is no doubt that there was such a Golden Age and it was the onset of idolatry and of war between communities which brought it to an end. The world from now on was destined to witness great changes.

These two centuries, noteworthy for the birth of Nahor and Terah, grandfather and father of Abraham, saw the peak of the civilisation that had been built up from the days of Nimrod something like six centuries earlier. Now, with the death of the military dictator Sargon of Agade and the rise of the famous Third Dynasty of Ur, with its energetic and able ruler Ur-Nammu, the balance of power swung again from the Semitic Akkadians in the North to the Sumerians in the South. Ur, Lagash, and Uruk, with two new city-states, Isin and Larsa, were the dominant centres of political power and all of them active in the still increasing hubbub of trade and industry consequent upon expanding knowledge of the wider world which the continuing increase of the human race was bringing into view. By this time the sons of Japhet had penetrated most of Siberia and reached the borders of China: those of Cush had set up a second Sumerian civilisation in north-western India and were pressing down that land's western coast, and in the west were spreading over equatorial Africa. Most of central Europe was occupied by Japhetic tribes. The peoples of the Middle East were at the centre of a complex system of world trade that extended over most of Europe and a considerable part of Asia and Africa.

It was probably at this time that the reference to the sons of Joktan in Gen. 10.30 applies. It seems such an irrelevant little remark that one wonders why it was inserted at all. The reason for the genealogy leading from Shem to Peleg is obvious enough; it is to point out the line from which

Abraham, the father of the people of Israel, was derived. But having arrived at Peleg, five generations before Abraham, the narrator breaks off to tell us that Peleg's brother Joktan had thirteen sons who dwelt, according to the AV, "*from Mesha as you go to Sephar a mount of the east*". Why such an apparently unnecessary piece of information should be included in the Genesis account is at first sight not at all clear; yet there must have been a purpose. The AV rendering is inaccurate – Middle East geography was not the 17th century translators' strong point – and a closer examination of the text reveals what may have been purpose in the plan. The RSV has it "*the territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east*" which is more lucid but still does not tell us where these places were situated. A literal rendering of the Hebrew is more like "from Mesha, toward Ephar, to the Mount of the East". One of these locations is definitely known – the "Mount of the East". As previously said, this was the mountain on which the Ark landed and was sacred to the Sumerians and Semites and is now shown on maps as Kuh-i-Anaran, in the Zagros mountains a hundred and fifty miles east of Babylon. Sephar could be either the Semitic city of Sippar in the north or the Sumerian one of Sifru in the south not far from Ur of the Chaldees. Sippar, so far as is known, was not in existence at so early a period and the balance of probability is that Sifru is meant. The location of Mesha is not known. Place-names in the Middle East have a habit of surviving through the ages and there is an area between Ur and the "Mount of the East", still largely marshland, where a number of localities bear names which could well derive from Mesha. If this deduction is justified, this would then define a broad band of territory stretching from Ur and Sifru in the west, across the marsh lands to the "Mount of the East". This, with the progressive drying up of the Gulf, that had been going on since the Flood, would only have become available for settlement about this time. It might well be that these numerous tribes, descended from Joktan, as the years passed and they multiplied, found that the only territory available to them was this Marshland revealed by the receding waters. In

after times they spread into Arabia and their tribal names have persisted in history as those of Arab peoples to this day.

With a rapidly increasing population and expanding world trade, life began to be more hectic; as with the modern world during the last half-century, there was a great increase in knowledge and invention, in industry and commerce, and everything had to be done more quickly than before. The old pictograph writing that had served the needs of less sophisticated generations in the past gave way to cuneiform (arrow-headed) which-simplified the picture-symbols into wedge-shaped signs. These could more easily and quickly be impressed on the soft clay tablets which was the writing material of the times. This meant among other things, that the stories of Eden, the Flood and of the Tower of Babel, which had already existed in the written form for several centuries, had to be translated into the new form, probably the first Bible translation ever made. Cuneiform was the script in which Abraham, later on, first read the Genesis narratives and incidentally the script from which Moses and his fellows translated the early part of Genesis into the Hebrew language, for this cuneiform writing remained the medium of all written records up to the time of the Exodus and the emergence of the Hebrew language. Despite its apparently complicated nature, a surprising amount of information could be compressed into a very small space. A tablet found at Nippur, written in the time of Abraham, measuring only four by six centimetres, proved to be a library catalogue containing the titles of no less than sixty-two literary works. From this time onward the legends and history of past generations began to be written down – with embellishments – and these "epics" are now one of the sources of our information regarding those days.

Beside the historical tablets, which form only a small proportion of the tens of thousands of clay tablets discovered, there are others which deal with industry, medicine, science and mathematics – for the people of Heber's and Abraham's day were superb mathematicians and diligent astronomers. They had calculated the distance from the earth to the sun with accuracy not equalled until the year 1920. At a somewhat later date they had recorded observations of the four largest moons of the planet

Jupiter, invisible today to the naked eye. No one since then knew that Jupiter had any moons until Galileo invented the telescope in AD 1610. Was the eyesight of the ancients so much better than that of modern man or did they invent the telescope first? Correctly made glass magnifying lenses have been found in the ruins of ancient Nineveh. In the field of medicine there is a tablet listing the methods of preparation of five hundred herbal remedies. Sumerian surgeons carried out surgical operations with copper instruments. In the province of industry, there is in the British Museum a tablet giving a process for glazing earthenware inscribed in cipher so that no competitor could understand it. When the Sumerian language died out a few centuries later the secret was lost until Assyrian craftsmen "cracked" the code in the 7th century BC but with the fall of the Assyrian empire the secret was lost again until in the 19th century the tablet was found, translated and submitted to British cipher experts who "cracked" the code once more and so enabled modern industrialists to try out the process, and find it successful. In Ur of the Chaldees coppersmiths had discovered how to temper copper to yield a cutting edge like steel – another secret lost until modern times. Time was measured by means of a water-clock in which one talent of water (about six gallons) ran out of an enclosed vessel and the diminishing water level operated a pointer which registered the complete day, divided into hours and minutes. In the Museum of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities in Baghdad there are earthenware jars with copper rods and traces of chemicals nearly five thousand years old. Technical experts today consider these could only have been some form of electric battery, which if true would raise the question what kind of electrical device did the battery operate? A century or so after Abraham had migrated to Canaan the whole of this complex and advanced civilisation disintegrated into what their own historians called "the times of confusion" in which they were overrun by invading peoples of lesser culture. Had this not happened the explosion of knowledge and scientific achievement which characterised the 20th century might have come there and then, and history would have been very different. But that was not to be; the Divine Plan included many features of great moment for mankind and not until God's own due time could knowledge be allowed

to be increased to the extent it has done today. By this time there were colonies in distant parts, set up by Sumerian merchants who traded local products with the homeland. Dilmun, four hundred miles down the Gulf where Bahrein is now, was an important staging port for ocean-going merchant vessels. Magan, which is now Oman at the mouth of the Gulf, was a busy copper mining area. Most important of all was Melukkha, on the river Indus in modern Pakistan, a territory larger in extent than the homeland of Sumer itself. It stretched from the vicinity of Bombay to the headwaters of the Indus, an area eight hundred by three hundred miles, furnished with cities strangely resembling modern ones in facilities and amenities. Built in the style of Ur and Uruk and Babylon, they had straight streets, forty-five feet wide with main drains having branches into every house, separate underground culverts five feet high for carrying off rainwater, evidences of a virile industry in the manufacture of pottery and textiles – the earliest cotton in the world's history was grown and woven here – and brisk trade in all kinds of tropical products carried on by means of ships which unloaded their wares at Ur of the Chaldees. In the other direction Syria and Canaan boasted the cities of Alalykh and Ebla and Catal Huyuk, and Tyre and Sidon on the sea coast, all links in the network of trading centres which by now had knit the far-flung sons of Noah together. Trade was booming, and the world was a very busy place. But behind all this passion for progress and discovery and achievement there did repose, in the hearts of these early descendants from Shem and Ham, a love of righteousness and justice and the higher values of life. Says Kramer ('From the tablets of Sumer') "they cherished goodness and truth, love and order, justice and freedom, righteousness and straightforwardness, mercy and compassion. The gods were extolled as good and just". After all, they had only recently abandoned the true God of their fathers and commenced to make for themselves false gods, alien gods who were now leading them into war and violence and every kind of villainy. For the moment there was still the recollection of the Golden Age they had rejected only a couple of centuries ago to keep their standards relatively high. It is probable that when Abraham came on the scene a little later, although he must have shrunk from the idolatry and moon-worship of Ur and its citizens, there was still much

in their characters and their lives that he would applaud. It might not have been altogether without reluctance that he parted from them in obedience to the Lord's injunction.

There is an example of what have been called the "penitential psalms" which demonstrate the sentiments of the devout Sumerian, whether worshipper of one God or many. Because their paganism always preserved the worship of the Most High God of heaven, superior to all the other gods, there is a kinship of sentiment which reveals that these men and women of four or five thousand years ago were not so very different from we ourselves in our reverence for the Lord.

"O my god, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins. I transgress and know it not. I sin, and I know it not. I wander on wrong paths, and I know it not. I feed on transgressions and know it not. The Lord, in the wrath of his heart, has overwhelmed me with confusion. I lie on the ground and none reaches a hand to me. I am silent and in tears and none takes me by the hand. I cry out, and there is none that hears me. I am exhausted, oppressed and none releases me. My God who knows the unknown, be merciful Lord, thou wilt not repulse thy servant. In the midst of the stormy waters, come to my assistance, take me by the hand. I commit sins – turn them into blessedness. I commit transgressions – let the wind sweep them away. My blasphemies are very many – rend them like a garment, God, who knows I knew not, my sins are seven times seven – forgive my sins!"

"God knewest I knew not!" Whether the prayer went up to An the Most High God, or to Enlil or Enki the lesser gods, who could doubt that the cry reached the courts of Heaven and was heard by the One who truly gave life to all men. It may be that the time was not yet ripe for the answer to come. The once for all offering of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sin of man was still three thousand years in the future, and until that offering was consummated on the cross, there was nothing that could be done. But Jesus did say that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were to stand in the resurrection to find an opportunity for repentance and everlasting life. That is sufficient assurance that these reverent and penitential Sumerians, living at the same time, five hundred miles from Sodom, will enjoy the same favourable opportunity. If there was any sincerity

at all in those prayers, then surely it can be expected that they will be answered in that coming day.

One man, at least, emerged from that welter of true worship and false worship, of one God and many, of light and darkness. The time was at hand for the Lord to take a hand in the affairs of men and commence the outworking of His purpose. A man was soon to be born in the city of Ur in preparation for the Divine call. Time was ripe, the world was ready; it remained now for the Lord to set the stage for a chain of events which must centre upon one new city in one new land. This should then and for all time become the land and the city upon which

the Lord would set His Name. A land as yet unpolluted by idolatry, by war, by commercialism; a land as yet without cities, inhabited only by a few simple pastoral folk, fitting home for the people for his purpose which God planned to call into being. One such land existed, surrounded on all sides by the civilisations which had grown up through the centuries, Egypt to the south, commercial Canaan to the north, Sumer and Elam to the east; one such land lying by some mysterious Divine foresight in the exact geographical centre of the earth. There the Lord determined to build his Holy City.

(To be continued)

AOH

THE SPIRIT OF THE COVENANT

**Some thoughts
on Genesis 17**

In the heat of the day, as Abraham sat within his tent sheltering from the burning sun, three travel-stained men drew near. With true Eastern hospitality Abraham ran forth to greet them, and besought them to rest awhile until he could minister to their needs. *"Let a little water be fetched and wash your feet, and rest yourself under the tree"* (Gen. 17.4). Of his store of the precious fluid he would share enough to cleanse and soothe their tired and sore feet. Hurriedly he and Sarah set about the task of preparing cakes baked on the hearth, a tender calf, butter and milk, which, when ready, was spread before them under the shade of the tree. With deferential respect for his guests, Abraham stood by to minister to their requests. In this way Abraham showed that he knew these were no ordinary visitors, and as master of the establishment, it was a token of great regard to stand and serve while they sat and ate. The repast ended, they called for Sarah, and in an extraordinary manner referred to a long-cherished promise that had been made to Abraham by God. *"I will return to you the vigour of your youth, and Sarah shall have a son"* said the spokesman of the little band. Sarah, within earshot, but inside the tent, heard the words and *"laughed within herself"*. For many years her maternal desire had been unsatisfied. What wonder then, as she heard these words, that she should smile, half-expectant yet half-incredulous? Had she not waited now too long? That little laugh, half-stifled, and her muttered words, reached the speaker's ears.

"Wherefore did Sarah laugh Is anything too hard for the Lord?" asked that remarkable guest. And so at long last, after many expectant years, the hopes of her whole life came to pass. Those aged wrinkled arms clasped to her breast flesh of her own flesh, and maternal hopes were satisfied. Several times that "promise of all promises" had been renewed, and here, beneath the shade of the Mamre tree, the messenger of God reaffirmed it by word of mouth. What recompense was that for *"entertaining angels unawares"* (Heb. 13.2)! Not only was the Covenant reaffirmed but the approximate date was set when the promised child without whom the covenant could never be fulfilled, should arrive. But this was not the sole reason for their call at Abraham's tent. They had other, sterner business to perform. Refreshment ended, they rose to go, and Abraham, deeply moved, accompanied them some distance on their way. Then began that most remarkable conversation between the three. The prompting question, which is recorded for our benefit, "Shall I tell Abraham what I am about to do? I think I can trust him with the news!" To this end spoke the principal member of the three. In poetic language, the Lord had "come down" to see if the sin of Sodom was as great as its "cry", and if so, to destroy it with fire. Would it not seem strange to Abraham's ears if He who stood pledged to "bless", was now compelled to destroy some of those families of the earth that dwelt on every hand? Had God not promised several times that in him and in his seed all nations should be blessed? And has

God not just reaffirmed his Covenant, and dated the birth of his son? If then the time for the arrival of the offspring were come, could not God defer those punitive measures upon those cities of the plains until the Seed were grown, and had time to work reform? Thus the question might have presented itself to Abraham had he not been told. "I know him" said the angel of the Lord *"I know that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him"* (v 19). Something ingrained in the parents' faith-built character would mature in the children's life when the process of development was complete. The "faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4.12,16) will become the faith of all his seed and *"All Israel shall be saved"* when God's due time is come. What a testimony was that! *"I know him!"* Alone in all the world, in that far day, to hold true faith in God! Alone and childless, yet promises reaching into eternity were centred in this man. The eye of God could see in this lone man those deep responses of faith that led him on, step by step, until he laid the darling of his life upon the wood of the altar and raised his hand to strike the sacrificial blow. That underlying faith has passed from father to sons, and through it all, when grown mature, *"the Lord will bring upon Abraham that which He has spoken of him"*. A progeny, numberless as the sands of the seashore, shall yet be blessed for their great father's sake, because he passed to them the ability to believe in God.

Two members of that little band went on their way, and came, at even, to Sodom's gate. 'Righteous Lot' sat there and invited them beneath his roof. The wickedness of Sodom broke out, because of the angels presence there and summary measures were needed to hold the Sodomites in check. Bounteous harvests that brought fulness of bread made pride of heart and carnal sin to grow. The other guest remained behind, and "Abraham stood yet before the Lord". Then began the plea of a mortal man before the Judge of all the Earth! There is no story, of those early days to be compared with this. Touched by a feeling for his human kin, this righteous man begged respite again and yet again for Sodom's sinful folk *"Will you also destroy the righteous and the wicked."* he asks, *"Perhaps there may be fifty with the city who are*

not utterly overcome with sin. Will you not spare the city for their sake?" Will not the Judge of all the earth, who holds the scales of Justice for others' acts, himself do right? Bold, courageous words are these drawing Divinity to the bar of its own Courts and Laws! Immediate came the response, *"I will not destroy the city for the fifty's sakes!"*

The old man knew the city's guilt and knew his quota was too high. Again he puts his plea. Wilt thou destroy the city perchance forty such be found ... or thirty ... or twenty ... or even ten? With each reduction and renewal of the plea, the heavenly visitor concurred, until at last he said *"I will not destroy the city for ten's sake"* (v 32). Not even ten were found; but only one, and he, an alien in their midst! With morning's early dawn he was urged forth, before the blow of Justice fell. The Judge of all the Earth did right. In later days God told His people He had seen "good" in taking them thus away. Some vestige still remained of innate good, to which, in resurrection days, appeal can then be made; some broken chords, which, when righteousness prevails, can be repaired and made to vibrate in unison once more.

"Shall mortal man be more just than his Maker?" is a query we must ask as we see the aged pilgrim pleading for his kind. Was Abraham more sympathetic to sinful men than God? Must God be moved by human plea before compassion could be shown? Had God relented of His purpose to bless all the peoples of the earth, or did He exclude these cities of the plain? That God was compassionate as well as just is true beyond all dispute. The Plan to bless the world is His - it tells of His great love. But how did the justice-loving patriarch stand when fronted by such baleful sin? Would he say Sodom got no more than it deserved when retribution fell? Would he say it served them right? Abraham was not more compassionate than God, though Abraham's compassion was deep and strong. He pleaded that justice might be done, and that the righteous (if there should be any) should also have their deserts. But the plea he used asked for mercy in ascending scale. He asked for mercy for a whole city, for fifty's sake, for forty's sake - nay even for ten's sake.

And the Judge of all the Earth agreed - the Judge of all the Earth had Abraham at the bar, to find how far in him tender mercy would temper

strict justice. And the Judge found him sympathetic down to the degree of ten men in a city – ten men for a city: ten men to redeem a city from its just fate. This was the spirit of the Covenant itself. Abraham too would see men blessed. Abraham believed it and let the spirit of the Promise soak in and saturate his soul. And so while justice must be satisfied – this he knew quite well – the temper of the soul, catching Divine intent, grew merciful and kind. The outcome of this Divine Spirit led in due time to the gift of God's Son (John 3.16) – and Calvary! But in those early days, the flow that had become a river of love at Calvary was but a tiny stream. It grew as ages passed; and still it grows; and as it grows it has borne those noble souls along who catch the Spirit of the Lord.

Today we live in an evil world and the cry of the weak and oppressed rises up to heaven. Sin of various kinds stalks the earth. Again, God has come down to make scrutiny for righteous men. How easy it would be for us to say "it serves them right", as tidings come that some other land or people is in distress. It may serve them right indeed, but it ill becomes the children of the Lord to hold that thought. Nations may have slighted and perverted their opportunities – they may have made false choice of leaders; or wrongly applied principles of action, but no nation is utterly responsible for that. No nation can have full one hundred percent responsibility under conditions like these. Measured responsibility they certainly have – and for that they must be called to account. But none save the Judge of all the Earth is competent for that. He only can assess the guilt of man or nation. The safer thing for us to seek is the spirit of Abraham's faith – the spirit which would plead for mercy for ten men's sake and rest content that He who is the Judge of all the Earth will do no other than what is right.

It will not be an easy thing to remain in proper balance of heart and mind, as evil after evil is committed in the Earth, unless the Spirit of the Covenant controls our every thought. The scales of Justice belong to God – and He will hold the balance true. But God will temper the severity of

Judgment with His mercy, at the time the guilty one repents, and forsakes his wicked ways. His plighted Covenant with Abraham and his seed speaks blessing and mercy for all the nations of the Earth. If, like faithful Abraham, we live within the spirit of this Oath-bound Pledge, allowing it to soak in and saturate our hearts, we too will think in mercy of the many that Satan has deluded, no matter who they are. It will permeate our thoughts; it will creep into every part of our body and make us more like Him who died for all. We speak at times of Christlike character and its development. There is no method so clear and sure to attain that end, as to be caught up in the spirit of the Oath and pledge of Abraham's God, who stands today, as then, sworn to bless all the nations of the earth.

That ancient episode in Abraham's life affords much food for thought. It shows that the Almighty God was working out His plan and was seeking Abraham's help to make His promise come true. But Abraham could not be the source of them unless the spirit of the Covenant and the spirit of his God directed him through and through. And God made test of Abraham to see if compassion for a sinful city was active in his heart. God chose a time and place to make that test. Where brazen sin had reared aloft its ugly head, Abraham passed his test acceptably. God's confidence in him was well placed. Sin's ugly head in all its forms is raised again today. The present international situation affords a test, to determine what spirit we are of. The visitation of Divine wrath must certainly come upon the aggressive nations of the world, but that is only a passing phase of the Divine Plan. God is waiting to be gracious, in His own way, to one and all. God's Spirit is still the Spirit of that ancient Covenant. He waits to bless all the nations of the earth. The Spirit of that Covenant must possess and control us too in all we say and do. It may be easier today to "blame" than "bless", to be "vindictive" than "vindicative", but all who are Abraham's seed must be possessed not only of Abraham's inheritance, but of the Spirit which, if needed, would plead for all the fallen sons of men.

TH

His wisdom is sublime,
His heart supremely kind
God never is before His time
And never is behind

Let no faithless thought, arising,
Hide His presence from our view,
He will nevermore forsake us
Who has blessed us hitherto.

WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF YOU?

"What does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6.8 NRSV). Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, during the period of the kings of Israel and Judah, there appeared in those lands men of God, the prophets, whose main task was to call God's people back to Him from the worship of idols. They spoke strongly against the pagan religions that resulted in immorality. There was a downward trend in the quality of their social life that would leave the two kingdoms at the mercy of the great empires of Assyria and Babylon that eventually absorbed them. The prophets introduced reforms and brought light out of the darkness. Out of that apostasy and corruption there emerged the golden age of prophecy. Their written and spoken words were unmatched in beauty and penetration except by the Lord Himself. These were men sent by God and His messages given by them became part of His Word.

Micah's messages were mostly confined to the commonwealth of Israel. The good gifts of this lovely land were to be shared by all God's people but the wealth of Judah and Israel had fallen into the hands of a relatively few landowners. They selfishly squandered it upon themselves and their wives while they lived in the big cities. The land continued to yield its increase but the peasants received little reward for their labour and many virtually starved. The rich maintained outward piety and went through forms of ritual and offered many sacrifices but they had little concern for their spiritual significance.

From the fertile fields of Moresheth in Judah, Micah came as Yahweh's spokesman, to the towns and cities, particularly Jerusalem, to warn the people of impending disaster. He told them that because of their corruption and greed God would permit the overthrow of their nation. He showed that God was not interested in religious ceremonies that did not reflect obedience to His laws and He condemned them for unfair dealings and unjust transactions. Violence and injustice contained the seeds of evil that when grown bore fruit that would ruin the nation.

Among the condemnations and judgments of the prophets, there came great flashes of prophetic fervour, positive and plain statements of what God

wants of His people. In such revelations we see the great yearnings of the Almighty for his erring children – yearnings to redeem His people and to restore His former glory reflected in them.

So it came about that Micah uttered those words that have echoed through the centuries. They clearly summarize real piety, the true faith of the Living God. In spite of all the darkness and weakness in which mankind is enshrouded God has not left Himself without witness. The great and Eternal God, the Almighty, wise and merciful Father has made Himself known to those who are willing to discover Him.

So in the six century before Christ we hear Micah of Moresheth saying "He hath showed thee O man what is good – but what does God require of you?" To some God fearing folk it may seem strange that anyone should ever consider doing anything other than what God requires, but as we look through the history of mankind, even the history of the Christian Church, it is clear that this has not been a primary objective. How seriously do ordinary people take these words about justice and mercy and walking with God? How seriously do 'religious' people take them? When we buy a house or a car do we consider what God wants us to do? When we turn our attention to finding a husband or wife do we really care what He thinks about it? When we plan a career or a holiday are God's concerns of first importance? Is He taken into our reckoning in these important issues? Does it really matter what He thinks about our decision? Will it even matter to us if His work and worship take second place in what we do? Do we even think about the principles that should govern the most important things in our lives?

The prophet answers his own question – "To do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Don't 'decent' people do those sort of things? Each individual is ultimately responsible not to the law courts or the fashion houses of the world or even the government of the country in which we live; but to God. There seem to be times in our modern age, when it isn't what the 'Law' says that we do but 'what can be got away with' – that strange idea, first heard from a school teacher, the 11th commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out". One would think that everyone who recognizes in any

way that God is God and that He knows everything about us, must accept that His view of every matter in our lives is more important than anything else. As God's people we should accept that the law is right and should be obeyed and that the judiciary should be upheld. But human, legal systems are inadequate to control all our wrong doing and sometime they are themselves quite wrong. God sees our going out and our coming in. He knows all about everything we think as well as what we say and do and He demands justice. How just are we? How upright, sincere, totally supportive of what is 'right' at all times? Our hearts and minds are open to God. He knows our motives and inner desires as well as what everyone else sees and hears. Are we "without hypocrisy"? What does the Lord require of you but to do justly. Is it not a strange belief that the few short years of a life time, 70 or 80 perhaps, should be the ultimate testing ground for eternity? Surely punishment forever and ever cannot rest on our little span life on Earth now. Yet that is the orthodox theology. And in a similar way, is it not strange that the majority of people believe in God, yet don't try to live in such a way as to please that all-seeing One? Many who profess to know about God and call themselves Christian don't give the will of God priority. It is almost as if they would say 'let tomorrow take care of itself'.

God's throne is founded upon justice. It is the first demand made upon a Christian as well as a child of Israel. Mankind has found that it is easier to perform all sorts of kindly actions and works of charity than to be just. It was the upper classes in Israel to whom Micah mainly directed his warning. They were quite ready to do their acts of religious devotion providing they could swindle their neighbour. False weights and measures were in common use and the poor got the worst of the bargain. In the western world much of the poverty has vanished and a large part of the population lives in comfort if not luxury. But poor nations are still being 'swindled' from within and from without. The large banking houses of the world have much to answer for at the bar of the Courts of Heaven as well as at the bar of their own consciences. But justice like charity begins at home – few of us need to look beyond the garden fence to discover the injustices of life,

"Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make;

Awake my soul when sin is near
And keep it still awake." - BSH 178

How sensitive is our conscience to detect that something is wrong? How sensitive are we to the snares of the evil and the traps of wrongdoing? Our western culture has absorbed some Christian virtues but what would the Christian reformers of a century and more ago make of our society today. Have we used a lot of white wash? There is an old saying "What the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve over"; but is that right? Is cheating the bus company out of small fare or defrauding the tax-collector permissible providing there is no risk of prosecution?

We must all appear before the judgement seat of God to answer for what we have said and done. We shall hide nothing then. We shall not have to turn out our pockets or wallets then but we shall stand judged by what our behaviour has done to our character. Before Him we shall be transparent. Shall be! – we are transparent now – He can see through us now and knows the thoughts and intents of every heart. It is better to take our problems to Him 'now' rather than be taken to Him 'then' to answer for what we have done and not done. Let all our dealings be such as we dare to do in His presence, whether those dealings are with the lowliest tramp or the majesty of officialdom. Let our affairs in this world be an uncompromising witness for the principle of the Kingdom of God.

God expressed His love first in wonders of creation around us. We live in a wonderful environment and everywhere is evidence of God's merciful love. We enjoy the song of a garden bird and give thanks for being able to hear it. We gently flex the muscles of an arm and give thanks for the wonderful way in which we can use our hands. We can listen to the pulsing of our heart and give thanks for the wonder of life.

The tenderness of Divine love is shown in God's words to Moses when He met his Maker in the Holy Mount (Exodus 34.6). Moses reflected that mercy when Aaron and Miriam rebelled against him in the desert and he interceded for his sister and cried to God to heal her (Numbers 12.13). It would be easy to emphasise the times of judgment and discipline that came upon Israel in the desert and throughout their history. In spite of all that they did, and all that Yahweh did, He was very patient and gentle with them and always kept in view the time

when they would return to Him and He would heal them. Perhaps no prophet glimpsed that mercy more than Hosea in his forgiveness of Gomer picturing God's forgiveness of Israel. That was a most extraordinary revelation of God's mercy.

In the culture of Greece and Rome mercy was regarded as a weakness of character. In that kind of world, Jesus taught His disciples to emulate God's mercy. They showed the world the way to the heart of God who alone offers true forgiveness and mercy. Matt. 5.7 *"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy"* is paraphrased by William Barclay in this way *"O the bliss of the man who gets right inside other people, until he can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, feel with their feelings, for he who does that will find others do the same for him and will know that is what God in Jesus Christ has done!"* It was in the ministry of Jesus that mercy was most fully demonstrated. Forgiveness is a major element in the prayer that He taught His disciples. Mercy is the underlying principle of the parable of the unforgiving servant, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son (Luke 15). Jesus says of the 'Good Samaritan' *"when he saw him, he had compassion on him."* The word for 'compassion' there is often used to describe

Jesus' deep feeling for the ordinary people whether as a crowd or individual sufferers (Vine). As Jesus was being crucified He asked His Father to forgive those who were doing the awful deed.

Paul wrote in Romans 1 of God giving the whole sinful world over to its own sinfulness. He was 'locking them up'. When the Apostle refers in Romans 11.32 to God having consigned them all to disobedience he then writes *'that he might have mercy upon all'*.

The way in which these two great qualities are best developed is to live consciously in the presence of God Himself. Is it possible to walk with God unless we are humble? *"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 57.17 RSV) For those that are truly pious – who really love their Creator who gave them life, walking with Him is the most natural and desirable thing in the world. This is what God wants – He desires to have His people walk with Him – every day.

DN

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – WHEN?

"In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 3.1-2 RSV).

The expression 'kingdom of heaven' is a familiar one in the New Testament and it is understandable that several views as to its precise meaning exist. To the Jews at Christ's First Advent it definitely meant the kingship of Messiah upon earth, the period when He would reign on David's throne and exalt Israel to the leadership of the nations. The phrase really defines the royal power that is from heaven or comes from the heavens and can quite reasonably be applied to the whole of the Divine sphere of rulership. Thus it can cover, not only regenerated humanity at the climax of the Divine plan so far as it relates to man, but whatever there may eventually be of intelligent life in any part or aspect of Divine creation, all must be part of the Divine empire. It would be rather short sighted on our part to conclude that God, the infinite Creator, will only manifest His creative power in

human life here upon earth. But from the point of view of the New Testament the Kingdom of Heaven can only refer to the operation of that Kingdom so far as man is concerned. The mission of John the Baptist and later, of Jesus of Nazareth, was to mankind and mankind alone.

In this sense the Kingdom of Heaven commenced its sovereignty among mankind at Pentecost, and continues extending its sway until *"all that hath breath shall praise the Lord"* at the end of the Millennium. But the development of the Kingdom in history is in two phases. Firstly, the formation and completion of the Church, which occupies the present 'Gospel' Age, and secondly, the calling and reconciliation of mankind in general to God, a work that is to have its greatest scope and reach its climax in the still future 'Millennial' Age. There is a tendency to separate the work of these two Ages into virtually watertight compartments and speak as if there is no sense in which the Kingdom is in operation until the Second Advent

of Christ, when the visible Kingdom amongst men on earth is established. Paul plainly tells us (Col. 1.13) that God has already translated us into the Kingdom of His Son. This means an actual and factual transfer from the kingdom of darkness, and is a present fact in the experience of every consecrated Christian who has 'come into' Christ. The lawyer who *"answered discreetly", was "not far"* from the Kingdom of God (Mark 12.34) which means that in his perception of Jesus' message he was already at the point of entry. Today, two thousand years later, only the smallest fraction of earth's millions have so much as heard of the Kingdom of Heaven, much less had opportunity to enter in. The key to this apparent paradox is found in Paul's words to the Athenians recorded in Acts 17. Prior to Pentecost, God had not moved actively for the world's redemption, but on and after that historic scene in the upper room in Jerusalem, He *"commanded all men everywhere to repent"*. From that time forward, throughout all the Gospel Age and all the Millennial Age, the call to repentance has been going out and will go out. And there is a corollary to the call; *"because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness"* (Acts 17.31). Men are called to repent because there is to be a final judgment before this three thousand year day of repentance and conversion is ended, and the sooner any man who at present is not reconciled to God, comes into the state of reconciliation with Him, the better it is for that man. Nevertheless it must not be assumed that Jesus and the Apostles had no other idea in mind when they talked about the *"gospel of the Kingdom"*, than this process of coming *"into Christ"* which is peculiar to this Age and concludes with its termination. Jesus came as the promised Messiah, and a Messiah without a Messianic Kingdom, an earthly dominion of righteousness, is unthinkable. That was the only kind of kingdom the Jews of the First Advent knew of or anticipated, and when John and Jesus announced that the Kingdom was at hand that was the kind of kingdom they expected. Nor were they mistaken; it was after Pentecost that those who profited most by Jesus' message realised there was a spiritual counterpart to the earthly Kingdom of their dreams, and the spiritual counterpart must be developed first and hence the earthly Kingdom was still some distance away in the future. The preaching of Jesus was

intended to combine the hope of both aspects of the Kingdom. He knew, none better, that only a few of those who listened would embrace the spiritual call; the many would come along later in response to the earthly call. Nevertheless, it was one command and one invitation, on one basis, and that remains unchanged until the end of the Millennium. *"Repent, and be converted; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"*. What God does with the repentant and converted one depends on what in His wisdom He sees He can do with him. It depends on whether the man comes to God in this Age or the next; whether he is of the clay that can be shaped and fired into a vessel of greater honour or lesser honour (2 Tim. 2. 19-21) and so on. There is a fallacy in the view propounded by Augustine fifteen hundred years ago in his endeavour to refute the doctrine of the Millennium, viz., that the Kingdom of God is here now in power, and that the conversion of the nations now proceeding is the evidence of this. The Kingdom of God is not here in power; the reign of Christ over the nations has not begun; the Church has not yet received any kind of power over the world. But the Kingdom is here, and has been since Pentecost, as an acknowledgement of God's supremacy in the hearts of believers. "The Kingdom of God is within you" said Jesus to some who challenged the fact of its presence (Luke 17.21). It is not yet here in outward manifestation. Jesus and His Apostles had all these aspects of the Kingdom in mind as they taught and wrote. There are approximately 124 occurrences of the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" or "Kingdom of God" in the New Testament. A reasonable analysis of these occurrences shows them distributed thus: - twenty six refer to the spiritual kingdom in men's hearts now. Forty two refer to the celestial destiny of the Church, beyond the Vail, after the Second Advent. Twenty five refer to the visible kingdom to be set up on earth during the Millennium. Thirty one are indeterminate and could not dogmatically be placed in any one of the above categories; in a good many cases these examples refer to the entire conception of the Kingdom embracing all three aspects.

AOH

BY THE WAY FROM THE BOOKSHELF

Over the years, indeed, over the generations, in our household we have accumulated books – books in the study, books in the bedroom, books in the passages, some of them dog-eared with use and some dusty with neglect. Very many of them are books to do with Bible study, in one way or another. It's a sign that we are getting old, perhaps, that it is books that we still gather. Our children have gathered tapes, then CDs, and our grandchildren are proficient in the mysteries of technology and accumulate gadgets which are rather quickly out of date. That is their way of finding out about the world. Our old books have served a purpose as we walked along the Christian way – not all of them, of course. Some are so erudite and closely written that only a Victorian could have the determination to persevere with them. Others are so obviously wrong in their viewpoint that they have been quickly put back on the shelf – yet where is the boundary between thoughts that are stimulatingly different and what is dangerously misleading?

Let's sample two or three. Here is a Christmas present which my wife received in 1955, 'Understanding God's Word', written by Alan Stibbs of the Oak Hill Theological College. *"The simple purpose of this book is to suggest to willing seekers and would-be students of divinely-revealed truth" ... ways to study and believe and obey God's written Word with enlarged understanding. From Holy Scripture we are meant to learn (1) what God has done in Christ for man's redemption, and (2) how men are to live lives that will please God. God rewards diligent seekers – despite our intellectual limitations – but we all have our prejudices and misconceptions, tending to see in Scripture only what we want to see. This book is full of guidance and practical suggestions for those who are ready to learn – it has a sensible, scholarly approach to matters of manuscripts and translations, the study of words, Hebrew and Greek idioms and advice. "Regard Christ and His two comings as the main subject" ... "Compare scripture with scripture" "Recognise the inevitable paradoxes of truth about things infinite and be prepared to accept both extremes – both may be right in different ways." "Never stop seeking to make further progress in*

understanding and obedience."

Next is a little red book inherited from an uncle who had it for his birthday in 1966. It is one of the series in William Barclay's Daily Study Bible, on the Acts of the Apostles. This book is different – it is not advising students how to go about their study, but is an example of a scholar laying out his knowledge for the benefit of others. The aim of the series is *"to make the results of modern scholarship available to the non-technical reader in a form that it does not require a theological education to understand"*, to make the New Testament teaching relevant to life and work today, to *"enable men and women to know Jesus Christ more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Him more nearly"*. We dip into it, Acts 20. We find Paul saying goodbye to the elders from Ephesus. He is captive of the Holy Spirit, not knowing what lies ahead *"but he knew he must face it and he knew he could face it"*. Paul reminded the elders of their duty, and their danger. *"Through all this scene there runs one dominant feeling, and that is the feeling of an affection and a love as deep as the heart itself. That is the feeling that should be in any church. "When love dies the work of Christ cannot do other than wither and fade."*

The next book may have been saved from the rubbish bin, for it has 8 blank pages and must have been thrown out from a bookshop. It is of a more recent era, and has photographs, beautifully tinted pages, diagrams, display panels with selected Bible passages on a given subject. This book is for people who want to get started in the Bible. It takes us on a guided tour of the Bible from beginning to end, introduces the main characters, explains what is happening, and shows what the book has to say to us today. It is called the 'User's Guide to the Bible', written by Chris Wright, and must have been published about 1980. Opening it at the back page I find *"The ultimate event – what will it be like when Jesus comes back? Although it is beyond our imagination, the New Testament does give us some details.... Jesus will come in person. It will not just be his 'influence' it will be recognisably Jesus himself, seen by all mankind."* The favourite New Testament word for the event was also used for the public arrival of a king in a town with great

splendour and spectacle ... as sudden as lightning, as unexpected as a thief in the night. We are to be ready at all times. Our job is to prepare for it, not waste time trying to predict it ... *"The return of Jesus will bring to an end the present world order, with all its twisted corruption, evil and frustration. But that destruction will not be God's last word on his creation. He will create a new creation in which he will once again live with his people. Christians do not look forward to living as souls in heaven, but to life in resurrected bodies, with Jesus Christ, in God's new creation."*

There is much more that we could sample, a whole world of books. Beyond that, there is a world

of instant 'information' which can be called up on screen. It may be just as accurate or inaccurate as what our forefathers accepted from the printed word. Modern day 'Bereans' still need to check and cross-check, to compare new ideas with what we have learned in the past. As students of the Bible let us deepen our own understanding (while being kindly to other students). Let us discover again the love shown in the lives of our Lord and His followers (and show it in our own lives). Let us look prayerfully and thoughtfully and hopefully to the future (for our world belongs to God and the future is His care).

GC

IN CHRIST

The union of the Lord Christ and His people is the truth conveyed in the phrases 'in Christ', 'in Christ Jesus' 'Christ in you' 'joined unto the Lord'. It is the truth of the Head and Body, the Limbs of the Body, the Branches and the Root; words which are but shadows of the solid and eternal realities behind them.

And thus all views of Gospel doctrines that take no account of this are inadequate. It is inadequate, and it is a spiritual loss, to *terminate* our faith or teaching within such phrases (true phrases and holy, when truly used) as "The Lord has loved me," "has sought me," "has found me," "has saved me," "has shed His blood for me," "has given His grace to me," "has changed me," "leads and guards me." Happy the soul for which such words are solid and well-grounded certainties! But that soul still loses what it might have, to its rich blessing, if it never sees all these things to be linked to the holy Union as their underlying secret of peace and power.

Truly this truth is a thing which, if revealed, must be worth the grasping. Is it a divine certainty for every human being who really accepts God's witness about His Son, yes, for every such being, that he is not only very near Christ, but in Christ, and Christ in him? Is he not only touched and held by the Lord but "joined unto the Lord, one spirit"? If so and so it is, here is no remote, superfluous item in our secret of peace and life. Here is the root, the centre, the repose. Out of this sacred well flow the rivers, clear as crystal, of righteousness, sanctification, and eternal redemption.

How full is the divine testimony to the fact, to the blessings, of this royal truth! How frequent is

that phrase, full of eternal life "IN CHRIST"! "In Christ" the true Church was chosen, and "blessed with all spiritual blessing," before the Universe began. "In Christ" "the Beloved," was given to it acceptance before the Holy One. "In Christ" we have "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." "If any man be in Christ it is new creation." "In Christ Jesus" the believer is "created unto good works."

"In Christ Jesus" he has been sanctified. "In Christ" he has "access" unto the Father. "In Christ" the whole company of such is one. "In Christ" the strengthener, each member of it "can do all things." "In the LORD" the saint dies, and is blessed. "In Christ" shall all be made alive. And on the other side, "the hope of glory" is "Christ in You"; "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is IN You, except ye be reprobates," – counterfeits?

Here indeed is a truth full, in all its blessed aspects, of "life and peace." Whether it points us to union with the Life of our Head, or interest in His Covenant, it is a truth as rich and fruitful for daily use as it is strong and solid for "everlasting comfort and good hope."

My reader may possibly be one of those sincere disciples who, having firmly grasped some precious "truths of the threshold," yet shun to go forward deeper into the Sanctuary. Perhaps he thinks that this or that revealed truth is only for the learned Christian, or for the aged, or for those who can find time to theorise and discuss. Whether there be any such revealed truths or no, this great central truth is not one of them. It is high and deep as eternity, indeed, in its issues and its foundations.

But it is also fit to come down, like the noonday sunshine, upon the very stones and dust of the hourly path. Nothing ought to be more intensely and directly practical than a clear apprehension and firm hold of my oneness with Jesus Christ, oneness in spiritual life, oneness in interest and standing. It is a truth of heavenly gold, but coined for daily traffic. It is for the young Christian, the unlearned Christian, the Christian of narrowest sphere and most earthly outward calling. To grasp this deep yet simple fact is to pour into the heart, and through it into the life, in all its parts, a new light, a new power, "I am in Christ, and He in me; I am the branch, the limb, of my living Lord; He and I are, at this moment, one spirit; I belong to Him, not merely as my table or chair belongs to me, but as my hand does; I am His bondservant, and I cannot realise too deeply that He is my absolute and despotic Master; but it is after all not merely as the chained African stands related to his captor, or his buyer; it is rather as my finger stands related to my head, a thing useless and without a reason except for the purposes of the head, and in relation to the head, but full of life and freedom within that

relationship." Truths like these, and truths they are for every true Christian, are not things for the study only, and the lecture, and the arm-chair. They are exactly fit to go out with us into common life and to give a new meaning and greatness to its little details, in the interest of our Head. They are the very things to fill with lasting and glowing life every thought of gratitude and love as we review our conversion, or our revival, or our blessed hope. They are things which can equally uplift the believer's soul in view of his heaviest trial or most difficult duty, and bring his perceptions of the will of God down into the minutiae of the ordinary day, into thought and care for punctuality in engagements, fidelity in little trusts, unselfish kindness in little needs, decorum in the little things of the room, the person; the manner. For the "obligation of nobility" extends over everything, when that nobility is oneness with Jesus Christ, the being a limb to that sacred Head, everywhere and always.

H. C. G. Moule 1885

BIBLE CROSSWORD 2

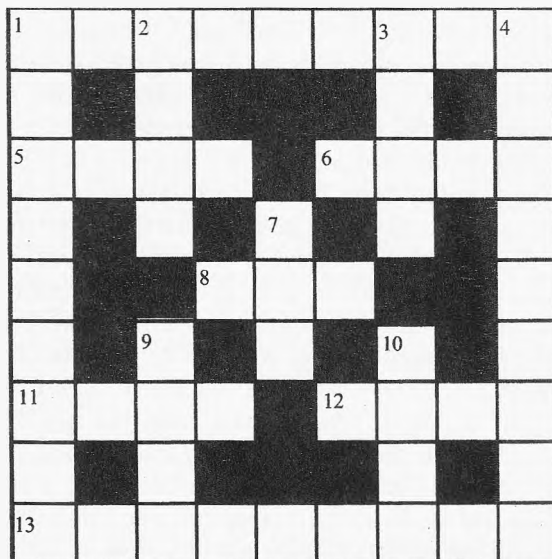
Clues

Across

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1 John the Baptist (9) | Mark 1.2-4 |
| 5 Jesus has one (4) | Phil. 2.9 |
| 6 Toilet preparation not known in scripture (4) | |
| 8 Fruit of the Spirit (3) | Gal. 5.22 |
| 11 Site of early horticulture (4) | Gen. 2.8 |
| 12 Cry from the Cross (4) | Matt. 27.46 |
| | (variant spelling NIV) |
| 13 Burial place (9) | Matt. 27.61 |

Down

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 Servants (9) | Rom. 13.6 |
| 2 The Part on the path (4) | Matt. 13.4 |
| 3 Better to swallow a camel? (4) | Matt. 23.24 |
| 4 God's purpose (9) | Col. 1.20 |
| 7 Herod (3) | Luke 13.32 |
| 9 Preserve (4) | Psalms 121 |
| 10 The modern Wadi es-Sant (4) | 1 Sam. 17.2 |



For thought: Could you make each of these answers a topic on which to meditate? Or why not sit down and write a paragraph about each one, in its context?

MY SON TIMOTHY

One of the most beautiful experiences recorded in the life of the Apostle Paul began at the commencement of his second missionary tour. It was at Lystra that he met one who was to be his close and dearly beloved companion for the remainder of his life. *"A disciple there named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman, who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him."* (Acts 16.1-3). Paul had recently parted from his former companion, Barnabas, who had sailed to Cyprus with Mark, and Paul had chosen Silas to accompany him. Of this visit to Lystra made by Paul and his companion only one incident is told us but it happily affected the whole future of the Apostle. In his former visit he had converted the young Timothy, and it was in the house of the boy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother Lois that he and Silas were probably received. The youthful Timothy was one of the best known and most lovable of the many who accompanied Paul in his travels. He adopted Timothy and regarded him as a son in all affectionate tenderness. Thus he addresses him, *"To Timothy, my true child in the faith."* (1 Tim. 1.2). *"To Timothy, my beloved child... I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience, as did my fathers, when I remember you constantly in my prayers."* (2 Tim. 1.2-3 RSV) and he reminds the Philippians of his worth *"how as a son with a father, he served me in the Gospel."* (Phil. 2.22). In spite of his shyness and timidity, coupled with his youthfulness, he was entirely united in heart and mind with the Apostle. Among his numerous friends and companions Paul found no one so genuine, so entirely unselfish, so sincerely devoted to the furtherance of the cause of Christ, for *"I have no one like him who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare."* (Phil. 2.20). He was in fact, more than any other, the 'alter ego' (other self) of the Apostle. That their knowledge of each other was mutual is shown in Paul's letter to Timothy, *"Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,"* (2 Tim. 3.10). In his yearning and often deeply wounded heart he had great need of a kindred spirit on which to lean for sympathy. In his distressing infirmities he needed

the personal services of some affectionate companion and must have regarded the devoted tenderness of Timothy as a special gift of God to save him from being crushed by overmuch sorrow. Much as Paul loved Timothy, he loved the churches more, and if any church needed warning or guidance, Paul desired to know how it prospered. Timothy was required to overcome his shrinking modesty and to console the persecuted churches of Macedonia (Acts 19. 22; 1 Thess. 3.2) and face the turbulence of Corinth (1 Cor. 4.17; 1 Cor. 16.10). In the Church of Ephesus he was an overseer (1 Tim. 1.3). No name is so closely associated with Paul's as that of Timothy. Not only were two letters addressed to him but he is associated with Paul in the superscription of five others; "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother." (2 Cor. 1.1; 1 Thess. 1.1; 2 Thess. 1.1; Phil. 1 and Col. 1.1). Timothy was with the Apostle Paul during the greater part of his second missionary journey. He was with him at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16.8-10), he accompanied him on his last voyage to Jerusalem (Acts 20.4) and he helped to comfort him in his first imprisonment at Rome (Phil. 2.18-20). He was urged in the second letter Paul addressed to him to hurry from Ephesus, to take with him the cloak, books and parchments which Paul had left with Carpus at Troas and to join him in his second imprisonment before it was too late to see him alive. (2 Tim. 4.9 and 13). Some sixteen years had elapsed between the days when Paul took Timothy as his companion at Lystra and when he languished in prison. From there he wrote once more to his beloved 'son'.

This was the young brother whose companionship Paul secured. He was young, yet the quick eye of Paul saw in him the spirit of loving and faithful service. He read the indications of one of those simple, faithful natures that combine the glow of courage with the bloom of modesty.

(Quotations from the Revised Standard Version
- abridged from a former BSM article)

ON THE MASORETIC TEXT

It is generally known that the "official" Hebrew Bible upon which the Authorised Version is largely based is known as the Masoretic Text due to it having been the result of the work of Jewish scholars in the early years of the Christian era who took in hand the rationalising of the various and varying Hebrew texts which then existed. The following note was recently observed in the "Speakers Commentary", a standard work of the late 19th century, commenting on Psalms 22.16, (vol. 4 page 223), of interest in this connection. "With regard to the Jewish text, it must be observed that the Jews have suppressed with the greatest care all readings which do not agree with it ... The Masoretic text as edited by Jacob ben Chaim (Venice, 1526) has been followed both in Jewish and Christian editors without regard to ancient

authorities, Mss, quotations or versions, which undoubtedly preserve or indicate different and, in many cases, preferable readings". The 'Speakers Commentary' is so-called because its compilation was suggested in 1864 by the then Speaker of the House of Commons, a suggestion taken up and promoted by the then Archbishop of York. It still remains a useful mine of information on the text of Scripture. It is considered that there were at least three variant texts of the O.T. in existence in the centuries just before Christ; The Septuagint gives evidence of readings differing from the present Masoretic, and so does the apocryphal "Book of Jubilees". It is not suggested that anything vital to our knowledge of the Divine Plan and the doctrines of the Faith is thereby lost, but the fact does have relevance to our understanding of minor points of the O.T.

ROCK OF AGES

August Montague Toplady was travelling through the pleasant English countryside when a sudden fierce storm sent him scurrying for shelter. He found it nearby in the cleft of a great rock. The wonderful thing for us is that whilst there, inspired by the situation and the surrounding, he penned those immortal lines: "Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee." Toplady, a born again Christian, always sought to show the utter

sinfulness of men and the absolute necessity of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ's mercy and pardon; who died upon the Cross to redeem us from the curse of the law.

Two years after these blessed words were first published, Toplady, at only 38 years of age, passed from this earthly scene to await the everlasting shelter of the 'Rock of Ages'.

Contributed by a reader.

PAUL'S EDUCATION

We know exactly the kind of education that Paul would receive. When he was six years old he would go to school for the first time. Once he had learned to read he would be given little rolls of parchment with certain scripture passages on

them, which he would have to learn by heart. The passages were: Deuteronomy 6.4-9; Psalms 113-118; Genesis 1-5; Leviticus 1-8.

From "Ambassador for Christ" by William Barclay p17 (The St Andrew press 1973)

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Across

- 1 Messenger
- 5 Name
- 6 Talc
- 8 Joy
- 11 Eden
- 12 Elohi
- 13 Sepulchre

Down

- 1 Ministers
- 2 Some
- 3 Gnat
- 4 Reconcile
- 7 Fox
- 9 Keep
- 10 Elah

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD
 WHO FOLLOW ME
 WILL NOT BE IN DARKNESS
 BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE

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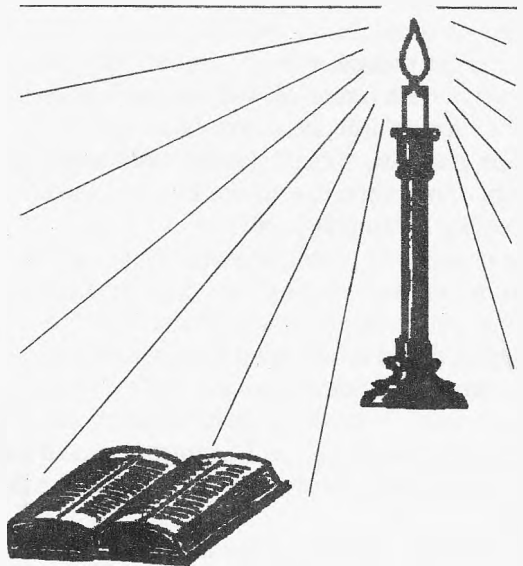
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NOTICES

When the Bible Study Monthly began in 1924 it was virtually A5 in size. In the years 1939 to 1943 it was at its present size. The restrictions on paper due to the war years reduced it for two years then in 1945 it resumed its present size. Now with the change in postal rates which involves size we must revert to its original size of A5 although we hope the magazine will have more than the meagre 4 pages of those very early years.

So with the January/February 2007 issue, Bible Study Monthly will be approximately A5 in size with a possible 36 or 40 pages. It depends on the thickness to some extent. We hope that there will be little or no reduction in the amount of material published in each issue. We will also do our best to retain or even enlarge the current size of type.

Other changes, albeit slowly, will make the magazine more attractive to the eye and therefore more readily acceptable to all ages.

The changes in postal rates and changes in our records may have resulted in some readers not receiving every recent issue of the Bible Study Monthly. If this is so, we apologise and will readily replace any magazines that have failed to arrive. We have done everything possible to avoid any reader paying surcharge on literature received and would appreciate notification of failure in this respect.

RENEWAL TIME. This issue of the Bible Study Monthly has a four-page pull out supplement as previous years. Please fill in the renewal form, writing clearly, and return it to the Bible Fellowship Union to whom cheques (checks) should be made payable. BFU is very grateful for every gift but no one should hesitate to request the magazine because they can't send a gift. Literature is free. If any reader has difficulty in returning the 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 any correction needed on the address label.

The four-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 can only send one copy of each booklet ordered in the first instance.

We are aware that several booklets are in demand that are currently out of print. We intend to replace these titles as soon as possible but feel led to take all our work to one printer who is doing a magnificent job. Neither he nor we can go any faster.

We try to make the Bible Study Monthly and 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 cause us to change anything immediately but we will listen attentively. With the Lord's guidance and help we will try to maintain high spiritual values and good levels of communication.

If you pay income tax in UK and have not filled in a form similar to that on the back page of the supplement, please fill it in, sign and date and return with your renewal form. Readers who do this help BFU who are able to reclaim the tax from the Inland Revenue. Readers outside UK should ignore this form.

BFU still has copies of 'Sword Against All Nations' and readers are invited to send for a free copy.

Gone from us

Henry Ahrens (USA)

Adele Darlington (Israel and Ireland)

Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

BY THE WAY – SNOW ON SNOW

It was unusual to hear hymns and carols mentioned on Radio 4, and more so to hear listeners be invited to nominate their most favourite and least favourite hymns. The presenter gave as his least favourite example the Christmas carol '*In the bleak midwinter*', with special reference to the line, '*Snow had fallen snow on snow, snow on snow*' which he thought showed a limited vocabulary. Listeners called in to point out that the author was the distinguished writer Christina Rossetti (1830-94). As my personal comment, the line seems an expressive description of the incessant snowfall of an English blizzard; but then, the birth of Christ did not happen in a bleak English midwinter but in Palestine, and probably in October when the shepherds were out with their sheep. All this perhaps is to miss the essential point of the carol, that our response to the amazing coming of Christ should be '*What can I give Him?*'... '*Give my heart*'. Christina Rossetti is also responsible for the carol which speaks of Love coming down at Christmas, and of love being our response in worship.

There are those who write off Christmas as a festival for true Christians, because it has been taken over by commercialism and consumerism. On the other hand, it is possible to fix one's eyes away from the tinsel and on to the real events which are remembered at this season. There are carols which are true to the scriptural record and can inspire us.

So I was stimulated to look through a couple of hymn books and found a lot of encouragement in the carols sections.

There are some carols which tell the story simply as to a little child. For example, this one, not the most well known, puts Christmas in context:

*Once there came to earth.
A child of lowly birth,
Far from home the tiny stranger
Lay contented in a manger,
Jesus came to earth.*

*Little Jesus grew,
Joy and grief He knew.
When He reached His manhood glorious,
Over sin He lived victorious,
Strong in love He grew.*

*Then Himself He gave
All the world to save
Sin and strife and hatred slew Him
Only those who loved Him knew Him
Jesus strong to save!*

*Jesus still can bind
In love all humankind
To the manger humbly kneeling
Still they come for help and healing
Weary humankind!*

(Dorothy Angus)

Some carols are a straight paraphrase of scripture. The origin of the following becomes clearer the more we sing of it.

*The race that long in darkness pined
Have seen a glorious light...*

*To us a child of hope is born,
To us a son is given;
Him shall the tribes of earth obey,
Him all the hosts of heaven.*

*His name shall be the Prince of peace,
For evermore adored,
The Wonderful, the Counsellor,
The great and mighty Lord
(Isaiah 9.2-7. Scottish Paraphrases 1781)*

Other carols call to mind various scriptures which it is difficult to pin down. In this one Isaiah 35.10 can be identified.

*The Christ Child will lead us,
The Good Shepherd feed us
And with us abide till His day.
Then hatred He'll banish;
Then sorrow will vanish,
And death and despair flee away.
And He shall reign ever,
And nothing shall sever
From us the great love of our King,
His peace and His pity
Shall bless His fair city,
His praises we ever shall sing.*

(From *All poor men and humble* - Welsh)

From early days Christians have used hymns to present teachings. It is thought that Philippians 2.5-12 was a hymn which Paul incorporated in his letter. In the nineteenth century John Mason Neale translated a fourth century hymn written by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius. It is sung to a sixteenth century tune.

*Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He
Of the things that are, that have been
And that future years shall see;
Evermore and evermore*

(Check such references as John 1.3, 14
Revelation 22.13)

Carols often link the events of Bethlehem with our personal experience today. *How silently* the great light came to shine in the dark street of Bethlehem (John 1.9). And we look for Him to be born in us (Galatians 4. 19) We earnestly pray for it. (*Little town of Bethlehem*).

This personal aspect appears in many carols. It must, if our celebration of the season is to truly mean anything for us. When we hear that '*Christ is born*' our heart rejoices. Coming to Him, we '*flee from woe and danger*' '*from all doth grieve you, you are freed*'.... '*love Him who with love is yearning*' We '*live to Thee, and with Thee dying, shall not perish*.' (All my heart this night rejoices Gerhardt 1607-76).

Some carols are rich in poetry. Just picture the scene '*Cold on his cradle the dewdrops are shining*'. The same carol describes rich gifts brought by the magi, but then there comes the reflection '*Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor*' (*Brightest and best*... Heber 1783-1826).

The poor, rich in faith, have an advantage over those '*who have winter but no Christmas, bringing them Thy peace on earth*' (*Cradled in a manger meanly* George Stringer Rowe 1830-1913). In fact we follow the '*Servant King*'. We are set the example by Him who '*mild. . . He lays His glory by*'... '*born to give men second birth*.' No room for Him at Bethlehem, but is there '*room in my heart for Thee*'?

Sometimes a contrast is made. '*Wise men seeking Jesus*' made a long journey, but *if we desire Him, He is close at hand; for our native country is our Holy Land.*' '*He is more than near us if we love Him well, for He seeketh ever in our hearts to dwell*' (James East 1860-1937) '*All our love and fortune lie in His mighty hands, our sorrows, joys and failures He sees and understands.*' '*No grief shall part us from Thee however sharp the edge...*' (translated from 17th century German by Percy Dearmer). And because the tiny flickering flame of the child at Bethlehem is a light in us, '*His light shall shine from our lives, Spirit blazing, as we touch the flame of His holy fire*' (Graham Kendrick - *Like a candle flame*)

The carols so often look to the future.
*He shall come down like showers upon the
fruitful earth:*

*Love, joy and hope like flowers,
spring in his path to birth:
before Him, on the mountains,
shall peace the herald go,
and righteousness in fountains
from hill to valley flow.*

(*Hail to the Lord's Anointed*
Montgomery 1771-1854)

The glorious song that '*came upon the midnight clear*' is still sounding, despite '*two thousand years of wrong*'. The days of that blessed age are still hastening on. The whole world will give back the song. How or when? Some things '*I cannot tell*.' But some things we know.

*O may we keep and ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind:
Trace we the Babe, who hath retrieved our loss
From His poor manger to His bitter cross;
Tread in His steps assisted by His grace
Till man's first heavenly state again
takes place.*

(John Byrom 1692-1763)

GC

Jesus never showed partiality; nor did he ever discriminate unfairly. How much like Him are we in that respect?

“WITHOUT PARTIALITY”

"Peter opened his mouth and said 'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality'" (Acts 10.34 RSV) or perhaps in more familiar language *"God is no respecter of persons"*. Peter had a vision on a housetop in Joppa and was led by the Holy Spirit to go to Caesarea. He learned from that vision of animals in a sheet that he was not to discriminate against Gentiles. The revelation was a watershed in the attitude of people to one another; the great turning point in the history of the human race. It was not a change in God's attitude to people but a change in human perception of how God wanted those made in His image to behave towards each other. Jesus had prepared the way for this change of attitude when discussing foods with His disciples, concerning people being made unclean not by what goes into their mouths but by what comes out (Mark 7.19)

In the days of the Patriarchs when Joseph was Lord of all Egypt (c 1700 BC) without his brothers knowing who he was, he entertained them to a banquet, sitting them in order of age. He sat apart from them because *"Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews"* (Gen. 43.32 RSV). Such customs of separation, partly religious, partly social, partly nationalistic, go back a long way into history, evidently before patriarchal days. Nations and groups of people thought of themselves as better, in all kinds of ways, than their neighbours. It seems to be more prevalent in societies which have become more 'civilized'. Religion and social manners affected their habits of feeding and speaking? They became 'refined' and that made them feel a 'cut above' those less 'refined'? Do those of the 'homespun' rural social order tend to envy those who are materially wealthier?

Problems of wealth and social distinction did not seem to affect the behaviour and way of life of Abraham's descendants while they remained, like their great and God-fearing ancestor, simple and nomadic. Once settled in the Promised Land, it was easier to compete with each other for wealth and social status and they began to imitate their foreign neighbours. This brought all kinds of social and religious infections to the people of Israel. The establishment of a royal court and the growing power of a once simple priesthood fostered a sense of social rank and strata. This tragic situation has

afflicted almost every nation and society from pre-patriarchal days. Devious means were developed to maintain the status quo among the poor while the rich and powerful climbed still higher. The Law given through Moses did much to prevent this kind of evil within Israel but by the time of the exile, seven or eight hundred years later, the ruling classes had discovered ways and means of breaking all ten commandments while outwardly appearing to keep the Law in all its details. From this sprang national, class and social distinction, racial discrimination and partiality in law. The great empires, ancient and modern, each shouted 'freedom' louder than its predecessors while drawing the cords of slavery tighter (democratically of course) to put the human race in greater bondage than ever before. But evil sows the seeds of its own destruction.

When Jesus came to Earth there was no way in which His grace and goodness would be tolerated by human society. He made His debut in the synagogue at Nazareth by reading Isaiah 61.1, 2 and then announced the principles of His Kingdom based on love. These transcended the barriers that mankind had erected. He reminded them that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah but God's prophet was directed to a citizen of Sidon. He recalled that many suffered from leprosy in Israel in the time of Elisha but he healed only the Syrian general. Jesus had told them the truth yet they tried to throw Him over a cliff. They clung to the idea expressed in Amos in 3.2 *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth."* – but that text did not give them the right to exclude all others from 'knowing God'. The bitterness of the people of Nazareth was echoed in Jerusalem when Paul addressed the crowd that had tried to lynch him. They listened quietly while he spoke in Hebrew of his experience of conversion but when he told them that God had sent him to the 'nations' they broke out in a frenzy of hatred. Their attitude did not demonstrate that they 'knew God' or that He knew them. If they had known God they would never have hated the 'nations' so bitterly or wanted God to destroy them. They had been designated "a light for the Gentiles" by Isaiah 49 and this Scripture spurred Paul on in his desire to spread the Gospel to all. How much have we learned by Israel's

mistakes?

There can be no doubt as to Jesus' attitude towards non-Jewish people. As we look through the Gospels it is interesting to note the kind of people that went to Him. In His loving concern for people He showed no discrimination against foreign nationals, whether they were Samaritan, Roman or Phoenician. He accepted, talked to and comforted a criminal on a cross, prostitutes about to be stoned and those who collected taxes for Rome. An honest appraisal of the Gospels shows clearly that those whom He gathered around Him were not necessarily the rich and influential nor even those whose religious credentials were impeccable. Jesus came to all without discrimination for Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, as His apostle to the Gentiles was to write in his letter to the Galatians (3.28) nor were there any qualifying codicils to explain how the law of love should be applied. Obstructions and hindrances to men and women, boys and girls, coming to know and love and serve God are of human making and in God's good time will be swept away.

Paul's unequivocal statement to the Galatians is by no means an isolated text to make a point. In Romans 2.11, God's justice is declared and none will escape the retribution which sin brings. Firstly, we must recognise that what the Scriptures refer to as God's punishment does not contain any thought of revenge. The Divine scales have already been satisfied by the work of Christ. Whatever God does is motivated by love and the chastisement is correction and a learning process to discover the way that is right. In the administration of that correction God is absolutely just and fair. We may infer from references in the Bible that it was common for judges to receive bribes, and particular attention was paid to the judges in Israel that they should be fair in judgment and not subject to bribes. None can bribe God for all that we have has come from Him. Therefore, if we would be like Him we too must be absolutely fair and honest and just and transparently sincere in whatever we do - 'without hypocrisy'. Ignorance and thought processes marred by sin prevent us from being as upright as God wants us to be, therefore our continual prayer must be that at least we do to others as we would that they do to us. Or can we do better than that?

The matter of class distinction is raised at the

end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians (6.9) where the subject of 'masters' and 'slaves' is raised. Again, the key idea is getting God's viewpoint of such matters. It may be that we believe this problem has vanished in the western world with the abolition of slavery and the outlawing of racial discrimination. The problem cannot be solved until western nations deliberately provide adequate help for all countries that have yet to develop a society in which its population has the necessities of life, even at the cost of lowering their own standard of living. Meanwhile individual Christians and their communities must examine their own position. Does our life style in fact continue to crush peoples overseas? How near to God's view point do we approximate on matters of wealth, lifestyle and the environment which man was given as a stewardship (Genesis 1.26).

Paul writes about God's attitude as an example to us (Col. 3.25 is a further reference) but James gives a direct command; "My brethren show no partiality as you hold the faith". He then gives an illustration about two visitors entering our place of worship, and being treated differently because they are differently dressed. Why the double standards? Was the rich man given better treatment with a view to a bigger financial contribution to church funds or were they just afraid of the kind of 'infection' which the poor man brought in his rags? Or did the life style of the rich man fit in with the majority of the congregation? Are we like those animals that reject individuals that are different from the rest of the group? We may have seen an albino 'blackbird' being mobbed by a lot of 'normal' members of the species. What would our reaction be to someone entering our Christian community or fellowship who wore different clothing or hair style or had some other unusual characteristics different from ourselves? Do we reject them, or make them feel comfortable and 'at home'? How does it affect the way we 'hold the faith' and behave toward those for whom Christ died? Do we reject those who have differences of speech and manners? Does gender or age – or doctrine, form a barrier?

We need continually to 'fix our eyes upon Jesus' – what did He do? He illustrated the lesson about who is my neighbour by telling a story. The hero of that story was a Samaritan – implacable enemies of the Jews. Into another parable (or was it an allegory?) in Matt. 25, Jesus wove eternal

principles of relationships (however we choose to apply that parable). They are eternal principles because there will always be differences between people and not total uniformity. *"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you*

visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." When we couple these ideas with the words of Jesus to Paul "Why do you persecute me" (Acts 9.4) it follows that our treatment of others is an index to the way we treat Jesus. Are we concerned with labels or a particular human need at this moment?
DN

AFTER THE FLOOD

13 - Citizens of Ur

Twelve centuries had passed from the day that Noah and his family stepped out of the Ark, twelve long centuries since the little family had grown into an assembly of nations that was now spreading far over the earth, from Western Europe to China, from Britain to Equatorial Africa and India. The children of Noah were to be found living under varied circumstances and already differentiated by colour and culture. Some led a settled industrial life in built-up cities, some as nomads roaming the wide pastures of their native plains, some advancing in knowledge and achievement. The world was fast taking the shape it has been ever since, although there were as yet still vast areas unknown to and untouched by man.

At the centre of this teeming world lay the land of Sumer, where it all began. Here was the beginning of all that had been achieved, and here still was the repository of knowledge and science, of trade and industry. Here, at the then head of the Persian Gulf, leading up from the Indian Ocean, lay the busy city of Uri-ki, Ur of the Chaldees, a place of twenty-four thousand inhabitants, mostly engaged in merchant shipping and trade or in manufacturing industry. The city was wealthy and prosperous, the houses ornate in appearance and luxuriously appointed, the citizens sleek and well fed, and apart from occasional military raids by the Elamites from the distant mountains, and the enmity of the neighbouring city-states of Isin and Larsa, life was good and seemed likely to remain so. The lofty temple-tower, surmounted by its sanctuary to the patron god of Ur, Nannar the Moon-god, rose into the skies, and ships in the harbour rode quietly at anchor as industrious labourers unloaded rare metals and timber, exotic goods, animals and birds, brought from far-away India and Africa. In the schools, the children sat at their lessons, carefully copying on soft clay tablets

the examples set them by the master, committing to memory the five hundred different cuneiform symbols which made up their 'alphabet', and learning the intricacies of mathematics and geometry which they were going to have to use in later life in a society in which these arts occupied so prominent a place. The school – *e-dubba*, literally 'tablet house' was the most important institution in Sumer and the pupils, from early youth to late teenage, were compelled to attend from sunrise to sunset, a twelve hours per day inculcation of lessons. Woe betide the inattentive. One tablet discovered is evidently part of the rule-book. It runs *"If the student at the e-dubba has not recited his task correctly the senior student and the teacher will beat him"*. No nonsense about the evils of corporal punishment in the school of ancient Sumer. One is reminded of the maxim inculcated by Solomon a thousand years later in Prov. 23.13-14 *"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell"*. The beneficial effect of the education they did receive is shown by the vast array of school exercises, some showing correction marks by the tutor that have been discovered. Many of them are lists of equivalent words in two or even three languages and have been of incalculable value in modern times as aids to the decipherment of those languages. Dictionaries, lexicons, grammars, painstakingly impressed on clay tablets by the schoolchildren of Ur and other towns, have been of enormous help to modern scholars.

In the Temple precincts the scribes were busy composing the great epics which enshrined all that history and legend had to tell them about the days and lives of their ancestors who had founded this land – and in the process got legendary and historical events so thoroughly mixed up that these

epics have been the despair of modern scholars trying to piece together a coherent story of the times. And so, on the whole, life was good for those citizens of Ur, way back two thousand years before Christ.

Abu-Ramu was one of those citizens. He is referred to in the Book of Genesis as Abram. Abu-Ramu was not a Sumerian; he was a Semite, descended from Shem through Arphaxad, but his family had lived in Ur for probably three or four generations. He was married to his niece Sarratu, daughter of his brother Harannu, sixty years older than himself and now dead. His remaining brother, Nakhur, about twenty years his senior, was married to Sarratu's sister Malkata. Together with the sisters' younger brother Lu-utu they all lived together in a house of Abu-Ramu's father Tarakhu.

This was a common practice in Sumerian cities. The general procedure was to add rooms as the demand arose, and the ruins of some of the dwellings excavated by Woolley in 1930 have as many as twenty or thirty rooms. They were not like modern houses. The exterior presented the appearance of a blank wall without windows. The visitor, passing through the entrance, found himself in a kind of reception hall, a door on the farther side giving access to a patio open to the sky around which was grouped a number of rooms, perhaps eight to ten, in the form of a square. Each one had its own doorway opening from the patio, and in some cases communicating doors between. A gallery approached by staircase, ran round the sides of the square at first floor level and from this gallery, the first floor doors opened. The roof, which projected over the gallery, was made of reeds and sun-dried clay made watertight with bitumen, and the centre of the patio was open to the sky so that daylight penetrated into all the rooms. Doors and windows faced the patio and the outside walls had no breaks save the main entrance. The residential part of the city must have presented a rather drab vista of sheer brick walls. But as if to make up for the sameness of brick-work in the streets, the public buildings of Ur were ornate and magnificent, often decorated with brightly coloured tiles and enamelled bricks and coloured representations of lions, bulls and dragons, or flowers and date palms in relief. Statues of gold and copper representing the gods or commemorating some military victory stood here and there and in the centre of the city the imposing edifice that was

the pride of Ur, the Temple of the Moon-God.

The imposing building, the 'ziggurat' of Ur – the best preserved of any of the hundreds of such in Iraq today – was first excavated in the late 19th century but much more thoroughly and scientifically in 1930 by Leonard Woolley. Sacred to the moon-god, it consisted of a series of seven stages surmounted at the top by the idol sanctuary. Abram and Sarai, in their walks through the city, or as they went about their business or met their friends, must often have stopped to gaze upon its magnificence. If as is probable, they were followers of the true God, it is not likely they set foot in its precincts. But its worship and its ceremonial must have been very familiar to them, and on the great feast days they might have watched their friends and neighbours setting out to join in the services and climb the great Tower that dominated the Temple area. They might have stood and watched the people thronging the Sacred Road that led up to the double gateway straddling the outer court. Through that gateway they might perchance catch a glimpse of the two sanctuary buildings, both built in the honour of Nannare, the Moon-god, both closed, their inward mysteries concealed from the public gaze. On feast-days the people were not concerned with the priestly ritual and priestly service; they pressed through the portals of *Dublal-makah*, the Great Gate, gaining access to the elaborated terrace on which stood the 'Hill of Heaven' the great brick 'tower', two hundred and fifty feet square and seventy feet high, planted on all its terraces with trees and flowers, and at its top the gleaming gold and silver of the holiest shrine of all.

The internal appointments of the residents' houses were in keeping with the prosperity of the city. From the relics found by Woolley, lying where the owners left them when the city was deserted and buried in sand millenniums ago it is evident that luxury was the keynote. The furniture in Terah's house might well have been made from tropical woods - sandalwood and teak from India and mahogany from Africa. He would possess chairs and tables, strikingly like our modern ones, elaborately carved and ornamented, the work of craftsmen. At night the family took its repose on beds formed of cord networks stretched across wooden frames, covered with cushions and having raised ends decorated with pictures or designs. Specially shaped receptacles of earthenware held

clothing and household linen, weaving was a well understood art and was employed for the making of clothes as well as carpets and cushions further to advance the comfort of the home. The majority of household utensils were of pottery or copper; if Terah was a reasonably wealthy man, tableware such as forks and spoons would be of silver or gold. Knives were made of copper, for the people of Ur, like all the ancients, held the secret, lost for thousands of years afterward and only rediscovered during the twentieth century, of so tempering copper that it could be used for cutting edges as today we use steel. Elaborate musical instruments, libraries of clay tablets containing literary works, religious exercises, commercial documents, even medical treatises and school lessons, all betoken a civilised and knowledgeable people replete in this world's goods and loyal in their devotion to their Deity.

It was in this city and this kind of house, and in this way of life, that Terah and his family lived. And they were all idolaters. That this was so is demonstrated by the names of the members of the family. They are all idolatrous names connected with one or other of the many gods of Sumer. There is also the testimony of Joshua, speaking to the people of Israel at the time of the entry to the land, when he told them *"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (river) in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and of Nachor, and they served other gods!"* (Josh 24.2). In addition there is a passage in the Apocryphal Book of Jubilees (150 BC), which declares that Terah, his father and his grandfather were all idolaters (Jub. 11.4-16). But the real evidence lies in the names, all of which are recorded in their Hebrew form in Genesis, although it has to be remembered that they were actually Sumerian names.

"Abram" is the Hebrew form of the Sumerian "Abu-Ramu", meaning "Ramu, my father". (The Hebrew language normally omitted the final 'u' when translating Sumerian words, or else replaced it with 'a' or 'i'.) Ramu or Adad was the storm-god. 'Sarai' is 'Sarratu', a name current in the country of Haran for the wife of Nannar the Moon-God. Her sister 'Milcah' is 'Malkatu', also a name in Haran for the goddess Inanna or Ishtar (Venus). 'Nahor' is "Nakhur", Nannar the Moon-god; "Haran" is "Hurranu". "An, my mountain" probably "An (the supreme god) is my strength"; "Terah" is "Tarakhu", the sacred gazelle of the Moon-god, and

"Lot" son of Haran, is "Lu-utu", "man of the sun-god". The names are mingled Sumerian and Semitic and most of them resemble the local names of the gods current in the northern town of Haran (also dedicated to the Moon-god) rather than the purely Sumerian town of Ur, from which fact it has been suggested that the family originated several generations earlier from Haran.

From all this it is clear that Joshua was correct; Abraham's father Terah was an idolator and named his family accordingly. (At a later date in Canaan God changed the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah to remove the pagan stigma). Terah's father and grandfather must have worshipped idols also, but that is as far back as the apostasy would have gone, for the grandfather, Serug, lived at the time when paganism had its rise. It follows therefore that the true faith was preserved in the family to within two centuries of the birth of Abraham so that quite reasonably the old writings, the stories of Eden, the Flood, and Babel, as we have them in Genesis – and probably much more were preserved and handed down until they came into the possession of Abraham himself: so the early Bible history was saved. Jewish tradition has it that Terah was in business as a manufacturer of *teraphim*, the miniature idols used in private homes to protect the inhabitants. It may be remembered that in later years Rachel his great-grandaughter was involved in some rather shady business concerning the theft of her father Laban's *teraphim* to the displeasure of her husband Jacob (Gen 31.30-35) so the legend may well rest on a basis of fact.

The conversion of Abram and Sarai to the true faith and renunciation of idolatry must have been at an early stage of their lives. There is some evidence that his brother Nahor shared in that conversion (Gen. 31.53). Various legends existed in later times purporting to tell the story of that conversion but they are but legends. In practice it is tolerably certain that the line leading from Shem to Abraham was faithful to the true God for the major part of its existence; the preservation of the early Bible stories is evidence of that. It is probable that Abraham, accustomed from youth to those stories, saw more in them than did his father and grandfather, and glimpsed something in them of an outworking of the Divine purpose which led him to realise that this was indeed the very Word of God, and set himself to follow the light he thus received. So the

Lord looked down and saw the man who would be the man of his choice and in the fullness of time revealed Himself.

It was about this time the name of a new god began to be made known among the people. Marduk the god of Babylon had not been one of much consequence in past times but Ur was now becoming increasingly dominated by Babylon and the claims of Babylon's god were being pressed. Marduk was not like the other gods, a personification of one or another attributes of the Most High God; he was a personification of a famous man of nearly a thousand years earlier, Nimrod, the celebrated hero who had taken the lead among their ancestors of early days. Now the priests and scribes got busy extolling his praises and writing epic poems about his mighty deeds. At first he was claimed to be the son of Nannar the Moon-god; later they gave out that he was the son of Enlil the son of the Most High and then they went further and made him the son of An the Most High himself, and wove wondrous legends about his becoming man's redeemer by dying and going into the grave and then rising from the dead and returning to the earth with gifts for men, all of which causes one to wonder how much early man, in the days of Eden and the Flood, did have revealed to them something of God's purpose of salvation, for that is where it must have come from at the first. An elaborate ceremony lasting a week was held every year in Babylon in the month Nisan

to picture this legend. Eventually Marduk came to supersede all the other gods, as the hero of the people. The cult of Marduk became a kind of national obsession; the poets and scribes began to weave his personality into their epic poems and he became the symbol of all that was great and spectacular in the national life. More than any of the other gods Marduk was the most prominent god of Sumerian paganism and set the pattern for all paganism in all the world since. Under his Semitic name of Bel he became Baal to the Canaanitish nations and so was worshipped by Israel in her more decadent days. The greatest of all Sumerian epics, the *"Enuma Elish"* written two centuries or more after Abram left Ur, is a long recapitulation of all his alleged mighty deeds, among the gods and among men. In the end the identity of Utu, the sun-god, became absorbed into that of Marduk. It might well have been the rising power of this cult which led Abram to welcome the opportunity the Lord gave him to abandon Ur with its paganism and go to the new land which He promised to show him.

So, at last, the word of the Lord came to Abram *"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation"* (Gen. 12.1-2). And Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.

(To be concluded)

AOH

QUESTIONS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

I cannot say 'our' if I do not recognise other branches of His family.

I cannot say 'Father' if I do not live as an obedient child of His.

I cannot say 'which art in heaven' if I am so occupied with the earth that I am laying up no treasure there.

I cannot say 'hallowed be Thy Name' if I, who am called by His Name, am not holy.

I cannot say 'Thy kingdom come' if I am hanging on to the good things of this life.

I cannot say 'Thy will be done' if I am reluctant to obey some of His commands.

I cannot say 'In earth as it is in heaven' if I don't devote my life to His work.

I cannot say 'give us this day our daily bread' if

I undervalue His Living Bread.

I cannot say 'forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us' if I harbour a grudge against anyone.

I cannot say 'deliver us from evil' if I do not fight it in the spiritual realm with the weapon of prayer.

I cannot say 'Thine is the kingdom' if I put my trust in human government.

I cannot say 'Thine is the power' if I doubt His ability to intervene in our affairs.

I cannot say 'for ever' if my horizon is bounded by the things of time.

Adapted from the Christian Message

MAN OF SORROWS

4 - Chastened of God

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53.5). Here we begin to enter a new realm, of how these things affect us. This expression, *"the chastisement of our peace,"* means literally the chastisement by which our peace is effected. The word does mean to chastise as with whips as used in the memorable passage where Rehoboam promised his subjects that where his father Solomon had chastised them with whips he would do so with scorpions. The expression really does refer to a scourging inflicted to coerce into submission. The word is derived from a root which means "to instruct". The dividing line between chastisement and instruction is very thin in the Bible. *"Spare the rod and spoil the child"* (Prov. 13.24) is a maxim that has support in the Old Testament. *"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"* (Prov. 3.11, 12). We might, therefore, without wresting the meaning of this verse, take it to give some indication at least that the chastisement laid upon our Lord was in some sense a means of chastening or instructing the sons of men in the way that leads to peace. Some will see in this a reference to the teaching about sin-offering and to 2 Cor. 5.21 *"He hath made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* Here too we see our Lord's conscious pouring out of His life unto death (v. 12) that men will receive the power and inspiration necessary to reap the benefit of the Ransom in the age to come. That is why, in v. 5 Isaiah tells us that both the suffering and the discipline which are included in the word "chastisement" are laid upon Him that we might eventually attain peace. In those stripes which fell upon Him, we shall at the end be healed. The Book of Hebrews declares this same thing. *"It became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."* *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered,"* and *"being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"* (Heb. 2.10; 5.8-9). There is much in the mystic power for righteousness, set free by the Sin-Offering, that we do not as yet understand, but one

of its most obvious aspects is the moral appeal to men's better nature engendered by the realization that He did indeed willingly bear our grief and carry our sorrows and accept our chastisement. It is that more than anything else that will lead men to cry out rapturously *"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).

There is a cryptic word in the Book of Proverbs which has some connection with this theme. *"The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise."* (Prov. 15.31). That word "reproof" is the same that is here rendered in Isa. 53.5 'chastisement', and it has the same underlying meaning. The *"reproof of life"* is that stern discipline, chastening, which leads the subject of the 'reproof' to life. The following verse declares that the one who refuses instruction is a despiser of his own soul. The one who willingly becomes subject to the reproof of life, the discipline, the chastening, which is necessary to eternal life, shall abide among the wise – a reference to those who at the end of the Millennial Age will be adjudged worthy. So we can look upon our Lord as one who willingly took upon himself the obligations and duties, the humiliation and suffering, of those who must receive chastening at God's hand that they be reconciled to Him and fitted for their eternal inheritance. He stooped down to us and became as one of us, that we might be lifted up to Him and become like Him, sons of the living God.

"All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). Irresistibly we are reminded here of the Good Shepherd, the One who gave His life for the sheep. It is because they have strayed from the safety of the fold into danger, that He is called upon to give His life in their defence and for their recovery. One of the most revealing discourses of Jesus is recorded in Luke 15. The reclaiming power and love of God, manifested in Christ, toward unregenerate man is shown in three everyday illustrations. There were a hundred sheep, one was lost and found. There were ten pieces of silver, one was lost and found. There were two sons, one was lost and found. These three

stories provide indisputable proof that none will be lost for want of the selfless love of God, reaching out into the dark recesses of sin to draw the wanderer back to Himself. Medieval theology made it hard to evade the stern barrier of Divine Justice and enter at last through the golden door into the bliss of heaven. The plain teaching of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels is that it will be a very hard thing to escape from the encirclement of Divine Love and fail to inherit the green fields and sparkling streams of Paradise. The Son of Man, like the Good Shepherd of Luke 15, has come forth into the world to seek and save that which was lost, and resolute indeed must be the man or woman who is so determined to fill their hearts with sin and steel themselves against every form of what is good that the love of the Redeemer has no effect upon them. We must hold very rigidly to the Divine declaration that nothing unclean or defiled by sin shall enter the Kingdom of God. None save those reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as Saviour, shall ever be admitted to the glory of God's favour and attain everlasting life. Nevertheless we do not have to conclude that on this account the number of the redeemed is to be few. The "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" has to be reckoned with. He has decreed that the whole earth shall one day be full of His glory. He has declared that His word does not return to him void, but prospers in the thing whereto it is sent. It is when we ponder Scriptures like these that we realise what tremendous force and power for good is let loose in the world when God sets Himself to recover His lost creatures, and how hard it is going to be for any man to remain wilfully and incorrigibly obdurate in the face of that outreaching love.

That some will be thus wedded to their sin, despite all the efforts made on their behalf and opportunities put in their path, seems possible from the general tenor of the Scriptures. Some there can be, it would appear, who will fulfil the dark words of Rev. 21.8 and meet their end in the utter destruction which is the reality behind the lurid symbol of the fiery lake. We can only hope, and we have good reason to believe, that the number will be small compared with the vast numbers of redeemed and reconciled mankind.

Meanwhile the sheep are lost; they wander still in this world, waiting for the shepherd to find them and lead them home, and not even conscious, for

the most part, that they are lost and need a Shepherd. *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way."* How like the bitter words of Rom. 1.28 *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things"* and so it goes on until the dreadful climax in 3.23 *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"*. There are the lost sheep, far from the warmth and light of the Father's home, and here is the Shepherd, making his way through this dark world to find the wandering ones and bring them safely back. But just as God *"gave them over"* so according to Rom. 11.32 God intends to reclaim the dissident sheep and son.

It is not just a question of picking up the straying sheep and carrying it back and putting it down in the sheepfold just as if nothing had happened. Sin and the effects of sin are not dealt with so easily and casually as that. Lest anyone, reading without considering, should think that is all that there is in the Luke 15 story, the Lord adds an epilogue. The sheep has been restored, safe and sound, and there is rejoicing. *"Likewise"* said Jesus, *"joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents"*. There is little use in bringing home the straying sheep if next day it is going to get lost again; or finding the lost piece of silver only to mislay it again; or greeting the returning prodigal if a week later, refreshed and revitalized, he sets out once more on a fresh career of dissipation and debauchery. There has to be repentance and atonement for past sin. The insult to God's holiness is not lightly to be set aside and the damage to the sinner's character is not easily rectified. So the Saviour not only carries the exhausted frame of the sinner back to God He also bears the burden of his sin. That is what this verse says. *"The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."* The literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase is that "the Lord hath caused to meet him, the iniquity". Iniquity has met him in the road and blocks his way. The word really refers to such things as the historical avenger of blood, meeting the man for whom he is searching and whom he means to slay in satisfaction for the murder of a kinsman. The custom is alluded to in Num. 35.19. *"The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer; when he meets him, he shall slay him."* That expression *"meets him"* is the same as *"laid on him"* in Isa. 53. The implication there behind the expression is

clear. The One who goes forth to seek and save the sinner is met in the way by the sinner's own sin, and that sin overcomes and slays him. *"Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."* (1 Pet. 3.18). *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree... by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop (episkopos – guardian or overseer) of your souls."* (1 Pet. 2.24-25). Sin met him in the way – and He went forth, calm and resolute, to meet it. He knew that it would encompass His death, but He knew also that only thus could He defeat sin and break its power. We think too often of Jesus the bearer of sin in the sense that Divine Justice demands a sin-bearer before the sentence on a guilty race can be lifted. We think not often enough of the fact that Jesus must bear the sin of the world in order to break the power of sin over the individual. Divine forgiveness of sins is ineffective until the sinner repents; and after repentance Divine Justice has no further claim. There is no reopening old scores once the repentant one has entered into a condition of reconciliation with God, only the inevitable working out of retribution for the deeds done in the body, which none can escape. So it is of the more importance that we consider the bearing of sin by Jesus as it affects the repentant sinners rather than as it affects God. We want to know just how it is that this amazing manifestation of Jesus' love for mankind can result in the reconciliation of man to God and the renunciation by man of all evil.

There is a story, said to be true, of a missionary some century or more ago who devoted his life to teaching a primitive tribe of head-hunters in Eastern Asia. Slowly he weaned them from their savage practices and by his love and kindness endeared himself to all their hearts. Suspicious of strangers they remained, but for their pastor and shepherd they had nothing but the tenderest feelings of love, and they listened patiently and attentively as he talked to them of the love of Christ and attended their ailments and helped them in their troubles. Before his coming, the tribe had an annual ceremony at which a human victim was sacrificed, in the belief that by this means the weather would be propitious and the crops successful. The missionary had persuaded them to abandon that savage practice, not without considerable

reluctance on their part, for they could not be sure that the orderly succession of sowing and reaping would go on uninterruptedly without the customary offering to the powers of Nature. When the harvests were good all went well but drought and failing crops made the men of the tribe restive and it took all their teacher's influence to keep them from a relapse into the old bad ways.

Years passed by, and then one day a deputation waited on the missionary. The old urge was back, and they insisted that they must be permitted to hold their ceremony and sacrifice a victim. In their reverence and respect for the one who had devoted his whole life to their welfare they had come to him for permission, but his permission they must have and they would not be gain-said. The old man realized that this time he would not be able to resist them and turn them from their purpose; their hearts were set upon sacrifice and a sacrifice they must have. He bent his head in silent prayer, and turned then to face the waiting deputation. "You shall have your request," he told them sadly, "but on condition that you follow my instructions to the letter." Overjoyed at having achieved their purpose, they assented gladly. "Tomorrow," said the old man, "you will go at the appointed time to your usual place of sacrifice. There you will see a man standing clothed in a scarlet cloak and his head covered with a scarlet hood. Do not attempt to look upon his features, but without delay do you accomplish your design. Now go, my children." At the set time next day the tribesmen went up to the place of sacrifice. There stood the victim, just as the missionary had told them. With shouts and cries of exultation they surged forward. The man appointed for the purpose swung his great sword, and with one stroke cut off the head of the motionless figure before him ... the scarlet hood rolled off and the horror-stricken people looked upon the features of their beloved pastor.

It is said that never after that day did the people crave after sacrifice and idolatrous ceremonies. Through all their generations they cherished the memory of a man who, when he could save them from themselves in no other way, did it by laying down his life, a willing sacrifice.

In our philosophy about the Atonement and the meaning of our Lord's death for man, it may be that we are never so near the truth as we are when we read that little story. Had there been another way of

saving mankind, surely God would have taken it. Maybe it was because there was no other way, because only by giving His life as the supreme sacrifice, that Jesus came out into the world to find lost mankind, and, coming out, met sin in the way,

and gave Himself to be slain by sin and return to His Father's house bringing the lost ones with Him. "All we, like sheep, have gone astray but the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

TH

THE BOY WITH THE LOAVES AND FISHES

This is the story of a boy who went out for the day to hear a famous preacher and found himself in front of a crowd of five thousand people. It all goes to show how the most unexpected things can happen and when we have gone out to see or do something in which the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned then the unexpected thing can be a very wonderful thing also. This boy had heard that Jesus was declaring the good tidings of the Kingdom of God up in the hills outside the town. He was healing sick people, and thousands of people were flocking out of town to see and hear him. He decided he would go too and listen to Jesus. He knew it would be an all-day affair and there were no shops or places to get food away in the hills, and so he took his lunch with him. And up the road he went, out of the town and past all the houses, through the vegetable gardens where the townsmen grew their daily food, until he came to a stretch of grass where crowds of people gathered together to listen to Jesus.

Right up at the front he could see Jesus with his twelve disciples, moving about as He healed first one and then another sick or crippled man or woman. He stopped at times to talk to the people looking on, telling them of the need to repent of their sins because sin is a greater evil even than being sick or crippled, and He wanted to heal them of sin as well as of sickness. Now we do not know what the boy's name was because the Bible does not tell us, so we will call him John; that is a good Bible name and this boy's name is as likely to have been John as anything else.

Well then, John got amongst the crowd and very speedily, as boys do, he pushed to the front where Jesus was, so that he could see and hear all that was going on. We may be sure that he listened very intently to all that Jesus was saying about being honest and straightforward and living a life of helpfulness to other people. Although there must have been many things in what Jesus said that he could not fully understand, seeing that he was only a boy after all, yet he was thrilled to hear of the

coming time when the Kingdom of God would come to earth and all men would love and do good to their neighbours instead of doing them harm as they do now. And when some men brought a crippled person to Jesus, and Jesus healed him so that he went away leaping into the air and praising God, well, John's eyes nearly popped out of his head with astonishment and excitement, so that he quite forgot to eat his lunch and never even noticed that he was getting hungry.

Now that is where John really came into the picture, because it was getting well into the afternoon and Jesus' disciples thought it was time to have something to eat themselves and then they realised that they had nothing with them. So they asked Jesus if they should tell all the people to go home and get their meal because it would soon be sunset and dark. "Oh no" said Jesus "you give them something to eat where they are". "But how can we" answered the disciples. "We haven't got anything here, and if we had a hundred pounds to spend it wouldn't buy enough bread for this great crowd of people". Jesus looked at them in his usual calm way and said "Well, what have you got?" at the very moment John, realising at last he was hungry, was getting his lunch out of his little bag. One of the disciples – Andrew it was – looking around rather helplessly, saw him do it and came over to see what he had got. John showed him – five little flat barley cakes and two small roasted fishes. Andrew went back to Jesus rather hesitantly and said "*There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?*"

John held his precious loaves tightly, fearing they were going to be taken away from him, but just then a wonderful thing happened. Jesus looked up and smiled at him, smiled so kindly and understandingly that suddenly John felt he would do anything for Jesus, even to going without his lunch if need be, and straight away he went up and put his precious lunch bag on the ground in front of Jesus. The teacher said "Thank you".

"Tell everybody to sit down" commanded Jesus, and off went the disciples to see about it. Then something happened which John never forgot to his dying day. Jesus took the little barley cakes out of John's bag and gave thanks to God for the good food, and then began breaking them in half, and dividing the two fishes in half, and putting the pieces on the grass before him; but as fast as he did so he still seemed to have them in his hands unbroken. Before long there was a great pile of broken cakes and fish and John was kept as busy as he knew how, piling up more of them as fast as Jesus was breaking them. He was so busy that he hardly had time to feel astonished, although he had never seen anything like it before. As for the disciples, when they came back from telling everybody to sit down they just couldn't make it out at all. Then Jesus quietly told them to start taking the food around to all the people on the grass waiting for it.

Now the important thing about this story is that if John had not been practical enough to think of his lunch when setting out in the morning nothing of this would have happened. All the older people went out to see and hear Jesus without thinking of the fact that before the day was out they would need food. John went out just as eager to see and hear Jesus but he remembered and made provision for his bodily needs as well. And because of that he became the only one in that great crowd of five thousand people who Jesus could use for his miracle of making food for all, out of five loaves and two small fishes.

In our day to day experiences we need to be practical while we serve the Lord Jesus and listen to Him. We should remember the needs of those around us and be ready to have the Lord use us in helping other people as well as spending our time praising Him or reading about Him. We need to put into practice the things we learn from Him, so that, as the Scriptures put it, people may take notice that we have been with Jesus and learned of Him. We should not get our heads so much in the clouds that we fail to keep our feet on the earth. That does not mean that we should forget the things of God and spend all our time looking after our daily wants. The Scripture does not say that we should spend all our time looking after our food and clothes and homes. Rather we are to seek the Kingdom of God chiefly and then other things will come into their

proper place. But we must give them the right amount of attention and the Lord will do the rest. John did not busy himself trying to bring enough food for all the people. He just brought enough for himself and the Lord took care of the difficult bit – enough to feed five thousand.

AOH

LORD JESUS,
Not knowing what is ahead;
We lean on you.

If it be happiness;
Let us wear it graciously.

If it be sorrow;
Let us wear it bravely.

If it be frustration
Let us wear it trustingly.

If it be wealth;
Let us wear it thankfully.

If it be poverty;
Let us wear it proudly.

If it be sickness;
Bear it cheerfully.

If it be health;
Let us use it serving you.

If it be emptiness;
Let us fill it with you.

LORD JESUS,
We do not ask for happiness;
Only joy.

We do not ask for wealth;
Only richness in you.

We do not ask for health;
Only strength from you.

So whatever you send our way
Can be faced
Leaning on you.

Submitted by RMC

"IF THOU HAST BEEN HERE"

*Some reflections
on John 11*

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" so spoke quivering lips in Bethany as Jesus came, at length, to wake "our friend Lazarus out of sleep." ... "if you had been here" how different the situation would have been! How sorrowfully, yet chidingly spoken, the words 'my brother had not died'! That the gentle reflective Mary should re-echo Martha's opening words most clearly indicates how frequently, amid paroxysms of grief they had reiterated these sentiments each to each. And very naturally too! Had He not sent by the lips of their messengers the most comforting assurance that *"this sickness is not unto death"*? Yet during His tarrying Lazarus had died! Notwithstanding His word of assurance, Lazarus was dead, and had been laid in the tomb! Why had He not taken more seriously the tidings concerning the illness of His friend? Why had He not accompanied, with speed, the return of their messengers? Why? Why? If... If.. *"If you had been here my brother had not died"*

It is so easy, and almost inevitable, in times of sorrow or suffering, for us to question the ways of Providence, and to assert that if this or that had been done when we thought it should, how different the outcome would have been!

Things had been moving to a climax in Israel. Sign after sign, testifying to the messiahship of Jesus, had fallen on unseeing eyes. One last witness – a sign of surpassing magnitude – was put into motion by Divine Providence. Lazarus, Martha, Mary and Jesus had their parts to play therein – Lazarus to die, Mary and Martha to weep and Jesus to weep, then to restore. A man, four days dead, was to be awakened, revived and returned to his home and place in life, as if decomposition had not laid its destructive hand upon his person.

A like happening had occurred before in Galilee, when Jesus halted the cortege and restored to a widowed mother's care her only son. But that had taken place in Galilee, and malicious tongues could talk it down and rob it of significance. Something must be staged, enacted and exhibited in Jerusalem, for only in Jerusalem were prophets and righteous men fated to perish, and the culminating sequel to this final sign was to be the death, in Jerusalem, of the latest and greatest of God's messengers – his holy and well-beloved Son. The enacted 'sign' must therefore be set in old

Jerusalem, and forced home with decisive impact upon the Council of the nation assembled there.

Let us not think of this tragic episode, therefore, as merely casual, or that it "just happened – so". Jesus knew from its very onset that it was intended, in some unmistakable way, to enhance the glory of God, and hence the fuller content of His reply to and through the messengers *"This sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby"*. Also to Martha Jesus said *"Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"* And so she did when the tomb gave up its dead and the semblance of the great resurrection truth which Jesus had previously taught her was set forth before her astonished eyes!

Events were moving to a crisis in Jerusalem and Israel. Many former signs had been of no avail to convince the nation of Jesus' claim to Messiahship. In the ordering of a higher Providence one last and vital witness to this heedless people was ordained and the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary selected for its setting. Lazarus in particular was greatly honoured as Heaven's choice of victim for the seeming tragedy, to be compensated later by an unparalleled act of deliverance from death and the tomb. And Jesus, though weeping in sympathy with those that wept, had come as the finger of God (Luke 11.20) to demonstrate resurrection power and to kindle to a brighter flame, a resurrection hope. Mysterious, wonderful oversight in human life. Yet as with Martha and Mary, so little comprehended, so little understood! And why? To draw out faith, to develop trust, to encourage assurance, to persuade that it is better to *"walk in the dark with God, than go alone in the light."* How often has this mysterious oversight touched down into our little lives to shape our "means" and "ends". That unaccountably strange first contact with God's people; that seemingly chance meeting with a brother; a spoken word in that address that presumed loss or bitter disappointment: that enfeebling sickness and tardy restoration: and a hundred other inexplicable incidents of life! How much easier to reproduce the two sisters' chiding words and reiterate their "ifs" and "whys", than bow submissive to the over-riding Hand. How much easier to chafe and fret than to rest in His Love and trust to His care!

Providence is a great and effective teacher; its lessons are ever new and fresh, based on the little episodes of life, but governed always by the great principles. How do we react?

Perhaps it may be well to change the terms, replace Providence for Omnipotence, Omniscience, Universality – it is high and deep, it

is wide and broad, and we are but frail and weak and small and insignificant. But God is my Father and I am His child! My Father is Providence and rules the world, the sun, the moon, and stars, and all things that exist! Happy child with such a Father to shape its ends!

TH

FOUND IN HIM

Phil. 3.9

The truth of our union with our Lord is a thing for human nature's, regenerate human nature's "daily food". It is something meant to be a secret of peace, power, faithfulness, and love during the hours and minutes of this present day – be the day what it may for you and for me. It is then a truth which must be ready in the soul, ready at hand for use. For how much of the difficulty of common life is made up of minute surprises, the being taken unawares in little things!

When St. Paul in Phil. 3 describes his conversion, it is not from the side of the external, the road to Damascus, the supernatural glory, the articulate Voice. He speaks of a transition, a revolution, in the attitude of his conviction and his will. He describes himself, as passing from a state of soul in which, practically, his hope and strength was in himself, in which he lived and moved on the centre and in the atmosphere of self, to a state in which he was IN CHRIST. And in the ninth verse he looks forward to the Great Day, and carries the thought of his new and blessed position up to it. He thinks what it will be to be "found in Him" at that great time of finding. He looks forward to be "found in Christ" with a view to acquittal before the Judge, as one clothed with, invested in, the merits, the righteousness, of his glorious Head. He anticipates the bliss of being "found" then with his ground of acceptance ready, and his feet already upon it; not casting about bewildered for a falling mountain to hide him from the Judge, but standing in meek fixity and calmness, unsurprised, hidden in Christ, in Jehovah Tsidkenu, in the Lord our righteousness.

There exists a profound connexion, under the main truth of "IN-NESS" in Christ, between the truths of acceptance and of life-power; not a confusion, for they are perfectly distinct, but connexion, for they come from the same fountain, Christ, on the same condition., incorporation. So I

take the holy words with a reference to the life of grace, the life of faith, the practical "walk" of the believer now as well as his "standing in the judgment" then. For the two things have to do equally, though in different ways, with our Union with the Lord.

"Found in Him". So must the soul be, as to the Lord's Righteousness, if it is to meet in peace the sudden presence of the Judge. But so too must the soul be, as to connexion with the Lord's Life, through the Spirit, if it is to meet, for victory and peace, the perpetual suddenness, if I may speak so, of the presence of the Tempter and of the Traitor.

I speak here, it will be seen, of Union with the Lord as it is realized, utilized, applied; Union turned into Communion. In itself the Union is permanent, perpetual. "He that is joined unto the Lord" does not, from the point of view of the covenant of God, move in and out, out and in, moment by moment, day by day. The embraces of eternal love and life are stronger and more persevering than to suffer this. But from the side of the believer's experience, the believer's appropriation and enjoyment of the holy privilege, there is indeed room for change and alteration. To "turn Union into Communion," I must as an absolute necessary condition, watch and pray. Watching and praying – *over my possessions in Christ* – I may look to be "found in Him," as to my experience, in the moment of need. Unwatchful and neglecting prayer, I must look to find myself, in this sense, outside, exposed, and helpless.

Let us take an obvious case or two in point. I am conscious of my liability to impatience. The little things of the common day are only too apt to betray me into haste of thought, perhaps of manner, perhaps of action. I am expected by those closest to me, to show quickly and easily when my wish is crossed. Shall I comfort myself with the excuse, so ready and so unhappy, that my nerves are highly

strung, that I am over-worked, that it is so common a weakness, that the movement is so soon past? God forbid. This thing can be dealt with, can be held in effectual check, can be precluded, in the soul which is in real union with the eternal Source of love and peace. But in order to do this, Union must be turned into Communion. The soul must learn (and it *may* learn) to maintain, by grace, an attitude of conscious intimacy and intercourse with its Lord and Head. And the little or great surprise, surprise of trial that comes upon it in such an attitude will "find it in Him"; in the place of peace, of deliverance, of strength. The trying letter, the unwelcome interruption, the disappointed plan, the mortifying word, will not do their wonted work there. Not only will there be outward calm; there will be inward.

I am conscious of liability to defiling imagination. Perhaps in this woeful tendency I "possess the iniquities" of past years. Let the exciting cause, crude or subtle, be what it may; let it "find" me "in Him". Out of communion with my Head, I shall be as one who feels for the ground, and treads upon the air. Abiding in Him I shall find "my foot stand" and overcome.

I am conscious of weakness and unreadiness in the exercise of influence for my Lord. Opportunities come and are lost. I am thrown with friends in unexpected intercourse, and it closes without a word spoken for Christ, perhaps without

an act of loving example done for Him, just where I knew such things were specially my work and call. Was it not because the occasion did not "find" me "in Him"? Other interests were, for the time, in possession and supreme. And I found it very difficult indeed, by confused and hurried acts of soul, to make my way back, at the time, to an even tolerable measure of "abiding in Him," the secret of bearing fruit. Shall not the next occasion "find" me in the right place? Then may I surely expect that my heavenly Master will use me, through word, act, spirit, manner, for His work.

Let the believer make it a definite subject of prayer and holy watching to be "found in Him", in this sense of the habit of communion with his Head. The name of the Lord, the revealed Self of the covenant Eternal, is the "strong tower" into which the righteous "runs, and is safe." But surely this does not mean that he is to dwell outside his fortress, and to run into it only when the terror comes. He is to hasten there, and make it his home. He is "not to stay in all the plain." He is to be "found in Him" alike by the crafty enemy now, and by the holy Judge hereafter.

Lord, work in me evermore, work in me this hour, to will and to do for the sake of this Thy good pleasure; to give diligence, that I may be ever found in peace, being found in Thee. — Amen

H.C.G. Moule 1885

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The second Gospel, as placed in our canon of Scripture, is the shortest and probably the earliest of the four gospels. It is a 'synoptic' gospel and therefore has considerable likeness to Matthew and Luke. The words '*immediately*' or '*at once*' occur quite frequently in Mark and give the impression of a young man in a hurry. This also makes it appear a very dramatic record of Jesus' ministry. There is very little about Jesus' background and details of John the Baptist are brief. The brevity of the account of the resurrection is surprising especially considering that Peter is regarded as having provided Mark with much of the information for the Gospel and that half the book relates to the suffering and death of Jesus. Up to chapter 8 we see Jesus as the exciting healer, working many miracles. After Caesarea Philippi and Peter's confession of the Christ, Mark is concerned with Jesus' sufferings in Jerusalem, culminating in

crucifixion. So who was Mark and what was his objective in writing the Gospel named after him?

John Mark was the son of Mary (Acts 12.12) whose home was used for meetings of the very Early Church and traditionally, the venue of the Last Supper. His uncle or cousin was Joseph Barnabas, a wealthy Cypriot, who shared Paul's first missionary journey in Asia Minor. Mark had started out with them but after they left Cyprus he turned back to Judea. Mark was quite prominent in Paul's later travels and was in Rome with Peter where he may have written the Gospel.

There was a great fire in Rome in AD64 and from 65-70 Christians were blamed for having caused the fire perhaps because they spoke of the world being destroyed by fire. They were severely persecuted and during that time, Paul and Peter were martyred and there was a need to rekindle loyalty to the Lord. Mark's contribution to this lay

in his ability to write an authentic account of who Jesus was and what He had done. This Gospel, perhaps more than the others, emphasises that discipleship means suffering. Mark's gospel was neglected for centuries as being only a summary of Matthew's record but thanks to the work of the scholars in more recent years, we now know that it was a primary source for Matthew and Luke. There are far greater parallels between Mark and Matthew and Mark and Luke than there are between Matthew and Luke. Mark contains vivid details as of an eye witness and one little story in chapter 14.51, 52 has often been taken as a reference to one of Mark's own exploits. Did he see and hear Jesus in Gethsemane while the older men slept? Scholars sometimes suggest that Mark should not be regarded as an eyewitness to the events in the Gospels. Since his mother and uncle were disciples there is a strong possibility that he was present in some of the events around Judea. Should the observations of a twelve to fourteen year old be disregarded?

It is an interesting study to compare parallel stories in the other gospels. The incident of the storm on Galilee is an excellent example. The differences in the accounts should not cause us to doubt the accuracy of either. Readers, like writers, are different – they see things differently – and different needs are met from the same stories because they are told in a different ways, from different angles. Many who do not share our faith in the Christ described in these Gospels, are nevertheless ready to acknowledge that the Gospel stories are the most beautiful in the world. We owe much to the second Gospel.

When Mark's record is checked against Early Church records and examined for internal evidence it is not only found to be correct but gives clear

signals as to what God is saying to us now for personal application. It seems strange that this Gospel is not used more for missionary purposes because Mark seems to have avoided the more obscure metaphorical language of, for example, John. Mark didn't write for scholars to analyse, synthesise, compare and contrast – he had a personal style of writing about events as they occurred while he was still young. He could look back at them as they had been thirty years before.

Mark is sometimes referred to as an apologist – he set out deliberately to defend the faith at a time of crisis to show that followers of Jesus Christ were good citizens. After writing this record of Jesus' ministry, the world could never be the same again even though more explanations would follow in the rest of the New Testament.

Mark is brief and omits details and teaching material that is given by the other two synoptic Gospels but he describes the happenings, places and people's behaviour.

He appears to write for both Jews and Gentiles but gives added explanations of Jewish customs for the benefit of non-Jewish readers. In Mark's account Jesus is a very real person who is doing things for others, as the servant in Isaiah 53, coupled with Peter's words in 1 Peter 2.22, 23. This reaches its climax in Mark 10.44, 45. In the latter half of Mark's gospel Jesus has set His face toward Jerusalem – the suffering, uncomplaining servant of Phil. 2.7, 8.

There are some interesting similarities between certain parts of Mark's Gospel and Peter's speech at Caesarea in the house of Cornelius recorded in Acts 10.36-41.

(Commentaries used in this study include Cole and English (IVP), Lane (SU) Barclay (St.Andrews)

DN

The following eulogy was written many years ago by a Christian minister as depicting the aspect from which the typical thinking citizen of Pagan Rome regarded the Christian of that day. Although that assumption may or may not be justified, surely we would in our day ask for nothing better than that we should be regarded in the way expressed in these words.

'Mysterious people', might the perplexed and pensive heathen say within himself 'Mysterious people.' Moving amongst us and yet not seeming to be of us. Passing through the world without

seeming to be deeply concerned in its forms and fashions, its prizes or rewards; tranquil amidst its contentions; humble amidst its pomp; silent amidst its bondage. Wrapped up, it would appear, in thoughts of your own; happy in yourselves, and never so happy as when shedding quiet blessings on all around you. How have your ways won me, durst I say so? How has your simple character told its tale to me, more touchingly than all the arguments of philosophy, more convincingly than all the logic of the schools? How have you almost persuaded me to be a Christian?

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8.34 NRSV). The key to discipleship and knowing God is obedience. A disciple is a follower of Jesus and to know what He wants us to do, we must be familiar with what Jesus said and then be honest enough to do it. As we read the Word of God day by day we must be aware of His presence with us in our meditation and quietly wait for Him to challenge us by that Word. There are two major things that prevent our obedience. We have preconceived ideas that are sometimes our own and sometimes they have been put into our heads in sermons or books, conversations or magazines. The Word of God itself is more important than any of these. The Word is the touchstone by which we judge all ideas, even the inner convictions of our heart must be tested by it. It is so easy to make excuses for not being obedient, the most subtle of which is 'Oh that doesn't apply to me' or perhaps 'that doesn't apply to the Church now'. At other times we know what we ought to do but something is more important. Perhaps we just put off doing what we should or sadly, worst of all, we are just lazy. These are the kind of things that prevented the Jews of the 1st Century from accepting Jesus as the One sent from God. Jesus said "search the Scriptures for they speak of me".

Eric Liddell, the celebrated Olympic runner who refused to race on Sunday, spent most of his short life as a minister of the Gospel and for much of that time was a missionary in China. His last year or so was in a Japanese prison camp where he ministered to all the other prisoners until a massive stroke claimed his life. He wrote notes about 'discipleship' for those to whom he ministered and his key text was *"My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own."* Liddell wrote "A disciple is one who knows God personally, and who learns from Jesus Christ, who most perfectly revealed God. One word stands out from all others as the key to knowing God, to having his peace and assurance in your heart; it is obedience."

Basically, the word disciple comes from a Greek word meaning 'to learn' and from the days of the prophets public teachers would gather around them those who wanted to learn about God. But the

learning was far from being just theoretical knowledge – abstract ideas – airy-fairy ideas that had no solid meaning in everyday life.

So a disciple is a learner or pupil of one whom they regard as leader or teacher. For those who become disciples of Jesus it is an individual relationship regardless of age, gender, race or nationality. Paul warns Christians in Rome about passing "judgment on the servant of another," rather he says *"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you."* (Rom. 14.4; 15.7 RSV).

As we look at the Gospel accounts of those with whom Jesus spent His time it is clear that he welcomed all types. He encouraged young folk to go to Him, women served Him, they readily learned from His teaching and He never rebuked them. He was as willing to help people of differing nationalities as His own people and several foreigners received His admiration for their expressions of faith.

Perhaps the first invitations to discipleship were recorded in John 1.35-49 as Jesus mingled with those around John the Baptist. They had therefore heard the call to repentance. It is essential to 'get right with God' before discipleship can begin. John referred to Him as the "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." What did such an expression mean to them then? Jesus' first recorded words, perhaps to Andrew, were "What are you looking for?" and later when they asked about His lodging place He said "Come and see".

Jesus moved, with those first disciples, to Galilee and before long Andrew had taken his brother Simon to see Jesus while Philip took Nathanael. They set us an example – discovering the Saviour is not a matter of argument or ritual but of invitation to others to see what He is like. We don't know what those first conversations were about but the young men were sufficiently impressed to continue with Him.

Jesus crossed the barriers that surround people. As He walked near to the Sea of Galilee he invited Matthew Levi to join Him. Matthew was a tax collector in the employment of Rome. Most Jews hated the 'publicani' and viewed them as traitors. They were well paid public servants who were able to cheat ordinary folk out of even more money than was actually due as tax. Matthew was the son of Alphaeus, a distinction shared by one of the James,

but we are not told that they were brothers. Matthew promptly left his tax desk or office, and followed Jesus. He arranged a reception for Jesus to meet his fellow tax collectors, a socially acceptable way of telling others about the new teacher. But the religious folk – scribes and Pharisees – were not happy and they regarded anyone who showed friendship to tax collectors as 'unholy' – defiled because those public servants 'broke the law' by serving foreigners. Jesus answered by saying that only sick folk need a physician and he quoted Hosea 9.9. Thus He showed them kindness, mercy and love for those in need of forgiveness and this is the real way to worship God. It was not the only time that Jesus quoted those words from Hosea and interestingly the word 'mercy' in the prophecy is the Hebrew word *chesed* – 'covenant love'.

A man who seems to have become a disciple in secret, was Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin (John 7.50). Was that the reason he went to see Jesus after dark? The Lord immediately engaged him in a theological discussion with which as a teacher he should have been able to cope. Surprisingly he took Jesus literally but as a scholar of Hebrew he must have known how to deal with picture language, figures of speech. But this was more than theoretical knowledge of God, this was confronting Nicodemus with the possibility of discipleship.

The Greek word *gennao* usually translated in this text as 'born again', has been queried by some because in other Scriptures it is translated 'begotten'. The word takes on the meaning appropriate to context and here there is a distinct reference to 'mother' and the womb so 'birth' must be the correct translation. Barclay writes thus of the passage "To be born again is to be changed in such a way that it can be described only as rebirth and re-creation. The change comes when we love Jesus and allow him into our hearts. Then we are forgiven for the past and armed by the Spirit for the future; then we can truly accept the will of God".

In the next chapter in John we have a very different story. It was not a chance meeting, for Jesus always did the will of His Father and on this occasion it took Him through Samaria. The disciples had gone off to find something to eat and Jesus sat by a well having a rest and feeling thirsty. It was mid-day. A woman came alone and He asked

her for a drink. She was shocked. Jews didn't speak to Samaritans – foreigners. Men didn't speak to strange women without a proper introduction and certainly not in public. But in retrospect it is even more strange for Jesus knew at once that this woman was not of the highest moral calibre (and that's putting it mildly). But Jesus was unusual – he did not allow the rules of social etiquette to prevent him from inviting someone into the Kingdom of Heaven. Recovering from the shock she rejoined with a question and Jesus saw the opportunity – "*If you knew the gift of God*" He offered the woman the water of life. I wonder what we would have said in the circumstances; nothing probably. But he goes on to speak of the right place and way to worship "the Father". He speaks to this immoral foreign woman about God as 'Father' and then cuts across the traditions of centuries by telling her that worship is not about places, shrines, and other dedicated buildings but about 'Spirit and Truth'. And Jesus knew He was not wasting His time. He stayed on for a few days and discovered the results of His missionary activity. The lady in the story went back to Samaria and was able to spread the news that Messiah was close by and could be approached. They acted on her 'good news' and went to talk to Jesus – or did he go into the city and talk to them? Whatever the details, they believed that He was the Messiah and they were undoubtedly ready for the early church when, in obedience to Jesus command the early disciples, after Stephen's murder, began to reach out beyond the confines of Jewry (Acts 1.8; 8.5).

In Mark 10.46-52 there is a lovely story which is described by one commentator as a 'parable of discipleship'. Jesus was passing through Jericho on His last journey to Jerusalem. As he walked among the enthusiastic crowds a cry was heard of a man calling out for help from the 'Son of David'. The folk at the front told him to be quiet but nothing would subdue this man's desperate need. He and his comrade were blind and this was the 'chance' of a life time. Jesus heard and overruled those who told this man to be quiet, telling them to call him. They turned and passed on the message and when the man saw his opportunity he cast aside what was perhaps his only bit of worldly property, and sprang to Jesus side – he was blind. Oh! if only more would be as obedient and put aside anything that would hinder their reaching Jesus – and his

obedience was rewarded – he could see and could follow Jesus.

That day Jesus found another citizen of Jericho – up a tree. The Master must have been observant – ever looking for those who might follow Him. But this time it was a wealthy tax collector who entertained Jesus. Only Luke captured this story of a man who had obviously been a cheat. But when Jesus comes into a life there is no room for cheating, stealing, 'doing other people down'. Zacchaeus made restitution for his sins and discovered the wonders of salvation. We know

nothing more of this man but Jesus had said that the lost had been found – another lost sheep restored to the fold.

We cannot meditate on the words and ways of the Son of Man too much. He had a way of attracting the right people. They weren't 'right' in the eyes of the religious folk of that day, but they were right in the eyes of the sinless Son of God and we cannot but think that they became His disciples to the end of their days. Obedience in small, simple ways can fill the whole life and make us like Him.

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THE TRIO

Towards the end of the 19th Century three young ladies were growing up in very comfortable middle class homes in England or other parts of Europe. Two were sisters of very contrasting temperament and the third, like the other two, was very gifted. Circumstances turned out that they each received and accepted God's call to become missionaries. Eventually they formed a 'Trio' in far away China under the auspices of the China Inland Mission. They believed God directed them to the far north-west of China – where living conditions were very different from their adolescent days. They established a school and a Bible school and the ethos must have reflected their home life.

Mildred Cable and Francesca French, describe their experiences (along with big sister Evangeline) in a book called 'Something Happened' (Hodder and Stoughton 1954) Pages 117-118 are reproduced here because it is felt that they describe an exemplary ethos for any Christian family or Church.

"Gradually, and without any spoken arrangement, the different parts learned to fit in and make the best use of any resources of talent, equipment and money which were at their disposal. The work was far too important to be held up, or even enfeebled, because of some rigid or artificial rule of procedure, and the communal basis on which the three lived finally prevented any one from looming larger than the other, as the talents, gifts and qualifications of each were a common possession of all. Concerning money, there was never a question. It was a trust to be used as directed by, and for, the Lord Who gave it.

They were all tough fighters for a measure of their own way, but when any one of them saw the other deliberately yielding her right, it so emptied

victory of pleasure, that she only coveted in having an equal share in yielding too. The harmony which has existed for more than a quarter of a century, and the joys of friendship, have been Christ's "hundred-fold more in this present," for the Trio. "They have often seen themselves depicted in the similitude of the mule team, which has drawn them over so many mountains, through such dangerous rivers and across such burning desert plains. The alert beast in the traces gets the first flick of the whip when there is difficulty ahead. She responds with a bound, but before the impetus of her pull has slackened, the driver has touched the steady reliable mule in the shafts, which can be counted on to brace itself to bear the strain. Then the two pull together to one purpose and one end, but without the third mule, hitched so as to get an equal share of the weight, the mountain pass would never be crossed, nor the exhaustion of the wearisome plain endured. The beasts of the team do not select each other, that is the driver's business, as it is his also to give the signals." (Reproduced by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Limited).

The book makes wonderful reading in Christian discipleship – if it can still be obtained. Look out for a second hand copy

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To be a disciple of Christ signifies much more, both in the way of responsibility and of advantage, than many think. Our Lord's words are very explicit in defining the terms of discipleship to be nothing less than a full, complete consecration to daily cross-bearing and to following in the footsteps of Christ, even unto death.

A VOICE FROM THE CATACOMBS

The pagans of Rome often remarked on the strange living hope which transformed the lives of those from among their number who became converts to Christianity. Nowhere is this contrast between the living faith that is Christianity and the dark despair that characterised paganism, more marked than in the epitaphs set up by pagan and Christian over their dead. The Christian sentiments, of which many examples are found in the Catacombs at Rome, breathe a spirit of calm and even joyous confidence for the future. The pagan epitaphs reveal utter hopelessness and resentment against a bitter fate which offered them no recompense for the trials and vicissitudes of life. Here are a few examples, all belonging to times between the year AD74 and the seventh century.

*Petronia, a Deacon's Wife
The Type of Modesty
In this place I lay my bones
Spare your tears, dear
Husband and Daughters, and
Believe that it is forbidden
To Weep for One who Lives in God
Buried in Peace on the Third
Before the Nones in October
In the Consulate of Festus.*

Another one, much more brief, but how eloquent

*Victorina
In Peace
And in Christ.*

Against this, read a pagan epitaph, brief in its tragedy of a pagan father who has lost a well beloved daughter, without hope of reunion:

*I, Procope, Lift up my hands
Against God, Who snatched
Me Away Innocent
She Lived Twenty Years
Proclus Set up This*

Not so the Christians who set this brief word on the stone of a pilgrim who had reached the end of the Way

The Dormitory of Elpis

To us a dormitory is a sleeping place. To the early Christians the grave was but dormitory. Our own word 'cemetery' is the Greek 'koimeterion', meaning a place of sleep. So two loving Christian parents, many centuries ago, laid their child to rest in a grave far below the streets of Rome and

inscribed upon her stone –

*Here Sleeps Porcella in Peace,
She Lived*

3 Years 10 Months 13 Days

That peace was denied the sorrowing mother who knew nothing but the hopeless creed of paganism, and poured out her heart's anguish in these bitter words –

*Caius Julius Maximus
Aged 11 Years and 5 Months
O Relentless Fortune
Who Delightest in Cruel Death
Why is Maximus So Suddenly
Snatched From Me ?
He Who Used to Lie Joyfully
On My Bosom
This Stone Now Marks His Tomb
Behold His Mother*

How different is the affectionate remembrance and calm submission of these parents, believers in Christ, who inscribed –

*Navarina
In Peace
A Sweet Soul,
Who Lived 16 Years and 5 Months
A Soul As Sweet As Honey
This Epitaph Was Made by Her Parents.*

Peace, peace: that is the constant refrain of these rejoicing believers as they laid their loved ones to rest. This last example is perhaps the record of a Christian matron, well spoken of for good works and labours of love in the service of the brethren.

*Constantia
Buried in Peace
On The Lord's Day The Sixth
Before The Kalends of July
In the Fifth Consulate of
Honorius Augustus
To the Well-Deserving
In Peace.*

How well these brethren of ours must have learned the truth of Paul's triumphant words: "So then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written 'O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?'" Truly we who follow in their steps are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, men and women, who, in their lives and deaths, manifested the reality of that faith which was in them.

AOH

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