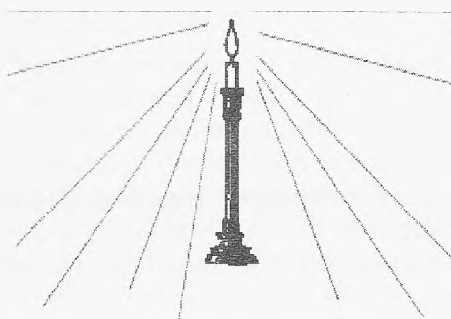
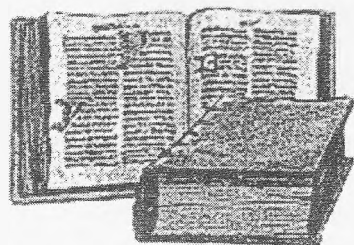
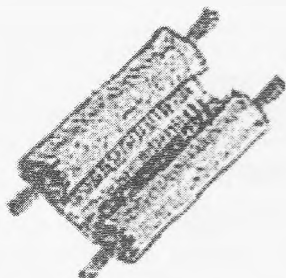


BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

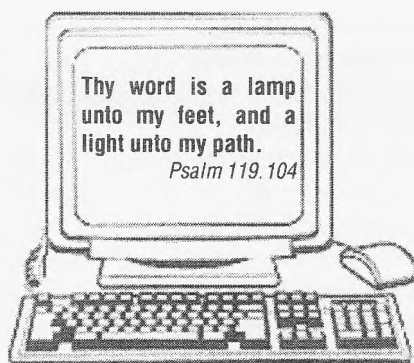
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

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WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

What an extraordinary substance water is even though there is so much of it about. It covers a major portion of the Earth's surface and it is the main constituent of plant life. In fact quite a lot of our own bodies are made up of various forms of water. Yet this substance that we take so much for granted is really quite extraordinary. It exists in all three different forms naturally upon the Earth's surface.

The way in which it expands as it freezes is unique among liquids and that is useful for living things in water. But why make so much fuss about it? Well, firstly it is a rather wonderful piece of our Father's handiwork. It gives a sense of unity to us with all living things and with our environment. We associate it with our Lord's words to a woman by a well near Samaria and to the crowds in Jerusalem listening to Him on the 'last day of a festival'.

Living water was offered to the audience of one and to the throngs of the city. Perhaps to those who live in hot climates and who know about water shortage, living water is specially poignant. We tend to take water from a tap for granted. Only when we have a water shortage or something like a flood disaster do we begin to realise how vital it is to our health and well being.

So what is 'living water'? It was not a new idea to the Jewish mind for the prophets had spoken about it. Isaiah spoke of coming to the "waters". Jeremiah complained *"they have forsaken the Lord the spring of living water."* (17.13) and Rev. 21.13 *"To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life"*. Throughout His ministry Jesus was asked how to get 'eternal life'. Living water is as essential for spiritual (eternal) life just as literal water is essential for our human life.

At the Samaritan well, the woman insisted on taking Jesus literally. But when she asked about practicalities in worship the Lord quickly turned her to the spiritual aspect. The literal place is not important – but 'spirit and truth' are

important. Coming to God, shorn of the arrogance and hypocrisy of human society, wanting Him face to face, in holiness and love, this is eternal life and from personal contact with the great Reality of the Universe we find what is essential for real life. Jesus was offering to link God's wayward people with Him so that they may feel and know that their inner spirit is satisfied and that their spiritual life is really growing.

Understanding the mechanics of God's purpose is very wonderful but in itself it will not make our spiritual lives grow. Growth occurs when we begin to understand and to know the Father who devised that wonderful creative plan.

DN

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 4 1 John 2.3-6

"By this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep His commandments" (v.3).

John has a great deal to say about this relationship between our knowledge of God and our faithfulness in keeping His Word. Paul wrote of our having the "witness" of the Spirit, the inner consciousness that our acceptance by the Father is a very real thing, a consciousness that can only be ours if we truly are led by the Spirit of God. *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the Sons of God ... but you have received the spirit of sonship."* It is that Spirit that bears witness with our own spirit that we are the children of God and therefore joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8.14-17). John's mind here in this chapter is running along similar lines. If we have truly entered into covenant relationship with God and have genuinely come 'into' Christ, seeking more and more to give His Word full scope and full play in our lives, then we shall have the witness within ourselves that we are His in truth, that we 'know' God. It may not be a thing we can define in so many words; we may not be able to express or explain the intellectual basis of our acceptance with Him to others or even to ourselves, yet nevertheless we shall **know** that we know God. This is not a matter of mere blind credulity, or even wishful thinking. Those who have truly entered into the secret place of the Most High and now abide under the shadow of the Almighty have a perception and knowledge of spiritual things that gives them a realization of the presence of God. This cannot be the portion of one who has never passed through that experience. Where there is positive knowledge the mind no longer needs the benefit of argument or debate, the appeal to logic or to reason. These things are the steps by which knowledge is – in this material world – normally attained. When we have achieved this the means becomes superfluous. Our knowledge of God is the result of experience after entry into the consecrated life, and when once we know Him there can no longer be any question about the matter – we **know** that we know Him.

Perhaps John had another thought also in his mind at this point. Perhaps he wanted to stress the fact that our confidence in this respect must rest upon our keeping of God's commandments as distinct from any other code or rule of life. Greater liberty is accorded to Christian believers as compared with that allowed their Jewish brethren in the previous Age. Their freedom from the Law of Moses, obligatory upon Israel, might very well persuade some, that notwithstanding our covenant with God and our acceptance of the consecrated life, we are left to formulate our own code of conduct and our own laws of right and wrong. In fact that kind of heresy did make its appearance among the early Christians after the passing of the Apostles and wrought much harm. The fact is that despite our having been given a considerable measure of self-determination in many aspects of the Christian life, we are morally bound to keep a Divine law that is really far more stringent and soul searching than was the Mosaic law. After all, that was a fairly simple system of prohibitions and injunctions. It was either "Thou shalt not do this" or "Thou shalt do that". The law of the New Creation, although not defined in words as was the Law of Moses, is really more strict. It demands a far higher standard of conduct than did its predecessor, and a far more wholehearted life of consecration and devotion to God. It demands all that the Christian has to give, and it is only when we have given our all, and then receiving it back at the Father's hands, proceed to use it in the furtherance of His interests, that we really do begin to "*keep His commandments*".

There was a time in the history of Israel when the people rejected the idea of responsibility to a central authority and a common law. The chronicler said of that time "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes*". (Jud. 21.15). It was a time of unprecedented disaster for Israel, a period of anarchy and lawlessness, of apostasy and consequent captivity, repeated time and time again. It was only relieved by occasional terms during which the people repented of their excesses, and cried to the Lord, and were heard, delivered, and restored to their own land. Sickened at last by their own weakness they petitioned for kings to rule over them that they might have an ultimate standard of conduct to which all must conform. Men are making the same mistake today. The old acceptance of Divine authority and Divine law as the standard for men, no matter how imperfectly understood and insufficiently kept, has been repudiated. Now, every man is a law unto himself, and the world is lapsing into anarchy in consequence. We who look for a day of world conversion in the Age to come, know full well that such conversion will not be effected by leaving each man to the unrestrained exercise of his own fancies and desires. However well intentioned or well-informed they may be, everyone needs the jurisdiction of a perfectly incorruptible and all-embracing educational system that will brook no disobedience. The salvation of men will depend, not on keeping commandments of their own devising, but on keeping God's

commandments. When, by reason of adequate discipline, they have a complete understanding and knowledge of those commandments, they will be free to accept or reject, by the exercise of their own wills, the alternatives of life and death, good and evil, that will then stand placed before them.

So then with us now. The wonderful freedom which is ours in Christ does not include freedom to frame our own code of laws, our own set of commandments. If we know God, then we realise full well that there is no alternative to the laws that He has set before us for our own well being. It is in the sincere and unreserved acceptance of those laws into our hearts, and the application of them in our lives, that we shall find the realization that we know God and are known of Him. The witness of the Spirit, speaking as it were with our spirit, will assure us of that.

Some claim to "know Him" but may deceive themselves, as well as others, because they have not really entered into this relationship to God and are not doers of His will and cannot claim to keep His commandments. John has no doubt about the position of such and he has no intention of there being any misapprehension in the minds of his readers. *"He that says 'I know Him' and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (v.4). In considering the forthrightness of a statement such as this we do well to remember that these men of the East were – and still are – accustomed to frame their sentiments in much more expressive and forceful words than we of the West might consider necessary or even proper. A good example of this is found in the Scriptural use of the word "hate", a word that will be considered later in this same chapter. Now here it is quite possible that John is not using the word "liar" in the bald, extreme sense that the same word normally bears among us today. His point is surely that the man who claims to know God but who is not doing the will of God simply is not speaking the truth. He may be quite unaware of the fact; in his own self-opinionated condition, his own egotism, or his own mere confident ignorance that he *does* know God, but in fact he does not. In consequence, says John, the truth is not in him.

Some are accustomed to speak of a believer as being "in the Truth" by which they mean that such has come to a knowledge of God's Plan and understands His purpose with the Church in this Age and the world in the next, and on that basis has become a consecrated footstep follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one thing, though, to be "in the Truth" and quite another for the Truth to be in us. This latter demands a great deal more than an appreciation and understanding of God's Plan and acceptance of the call to consecration. It requires the devoted painstaking following of Christ in all things throughout life, fully allowing the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the continuous demonstration of the results of that work as the years pass. Later in the chapter John will be talking about the Word of God abiding in us. Perhaps it is

something like that he has in mind here where he speaks of the truth not being in those who, despite their protestations, really do not know God.

'But whosoever keeps his Word, in him truly is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in Him' (v.5). This is the other side of the picture. The outward evidence that a man is keeping the commandments, *"his Word"* is that in him the love of God is visibly manifest, quite apparently in process of being made perfect. This connection of love with the commandment is worthy of notice. The great aim and object of our lives is that we be made perfect in love. Love it was that caused the coming to earth of Jesus for man's salvation, the love of the Father and the love of the Son. Love it is that leads us to give ourselves to God after having realised His own great love toward us.

Now we are to be made perfect in love so that we in our turn may be used to bring the blessings of salvation to those who, in the next Age, will need them so much. Paul, writing to Timothy, warned him against giving attention to fables and endless genealogies which give birth to unprofitable questionings and debates rather than *"godly edifying which is in faith"*. He told him that *"the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned"* (1 Tim. 5). The result of our keeping the commandment of God is that we are made perfect in love, made pure in heart, made sound in conscience, and genuine in faith. These are the characteristics of the disciple who *"keeps His Word"*. In such an one truly is the love of God perfected.

Thus do we come to the climax of this lesson. Verses 3, 4 and 5 lay down the Divine principles regarding knowing God and show how easily we may be deceived if we are not perfectly sincere in our profession. John explains the difference between the one who knows God and keeps His commandments and the one who does not keep the commandments and therefore does not know God. Now comes the practical exhortation, the logical consequence of what has gone before. *"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk even as he walked"* (vs. 6). The outward evidence that we are indeed abiding in Christ is to be found in the outwardly manifest fact that we are walking as Jesus walked. Now that does not mean that we must display before men and our brethren on all occasions, without ever failing, the same serene, unruffled composure the same complete freedom from hasty word and act, the same purity and nobility and majesty which Jesus Himself displayed to men during His earthly life. Not one of us can ever measure up to the fulness of that wonderful life or approach anywhere near it. But we can walk in the manner that He walked, so that men may take note that we have been with Jesus, and have, however imperfectly, learned of Him. We can so yield our lives and all our possessions and our talents and our influence to Him in glad consecration that it may truly be said we are *"abiding in Him"*. Let it never be forgotten also that this abiding in Him brings the corresponding great joy of the knowledge that He is abiding in us. The

visions of Revelation include the picture of One who stands at the door, and knocks. If any man will open the door, the Lord will come in and sup with him, and he with his Lord. This is an abiding together, we in Him and He in us. "Abide in Me" he says *"and I in you... He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing."* (John 15.4-5).

Our claim to know Him, and to be abiding in Him, then, will be evidenced by our keeping His commandments. The result of that will be our perfecting in love and in every good grace. The perfecting of ourselves in love will in turn be the evidence that we are members of Christ's body, of His Church. *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love... this is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."* (John 15.10-12).

(To be continued)

AOH

PRE-ADAMITE MAN

A thesis that is several centuries old, holds the view that before the beginning of human history as recounted in the Genesis story of Adam and the Garden of Eden there was a prior creation of human beings. They fell into sin so grievous that God not only destroyed them but made the earth itself a complete ruin and desolation. The six days of Genesis and the creation of Adam constitute, it is claimed, a second creative work of God. This is generally called the 'disruption'; it is based upon a variation in the understanding of Gen. 1.2 *"and the earth was without form and void"*. It is sometimes said that no important Christian doctrine is involved, but this is open to question. The central belief of the Faith, the Ransom for All, is based upon the fact, plainly stated by Paul, that *"By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, for that all have sinned"*. That man, in Paul's theology, was Adam, and before Adam there could have been no men and no sin on earth.

* * * * *

The whole theology of human creation, the Fall, the redemption in Christ, the Ransom and its application to man, must rest upon the understanding that Adam was the first man and none preceded him. If man capable of sin lived prior to Adam then the entire plan of salvation is itself disrupted. Harmony with that plan would seem to demand that the first chapter of Genesis is an orderly account of creation, the earth emerging from an original chaotic and formless condition, developing by steady steps until, replete with plans and animals, it received its crowning glory, man. From that point history really commenced.

AOH

The above two paragraphs form the beginning and endings of a much longer article on this subject. But is it still relative to our thinking today? The editor would be interested to know of any who would like to read the whole rebuttal of the Pre-Adamite Man hypothesis.

A NEW COMMANDMENT

Part 2 of a conference address

Reading: Luke 10.25-37

Our reading (Luke 10.25-37) records how a lawyer had tried to trap Jesus by asking Him, *"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* But Our Lord turned the question back on the Lawyer by asking him; *"What is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."* Jesus' reply to this answer was: "That's right, now go and do it and you'll live." When he heard our Lord's reply, we can imagine this man saying, "That's all very well. I believe these two things are the most important of the commandments, but, if I'm to obey and keep them, just who is my neighbour?"

Jesus, as He usually did, gave His answer in the form of a story so that the man - and we - could work out the answer for ourselves and so more fully understand what He meant as He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable is a lovely explanation of the law of loving our neighbour as ourselves, without regard to nation, party, colour or any other distinction: and it is also very practical, in that it asks us to say who is our neighbour. It forces us to come to a conclusion about something which, up to that moment, we have probably not thought about. It opens our minds to some portion of God's truth to which, until then we had been blind. In fact you may have noticed that Jesus talks quite a lot about blindness and deafness. But while, in His love and compassion for those who were suffering, He healed the ones who were physically affected in this way, it was with the mental and spiritual blindness and deafness of the people that He was primarily concerned.

Having made us think about the implications of the story it then gives us the answer that our neighbour is anyone who needs our help. However, Jesus doesn't stop there. Now that He's established in our minds just whom we should think of as our neighbour He goes on to ask us "What then is our duty towards him?" The answer to this question is 'concern' but it must be concern which results in help. Concern which remains only as an abstract thought and doesn't result in practical help, is only an emotion and isn't true concern. The parable tells us that practical help must take precedence and tells us that we must help even if the needy one is the author of his own troubles: even if there's a possibility that by helping there might be risk to ourselves.

Neither should we, in helping, consider the cost. When the Samaritan helped the injured man, he put oil on his wounds and left two pence with the innkeeper to pay for his treatment. But, as it has been said, there are many who are willing to play the Samaritan, as long as they do not have to provide the oil and the two pence.

It's amazing how much selfishness and self-interest is instilled in people - and we can all be guilty of this at times. It's incredible how many excuses they will make to avoid trouble or expense in relieving the difficulties of others. But the true Christian has the law of love written in his heart. The Spirit of Christ dwells in him. With that spirit within us, we won't act like the Priest and the Levite and "pass by on the other side" rather than get involved because it could involve us in some trouble or cause us some inconvenience.

This is where we must transfer the judgements made by the parable to our own lives. We have established that our neighbours aren't just the people who 'live next door' but that they're anyone who needs our help. It doesn't matter whether we like them or not: or if they've opposite views to us; or even if we've broken friendship with them. What matters is that they need our help, our love, our kindness, or our support, and that we must, "Love our neighbour as we love ourselves." If we think of this in an abstract, personal way, there can be very few people who would refuse to give help to themselves, when they were in need of any kind of assistance.

We must always show compassion and to do so is to demonstrate that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us; that the true Christian law of love has been written in our hearts. As Paul wrote to the Colossian church (3.12-15) *"As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender feelings of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving yourselves, if anyone has a complaint against any. As Christ forgave you, so also you do. And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you also are called in one body, and be thankful."*

Those who are the elect of God ought to be lowly and compassionate towards all. While we're in this world, where there is so much corruption, quarrels will sometimes arise. But it is our duty to forgive one another: imitating the forgiveness through which we are saved and letting the peace of God rule in our hearts. Frequently throughout our Lord's teaching we find commands, like the one in this parable, or invitations, to which He expected a response: and He expects the same response from us today. He knew that we could be much better than we are, and to Jesus it's a sin to fail to be all that we can be.

He condemns the man who doesn't use his talents. Not that He ever suggests that we all have the same capabilities. What He does say is that we can all make the same efforts to use, to the maximum, whatever ability we do have. It's the failure to make our best efforts that He condemns.

He speaks very strongly against those who fail to show pity. He said, in Matthew 18.23-35, that the unforgiving servant who had received help and pity from his master, to whom he owed a debt that could never be repaid in his lifetime, and then failed to show the same kindness to a fellow servant, who

owed him a very small amount, would be condemned.

In another story in Luke 14. 16-24 --which tells of a great man who invited people to a supper and when they each made excuses for not accepting his invitation, sent his servants into the highways and byways to invite the poor instead - Jesus shows how, by refusing an invitation, we can lose our invitation to take part in the Great Banquet of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Taking this statement by our Lord one step further we must ask ourselves whether this could mean that if we refuse to do something that He's prompting us to do - such as helping someone in need - that **we are** refusing His invitation? By ignoring His prompting are we turning His invitation down just as much as if we said to Him, "No thank you I don't want to come?"

Peter gave us another reason why we should show love to one another and why we must always be ready, when, in 4.7-8 of his first letter, he gave us the warning that *"The end of everything is near; so be sensible and clear-headed for the sake of your prayers. Above all, continue to love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins."* Peter was writing about the end of the age but our own approaching end is a powerful argument for making us think seriously about everything that we do. There are so many things wrong in each one of us, that unless our love covers, excuses, and forgives in others, the mistakes and faults for which every one needs the forbearance of their fellows, Satan will succeed in his attempts to stir up divisions and discords among us. The adversary wants to cause divisions and disagreements among those who are running for the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus and no one, or for that matter no group, can be exclusive or separatist. Paul in Romans 12.18 says: *"If it is possible, as far as is in you, live in peace with all men."* Those who, whether an individual or a group, refuse to live in complete unity with their fellows are, in effect, refusing to live in unity with their King. When we destroy fellowship with one another we've moved, if we follow the simile of the Sheep and the Goats, from Christ's right hand to His left (Matt. 25.31-48).

Peter's warning makes the words of our Lord even more urgent because Jesus makes it quite clear that He intends that we should take Him very seriously. There will come a day that brings sad disillusionment for many who only make a profession of doing what He taught, but in reality are doing very little, if they're doing anything at all. It will be doing the things that Jesus taught: practising them in our daily lives, whatever the difficulties, that will count in the final analysis. And in the parable of the wise and foolish builders, found in Matthew 7.24-27, Jesus makes it very plain that it's not one bit of use calling ourselves Christians, unless we practice the things He taught. He says that, if we build our faith on the firm foundation of His words, then nothing can shake or disturb us. On the other hand, when we try to build without the strength of His teaching, then we'll find that, when trouble strikes us, everything in which we've

trusted will fall down around our ears and be destroyed.

When He was talking to His disciples, at the Last Supper, John records in 13.34-35 that Jesus said: *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love toward one another."* As in Leviticus 19.18, the law said that we're to love our neighbours as ourselves, which means those around us, whether we know them or not, so why should Jesus say it was a new commandment? The first part of verse 35 explains this apparent oddity. Our Lord said, *"By this all shall know that you are My disciples."* This commandment that He gave them shortly before he was to leave them was to be what we might call 'a badge of discipleship', by which they could be seen and known to be His followers and friends. It was called new, because love for one another had never before been the symbol by which any body of people had been known and distinguished. It was new because, by showing God's love, in the life of Jesus, love had been revised to a completely new standard. He had widened the boundaries of love until there were none who would be left outside. It is in the way that Jesus loves everyone that we must love each other. This commandment was also new in regard to the extent to which this love was to be carried; because he immediately adds, *"As I have loved you, that you also love one another."* His love for them was strong, continuous and tireless. He was, in a few hours, going to show just how strong was His love for us, His friends, by dying for us so that, as we are told in John 3.16, *"all who believe in Him might have eternal life."*

We say that we're Christians, therefore we must always be very careful about anything we do, because all that we do is done in the Lord's name. Before we do anything we should ask ourselves whether what we're doing will bring honour or dishonour to His name. We must bear in mind the fact that everyone on earth is an example of something to someone. We all follow examples, and we all set an example for others and whatever we do will be regarded by 'the world' as if it were Jesus Himself doing it. Our personal conduct not only influences others in matters of daily living, but it also incites them towards good or evil behaviour - for Christ or Satan. In the eyes of the world, we represent Him and everything we do or say can either draws people to Jesus or drive them away from Him.

A missionary in India was shown the truth of this when he was speaking to a group of Hindu women. One of them seemed to be very interested in what he was saying and he thought that, in her at least, his message was bearing fruit when, suddenly, he was very surprised and rather disappointed to see her get up and walk away. Some time went by then she returned, sat down, and listened even more intently than before to what he had to say. After he had finished his message the Missionary approached the woman and asked her. "Why did you leave in the middle of what I was talking about?" "I was so interested in the

wonderful things you were saying that they seemed almost too good to be true," she said, "so I went to ask your servant if you live like you teach. He said that you do. So I came back to hear more about Jesus."

Jesus is the light of the world, dispelling the darkness of ignorance, superstition and fear. The light shines into our hearts to show us His glory and grace: and through us to bring comfort and hope to a sin-sick world. With this in mind perhaps we should ask ourselves what kind of example we've been exhibiting to others lately? Are we reflecting the light that our Saviour brought into the world or are we hiding it under a bushel? Can people see that we have been with Jesus or should we be trying harder to be the kind of example that will make people want to follow Christ?

Jesus said that those who believe in Him are the "*salt of the earth*" and as we know salt can make one thirsty. Are we, by our behaviour, causing those around us to thirst for righteousness; for the water of life that has so obviously quenched our thirst; for the streams of Living Water that well up in those who truly believe in Him? Call on Him; ask for His help and His blessing, because if we do, we shall first of all be more likely to avoid doing anything of which we should be ashamed for Him to see and secondly, we will know that we're not alone but have His help and support in our actions.

He died for us, so that all that believe on Him, will have the opportunity of everlasting life. What greater love could be shown to us than that? Isaiah tells us that "*God will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in Him and whose thoughts are fixed on Him.*" (26.3)

So remember the words of Our Lord in our reading from John 13.34. "*A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*" Amen

RJH

It will be as when sunshine draws forth the glory of colour in a landscape that has been lying under a pall of cloud ... Under the direct rays of the Sun of Righteousness buds of earth will become flowers of heaven. Vision will beget likeness, and likeness, again, give clearness to vision, their endless interaction securing endless progress towards the inexhaustible fulness of Christ.

(Robert Law)

The sweetest perfume that the home circle ever knows arises from the deeds of loving service which its members do for each other. The sweetest perfume of our homes do not arise from elegant furniture, soft carpets, elegant pictures, or luxurious viands. Many a home, having all these, is pervaded by an atmosphere as tasteless and odourless as bouquets of waxen flowers.

NEWNESS AND RENEWAL

At the beginning of a New Year it is perhaps appropriate to look at the Scriptures which speak to us of newness and renewal. It may have been the idea of the 'the preacher' that there is nothing new under the sun, (Eccl. 1.9, 10) but such a statement is only theoretically true, if true at all.

New things are received in different ways. A new set of clothes elates some people, they feel new in themselves; but some prefer the old familiar comfortable things. Some love to adventure in new places while others have a feeling of being lost. Some find a new job a challenge but others find the experience frightening. Each new day is daunting for some but others go forward to enjoy new opportunities. If we place our hands into the Lord's with a planned time set aside to be with Him, we go forward into the unknown hours with confidence in His presence.

Practically, new things are 'happening' all the time. They occur in the working and development in nature; they occur in the history of mankind as the ways of men unfold and they occur most importantly in God's purpose for mankind.

Giving something a name with the word 'new' in it can be rather strange - yet it is still done - New Town, New Street, Newquay, because they will all become old - just as methods change, new products become 'old fashioned'.

In particular, there was one great divide in history, one point in time when all things changed, when that which was old began to fade away and that which was new came into being. It was at our Lord's First Advent. There never was such a time of renewal as when the Son of God trod this Earth and there never can be a time like it again. When ultimately the New Earth and the New Heavens (Isa. 65.17; 2 Pet. 3.13; Rev 21.1) are brought into being, it will be a further development of what Jesus began when John baptized his cousin in Jordan. The wonderful times of refreshing to which we look forward with joyful anticipation, will be a wonderful renewal of all creation but the process began when God 'overlooked' the human folly of the past and said that "All men everywhere must repent" (Acts 17.30). That process will continue until all things are made new and in a condition to be handed back to the Father by the Son (1 Cor. 15.28).

At the great turning point in history, when Jesus taught in Israel, He said that a wise scribe is able to take out both things old and new (Matt. 13.52). There was much useful teaching in the Law given through Moses that the scribe of Jesus' day would have done well to discover and teach. Much of that teaching is still valuable today. But there were new things that must come from that First Advent into the world of the Messiah, things which had been in the mind of God from long ages past and which He had shared with His Son. But now those

things promised in the shadows of the Old Covenant were to become a reality in the New Covenant. And those that enter this new relationship are new creatures or perhaps more accurately are a New Creation as Paul describes it in Gal. 6.15 and Eph. 4.24 and so become 'a new man' (Eph. 2.15). Hence the expression 'new birth', which really had its origin in the words of Jesus to Nicodemus (John 3.3) *"You must be born again"* or as the NRSV has it *"You must be born from above"*. However this controversial verse is translated, a new beginning is indicated.

We are exhorted to *"seek those things which are above"* (Col. 3.1); *"seek first the kingdom of God"* (Matt. 6.33); *"set your affections on that which is above not on the earth"* (Col. 3.2) all have the same implications. The believer who becomes a full follower of Jesus accepts the gift of the Holy Spirit and begins life all over again and finds a new orientation toward all those things that belong to Christ. The old relationship between God and His people depended upon material things, taste not, refrain from doing this, a law that was concerned with teaching tribes of slaves how to use the things of the Earth and how to behave toward to each other. The new relationship in which the believer is called to live is a new life, to be like God Himself, to look at all things from His angle, and to do things His way; to be like Him and so be at one with Him. The great prophets of the Old Testament from faithful Abraham to those who saw the gleams of the New Covenant like Jeremiah came very close to their God and in fact knew Him face to face better than many who have claimed to follow Jesus. But that new relationship could not come to power until the one who was to come had done the atoning work, for it is only as we are joined to Him that we can receive this new life which puts behind us forever the old life in the 'flesh'. Like the Israelites of old who lingered as they came out of Egypt and longed again for the 'flesh pots', we are uncertain in our movement along this new and living way.

At the beginning of a New Year we must put behind us those things that would distract us from the Heavenly direction. We need spiritual renewal because we live our new life in the flesh surrounded by the old order of things, still bearing in our bodies the affection for that which is below rather than that which is above. There is a value of knowing that there was a point of time in our lives when we surrendered our hearts to God and He consecrated us to Himself. We can look back at that moment and remember the radical change. But not all can identify the point in time. They may have been brought up in a Christian home with Christian values. Gradually such believers realised that they wanted to follow Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform them.

There are two points to remember in connection with the new way of life. Firstly, there must be a clear recognition that we were born to a sinful life and need to have thoroughly repented of everything that points us away from the 'will of God'. There must have been a decisive turning away from this world and

a clear perception of the New Way ahead. Secondly, this renewal is quite different from that which might be the experience of a morally good person who relies on a rational understanding of what he ought to do and then does it with all his own strength – and is often more successful than some Christians. But that is not the way of the Lord. However well we discover from the Scriptures the wonderful philosophy of atonement and upright living, we cannot of ourselves begin the life in Christ. No striving and self-help can make progress along the Christian Way. Transformation is done by us submitting to the glory of God (2 Cor. 3.17, 18). So our new life grows in Christ. Our self denial must allow Christ to come in with His life and together we travel the Way. The more we keep the relationship with the Lord strong – remain close to Him, live in Christ - the greater the progress. Knowledge is valuable so long as we come to know the Lord. The truth is invaluable in Christian growth – so long as we are in Christ and come to know Him who is the Truth, personally. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we can never reflect His glory.

A point in time is not vitally important but it is important to identify that the experience has occurred whether it takes 5 minutes or 5 years. The experience is that the old nature is nailed to the cross, that it is dead and that we have become alive in Christ. The change does not come about through learning creeds or sectarian dogma – but by sharing Christ's baptism and by dying with Him – then we have new life. Upon what are our affections truly set now? Is there anything in our lives that we cannot share with Christ?

In Jesus' prayer in John 17 which speaks of our union with Him and with the Father, we have the basic Bible doctrines of atonement and covenant. It is fantastic that we should be able to enter this great union and there never can be anything more important. Our relationship with God and His Son have come about because of the demonstration of their love for us. We can ask the Lord to come into our lives and share those parts of our lives that cannot be shared with any other. Spiritual renewal is that process by which God, through His Holy Spirit, changes us from what we were to what He intends us to be.

Behind all this is Jesus' own sacrifice, He gave up first His home in Heaven. At some time, possibly around the time of His baptism, He gave up His earthly home. He gave up His life and all that He had so that we could share His life. It was this that inspired the early Christians in their sacrifice to the Will of God and led to their wide spread evangelical effort.

The ancient world in which the early Church grew up were chained to sin. The vice familiar to us in the modern world was familiar to our early brethren in Christ. But they gladly became His slaves because that was the only way of freedom. It is just the same today in the new and living way.

DN

WORLD CONVERSION – WHEN

That grand old Christian statesman, George Lansbury, once visited Lenin at Moscow in the course of an endeavour to promote friendly relations between European powers. In his book, *"My Quest for Peace"*, he told how the Russian leader listened sympathetically while he spoke of Jesus Christ and His saving power, how that no nation that rejected God could hope to be truly prosperous in the long run, and then said quietly "Lansbury, go back to England and convert your own people to Christianity – then come and talk to me again!" Lansbury never returned to Russia.

In January 1953 five African chiefs from Nyasaland came to England to voice their people's protest against forcible inclusion in the new political amalgamation of East African territories. Said their spokesman "the British won Nyasaland at the first, not by military weapons, but by the Bible. Now the British have abandoned the Bible – but you will not hold Nyasaland with guns and bayonets". That is a damning indictment of the change that had occurred in Britain in little more than a century. Once missionaries were penetrating almost every part of the world with the Bible in their hands and the love of God in their hearts. They braved innumerable dangers; the perils of Nature, the ferocity of men, but they kept at their task, and they planted the seed of the Gospel in many places where it sprouted and blossomed and brought forth its fruitage of light.

Each successive generation of the Twentieth Century included a smaller percentage of convinced Christians than its predecessor. The religious background to daily life which three hundred years ago was normal does not exist today. Christianity is fast becoming the faith and guiding principle of a very small number of people, and they increasingly found among elderly folk.

Is world conversion an ideal that will eventually be attained, despite present apathy and disinterest in the Christian faith, or is it an impossible dream, a hope that will never be fulfilled? Will present materialism and reliance upon human philosophy and scientific achievement continue until the life and death of Jesus Christ and the deeds of His apostles become dim legends as shadowy as the English stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table?

Such a tragic end to the great thing that had its beginning in the Roman province of Judea two thousand years ago is out of the question. World conversion **will** come; this earth with its teeming millions **will** be the Kingdom of God and of His Christ. Those who have spent time and effort and life itself in bringing men and women to Christ, whether in far-off lands or right here in our own country, will share in that triumph and find that none of their efforts have been in vain. The world **will** be converted; but it may not come in the way we think.

The inspiration and incentive for all Christian missionary work springs in the first place from the words of Jesus, spoken after His resurrection, when He was

about to leave His disciples. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16.15). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . . and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Matt. 28.19, Acts 1.8). A very comprehensive mandate! There is a saying "The sky's the limit". That is how it must have seemed to those men, simple, untravelled Galilean peasants and fishermen, given a commission which took in its scope the whole of the earth.

Although there is no doubt about the universal nature of this commission to evangelise the world, Jesus did not promise that His followers would effect the general conversion of the world before His return. In fact He indicated just the opposite. He said on one occasion "*When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?*" (Matt. 18.8). Judging by the catalogue of disasters and wickedness, of apostasies and the waxing cold of love, in some of His fore views of the events of this Age, as narrated for example in Matt. 24, it is obvious that He did not expect so to do. The Age which opened at Pentecost will see at its close, not a world fully converted, living at peace and in the glorious liberty of the children of God, but a world facing catastrophe and held in more vigorous bondage to sin and the effects of sin than ever before. The Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth as He promised, not because His Church will have saved the world without Him, but because His own personal presence is necessary for the world's salvation.

That is the secret behind this apparent failure of Christian missionary effort today. It was not expected that Christians should convert the world in this Age, before the return of our Lord. It was intended that they should prepare the way for His return and preach the Gospel "*in all the world for a witness*". The present is a time during which disciples of Christ are being trained and disciplined for a much more extensive missionary work that is to come in the age to come. James the Just, first Elder of the Church at Jerusalem, thus summed up the matter at the Council whose discussion is recorded in Acts 15 "*God first visited the nations to take out of them a people for his name. After this* (quoting the prophet Amos) '*I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen* (the habitation of Israel) *that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and, all the nations...*'" There is a three-fold Plan outlined here. Firstly, God will make a selection, from among all nations, of those who are specially called by His name -- devoted Christians of all nations and generations, in all the years that pass between Jesus' First and Second Advents. Secondly, the restoration of the national polity of Israel, in preparation for the new centre of world administration under Divine control. Thirdly, a time when all men everywhere will be called to turn and seek the Lord. That latter is obviously the time of world conversion for which we look.

In harmony with this, we find that for the first two centuries of Church history there was no expectation that Christians must convert the world and present the finished work as it were to God at the end. Rather there was a fervent and fixed belief in the early dissolution of the institutions and powers of this world in face of the coming and appearing of the Lord Himself in power and glory – the Second Advent. Hence their universal belief in the Millennium, the Age of Christ's reign upon earth, when wars would be made to cease and evil eliminated from the hearts of men, until death itself had vanished (Rev. 21.3-4). That was the hope and conviction of the Early Church.

During the second and third centuries certain heretical sects began to put grossly sensuous and material interpretations upon the Millennial prophecies and in consequence this aspect of the original Apostolic teaching passed under a cloud and was largely banished from "official" theology. The teachings of Augustine, in the fourth century, paved the way for what became a very general belief in Christendom, that is the thousand-year reign of Christ in which He vanquishes all His enemies (1 Cor. 15.24-28) is during this Age before Christ comes, and not in a future Age after He has come. That theory sounded all right at the time it was formulated, when Paganism was rapidly giving way to Christianity in the political sphere as well as the religious, and it looked as though the Church was destined to sweep on from triumph to triumph until it had conquered the world. It does not look so convincing today, when from the outward and natural viewpoint, Christianity is in retreat almost everywhere and the prospect, not only of winning new ground, but even of regaining ground already lost, is bleak indeed. It is becoming more and more obvious that the Church of the first two centuries was entirely right and that our calling is to continue with our missionary work with as much, or more ardour. We do it not in expectation or hope of converting the world now but certainly in the firm conviction that we are sowing the seed that is to result in world conversion after Christ comes.

There is a very significant remark in the comprehensive answer that Jesus gave to His disciples in response to their question as to how they would know when the time of His return and the end of the Age had arrived (Matt. 24). Amongst the sequences of wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, persecutions, that were to characterize the successive centuries of the Age, we find this statement. *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."* (Matt. 24.14) The importance of the statement is shown in its setting. Up to that point, Jesus was speaking of the characteristic events of the Age. *"You will hear of wars and turnouts of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet."* After that point we are in the time of the End itself, there are signs and portents and events associated with the transition period.

during which the *"kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever"*. (Rev. 11.15). It would appear therefore that this *"preaching the gospel of the Kingdom"* must be done in the whole world, not at this time for their total conversion, but *"for a testimony to all nations"* before the end can come. In other words, the full understanding of God's Plan of Redemption is locked deep in the "determinate wisdom and foreknowledge of God". The Age for world conversion cannot come until the gospel has been preached first for a testimony *"to the uttermost parts of the earth"*.

Such an understanding of the matter should give greater impetus than ever before to every effort for Christian witness. If the essence of present-day evangelism is to take the Gospel to places where it has never before been, and failure to convert all who have in past time been reached does not of itself imply any thwarting of the Divine purpose, then the closing of doors that have been open for centuries past need not occasion undue despondency. The Gospel has been preached, the testimony has been given: a few have retained the seed in their hearts and even if the doors do close upon them and we see them no more, we may have confidence that those same doors will swing open again, never more to shut, at "His appearing and His Kingdom". Even though faith in a country such as our own is at a low ebb and the signs are that it will sink still lower, yet our country has had the testimony and a few remain witnesses to the saving power of God in the life. The tide will turn again. That is the great hope and expectation to sustain faith and zeal while as yet our missionary work goes on. *He promised to return - and* under the administration of His Kingdom Christian evangelism will soar to heights previously undreamed.

There are Christian observers who point out that in a geographical sense the statement in Matt. 24 has now, albeit recently, been fulfilled. The disciples set out from Jerusalem and speedily carried the name and message of Christ throughout the Mediterranean world. Successive generations of evangelists pushed on, but it was not until the phenomenal increase of missionary work in the 19th and 20th centuries that the utmost limits of the world were reached. It is an established fact that the Gospel has now been preached *"in all the world to all nations for a testimony"*. If that is so, we may be much nearer to a tremendous change for the better in earth's affairs than is generally thought or hoped. No one will dispute that a change is necessary. If the present appalling prospect that faces mankind is in fact destined to be resolved by some kind of Divine intervention few will be found to criticise the change except those whose interests lie in the maintenance and continuance of evil and evil things. This will save men from the worst consequences of their own folly, and will put the Christian Church in a position of immeasurably greater influence than it has enjoyed at any time past.

Speaking to the philosophers of Athens. Paul declared that God *"has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead"* (Acts 17.31). Christ Jesus is that one, the time, clearly, that of His Second Coming, and the day, consequently, the one that Jesus referred to when He said *"Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"*. (Matt. 19.28). Such a statement cannot be referred to this present Age when the last thing a Christian disciple expects is to occupy a throne or the prerogative of judging anything or anybody. The Apostle Paul expressly relegates the time of ruling and judging to the future, as in 1 Cor. 6.2 *"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"*

The preaching of St. Peter at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2 and 3, associates the coming of the "last days" with a great opportunity for salvation and a time of world conversion. *"In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ... And it shall be that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Acts 2.17-21). This is coupled with a call to repentance as preparation for the coming of this future day of grace. *"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old"* (Acts 3.19-21). These passages obviously pre-suppose a time at the end of the Age, at the Return of Christ, when there will be a great outpouring of the Gospel upon the peoples of earth and a correspondingly great response. There is a definite basis for this belief in the Old Testament. For instance, Zephaniah says (3.8-9) *"Therefore wait for me" says the Lord 'for the day when I arise as a witness to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation; for in the fire of my jealous wrath all the earth shall be consumed. Yes, at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord.'"* All this indicates very clearly the Divine intention that a day of grace, and a most successful day of grace, is to succeed the day of judgment which brings this *"present evil world"* to an end. The Book of Isaiah is eloquent on this subject. The great Hebrew statesman saw very clearly the nature of that day which is yet to be, when all missionary and evangelical effort will converge into one great work of reclamation and reconciliation among all mankind. The figure of Messiah is predominant in all his pen pictures -- the king who will *"reign in righteousness"* of Chapter 32, the one who is to *"feed his flock like a shepherd"* of Chapter 40, the *"servant"* who is to *"bring forth justice to the nations"* of Chapter 42, the anointed One, bringing liberty and healing to

the captives, of Chapter 61. *"It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (25.9). "And the effect of righteousness, will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever." (32.17). "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (35.10). "Behold my servant, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations ... he will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth." (42.1-4). "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." (61.13).*

This is only a fraction of the vast store of Biblical evidence that a glorious future is before Christian evangelical work, and a programme that envisages a definite endeavour to reconcile to God every member of the human race who has strayed away from Him or never known Him. The apparent failure of today is only apparent; the Advent of the King will change the entire situation, and set the stage for the conversion of the world.

Scripture quotations in the above article are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

AOH

The above article appeared in the Bible Study Monthly forty years ago. It was reprinted as a booklet of which copies are still available, it is now reprinted in an abridged form largely because some of the content was out of date - nevertheless it could be reprinted if there was sufficient interest - with a question mark at the end of the title.

There is a grass, a kind of millet, the stems of which are seen to shoot up in the tropical forests of India. They are scarcely thicker than a stout straw, and seem but poor, weak, insignificant things amongst the grand forms and gorgeous beauty of the surrounding growth. But watch them and you will see that with great rapidity and strength they continue to rise up higher and higher. Presently they reach the boughs of vast trees, but pushing their leaves aside, they pass onward and upward. Now they have mounted over the summit of the highest branches and there, above all the trees of the forest, they spread their flowers like some rich meadow far in the upper air! Is not this a striking illustration of the followers of Christ? Indeed by ordinary standards they do indeed appear poor and weak in comparison with the pomp and show around them. There is often little of outward beauty or strength to mark their earthly way. Their flowers cannot flourish nor their fruits ripen in the fields below. Truly their "conversation (their daily walk) is in heaven". With wondrous power, despite all obstacles, they pursue their upward way, soaring over the heads of their fellow-men; in affections placed higher, in aims more exalted, and earth left behind they rise to enjoy "*spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*"

DAVID'S PSALMS AND OURS

Psalms are songs to be sung by human beings, but sung for the ear of God. David we all know of as the shepherd boy who killed Goliath, and in scripture we can trace his career as guerilla leader and then king over a contentious people, a man sinned against and sinning. Of the 150 Psalms collected together in our bibles, 73 are ascribed to David. From these we can learn of David's character, why he should be described as 'a man after God's own heart'. In so doing, we glean thoughts which may help us as we worship, for we are serving the same God three thousand years further on in history.

David was nothing if not spontaneous, and said what he felt. What he said to God gives a clear picture of what he felt about God, of why he wanted to worship Him. One member of a study group made this summary of thoughts David expressed "God is a protective shield that can be relied upon in times of trouble, who will reply if called upon. He is great and holy, majestic, and yet cares for man. God sometimes seems far away, but will help in the end. He is just, if we have sinned, but will forgive." David of course did not speak as a student, summarising the truth, he spoke out of the heart as a poet. He used symbols, images, to praise the God he loved. So God is 'a rock, a fortress': we can imagine David and his warriors perched upon the crags of the wilderness where their enemies cannot reach. God keeps David as safe as that. God is 'a fountain of life': we can imagine dried up wadis and the dust of the desert where a spring is what saves David from death by thirst. God gives life like that. God is 'a hiding place': we remember the caves where David and his men tried to keep safe from Saul and his vengeful army. God protects us more than that. God is light in the darkness, safety in danger, a shepherd through difficulty, the creator of everything that is good. He is like a king to be obeyed, a comforter to run to, a guide in perplexity, a healer. He is faithful, just, all knowing, eternal.

David spoke of God as a kindly creator who remembers that we are dust. But he had also a strong conscience for God's law, he stood in awe of God's majesty. This reverence, combined with his great love for God, led him to an extreme of repentance on various occasions when he realised he had sinned. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." He knew God expected him to keep the commandments. He had to give up sinning. He must come before God with praise ... with awe ... with trust. He owed God not just animal sacrifices but the sacrifice of his wilfulness, a discipline of the thoughts so as to be pleasing to his God. David must love Him. He must call on Him in his need. He must obey Him.

David's psalms are his prayers. He did pray when he needed help, he prayed for victory over his enemies. He prayed for God's good law to be obeyed, he prayed for right to be done. He was overwhelmed by God's glory, he bowed low

in repentance. He prayed for forgiveness, he prayed in failure, he sought for wisdom and pleaded to be safe from his enemies: His prayer was not always confident, because of what David knew himself to be. But his faith rose to assurance because of what God is, shield and shepherd. David earnestly sought for the Shepherd to lead him, until he might dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

What psalms might we ourselves write? A group at a conference once made the attempt. Two participants were children, working together. For them, life amid the hazards of the school playground, or going home among the rough and untamed members of our society, must have some similarities to David's early life. So, taking David's words as a model, they wrote

*My God is my light and he will save me.
I will not be scared. The Lord keeps me safe.
When the bad try to catch me they will fall down.
Even if a whole army surrounds me I will not be scared
Even if bad people hurt me, I will still trust God*

One of those present was an aged Christian, conscious of a lifetime of God's care.

*The Lord is my Shepherd, as well as David's.
He leadeth me throughout my life.
I have not fought a lion or a bear,
But I, like David, fear no evil.
Why? Because I have learned
To let go and let God.
His work is mysterious and not easy to follow,
so I just trust.
His wonders are all around in every direction.
As the disciples learned, even the wind and waves obey Him
So why should I fear? Hallelujah!*

Another participant was very conscious of the environment.

*O God, why do men destroy your Earth
How long will they cut down trees and burn hedges
You made the hills and the vales
Yet men use earth removers and level them,
they turn the soil to dust and it blows away.
They cover it with chemicals and your animals die.
You gave us seas in which to sail and swim,*

*Yet it is polluted and the algae dies.
You created the air so pure and provided the aromas of flowers
Yet we have made the atmosphere fit only for devils.
Lord, how long before you stop this folly
And purify your Earth for all to enjoy?*

And yet another may have been thinking of the never ending human story

*O God, hear our prayer!
Wicked men are waging war,
Those who could prevent it
Do nothing, say nothing.
The innocent are suffering -
Women and children,
Mothers and infants,
Trekking over mountains,
Open to all weathers.
O Lord, hear our prayer!
Let our cry come to you,
Let it arise into your
Holy presence,
For we have no other
To whom we can turn.*

GC

Though doubts and dismay should enfold you
And hope of relief become dim --
Remember that Someone has told you
To 'cast all your care upon Him.'
The world is unkind;
And friends may not mind;
But -- it matters to Him.

If sorrow and trouble o'ertake you,
And grief fill your cup to the brim --
There is One Who will never forsake you,
So 'cast your care upon Him.'
He will not pass on,
Or bid you begone,
For -- it matters to Him

F W Pitt (M'Call Barbour) - used by permission

THE FOUNDATION IS SURE

"Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows those that are his" (2 Tim. 2.19). It is the refined gold of the martyr's faith that carries him through his Gethsemane and Calvary experiences. Though he may fall, he will not admit defeat. The ruthless oppressor may ride roughshod over his prostrate body, and blend his lifeblood with the dust, yet as he falls he never doubts the triumph of his testimony. He knew that it was the tyrant's hour, and the tyrant's juggernaut could lay him low at any time, yet he had held aloft his torch, and lifted up his voice to testify his conviction against all odds. The Stephens and James, Riddleys and Latimers of this noble band never feared to die. Never did they think the witnessing would be extinguished by their death. The cause of Jesus was greater than themselves, and, as each faithful witness fell, it sprouted forth new life, more vigorous because watered with martyr blood. It could not die while Jesus lives and He can never die. Come what may before our witnessing is done, the Lord of all the martyrs lives, and while He lives, His fellowship can never be destroyed. With that conviction we may look the tyrant in the face, then look aloft, like Stephen, with faith's undaunted eye, and see the Lord stand waiting to receive us to Himself.

One of the noble band whose hour was nearly come was our beloved brother Paul. The hour of his departure was at hand. He had long kept the faith. He had maintained the goodly fight for many years, but now the end was near. In earlier days he had a host of friends. In every city and every land where he had held aloft the torch of truth these friends had rallied to his side. The good tidings which he told had drawn them by its magnetic power. Like children in a father's care they had clustered to his knee, and from his words and tears they learned the story of God's great love. But darker days had come - Paul's foes had won the day. The Roman's last decree had fallen on his head, and there could now be no reprieve. He had no host of friends to comfort and console him now. *"All they which are in Asia be turned away from me"* (2 Tim. 1.15). The binding spell of earlier days was gone; men who had shared his love had now forsaken him. Now he was left alone - yet not alone, for *"the Lord stood with me and strengthened me."* Shallow-minded friends had disappeared, timid-hearted time-servers were gone - but what mattered that, so long as God's foundation remained?

Again, some of the precious truths had been debased. Doctrines for whose defence, when free, he had so faithfully stood, were now subverted. The holy things of God entrusted to his care were now distorted by hostile tongues. Naturally it hit deep into his soul. What soldier could see his defences pierced and overthrown, and not show some concern? What custodian could see his treasures violated and not resent the sacrilege? Oh, if he were free, and could meet Hymenaeus face to face, or take Philetus on the spot! But, then, what

mattered their puny battering upon the walls, if only God's foundations remained sure? They might swear black was white, and say future events were past, but they were only creatures of a day. They might misguide befuddled brains, and turn the doctrine upside down. That mattered not so long as the bedrock itself remained unchanged. They might prate and chatter like a flock of rooks – what matter that, if God, the God of truth, remained immovable!

Let Demas forsake. Let those of Asia turn away. Let Hymenaeus canker and corrode. Let Philetus destroy shoddy faith. What mattered these, and more beside, if only God and His foundation stood fast? Nay, more, let the whole world conspire in common cause to bind and slay the servants of the Lord. So long as God's word was free, all still was well. So then, we hear him say; *"I suffer trouble, as an evildoer unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound"*. How often men have tried to bind God's words in chains and how often they have failed. Petrified creeds, dead tongues, pontifical decrees, the furnace flames, have been men's cords to hold God's word in thrall and stultify its voice, but still it lives and speaks and imparts life to those who long for God. And when the hammers of its enemies are outworn and cast away, the anvil will stand unhurt and undefaced.

"Nevertheless." This shows the heart at rest. It shows reliance doubly-based on God. In every sense, all still was well within himself; yes, and without. A soul at rest in God could look out upon the wreckage, wrought by men, without a single fear or quiver of a lip. A lifetime's work may seem to lie shattered into dust and yet know neither remorse nor regret. Whence came this confidence and trust?

Paul's unwavering assurance, in good days and bad, came from the holy root (Rom. 11.16), the basic promise laid as foundation for all God's works on Mount Moriah's slopes. The deep-laid purposes of God, to bless the nations of the earth, through Abraham and his seed, were laid upon the basic rock of almighty Promise and Immutable Oath – to be more deeply and immovably laid than the foundations of the earth itself. The sworn foundation of the eternal God stood fast though men deserted or defamed. No shock or impact of mere human dust, of thought or word or act, could move one fragment from that rock, harder than granite. This was the rock whereon Paul's confidence was built. Men might come near as friends, and then depart as foes, but they could not strike a tiny splinter from that rock. Men might prate against the truth, but they could not remove one syllable from the Promise and the Oath.

Broad-based upon the foundation-rock, another Oath was laid. *"Kings shall be of her"* said the Most High to Abraham (Gen. 17.16). And in due time a king appeared, taken from the sheepfold to tend a nation for His flock, God again gave His promise and His Oath. *"I have made a Covenant with my chosen. I have sworn unto David my servant. Thy seed will I establish forever, and build*

up thy throne to all generations" (Psa. 89.23). Thus the "sure mercies of David" were laid upon the basic rock of unchanging promise and an immutable oath. "Remember" says the aged warrior, ready to die, as a father to his son and lieutenant in the field – "*Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead.*" (2 Tim. 2.8). Jesus Christ is David's Seed and Israel's future King. Then based on the oath of God "*that cannot lie*", and on the life of Jesus Christ, who cannot die again, that broad foundation cannot be shaken, no matter what mere man may do. "*Jesus Christ was raised from the dead*" and is alive for evermore. Demas is dead; all they in Asia are dead; Hymenaeus is dead and Philetus is dead; but Jesus Christ is raised up from the dead. They had their little day, and muddled through their little work, but Jesus has His day to come. He has long waited beyond the reach of His puny foes, until His Day shall have come.

Thus the unfettered heart of the deserted, fettered servant of the Lord could sweep the wide horizons of time, past and to come, and bring the microscopic trivial things of man's little day into perspective with the foundations and structures of the Most High God. Thus he could find comfort for his last weariness and final strife. Through all the ebb and flow of darker and better days, one mighty thought had gripped the heart of the Apostle. Election-selection-preferment-choice, had for long centuries been vested in Abraham's Seed. "*Them that are his*" had hitherto been found only there. Of such the Son of God had said: "*Thine they were, thou gavest them to me*" (John 17.6). In earlier days, one of God's messengers had said: "*The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in him*" (Nahum 1.7) Also in a dark day, when rebellion against the ordinance of God was abroad in the camp Moses had said "*The Lord will show me who are his*" (Num. 16.5). With thoughts like these culled from the storehouse of God's promises, the aged prisoner of Jesus Christ could take them to himself and know that, though his enemies could overthrow the faith of unstable men, the end of things would be with God. Amid the ant-like activity of this fallen world, the kindly eye of God rested with extreme delight upon "*them that are his*".

But God has His price for this; "*them that are his*" must seek to be like Him. They may not league themselves with evil men or evil things. They may not choose alliance with God's enemy. They may not permit this world's evil ways, nor fallen flesh, nor subtlety of demon powers to permeate their lives. They must depart from iniquity. They must be responsive to God's highest law. They must be imbued through and through with the Spirit of His covenant, and desire, like God, when the due time comes, to bless their fallen kin. Participation with God is an exacting privilege. It will demand our all. Like Him, we must hate sin and iniquity, and love holiness, justice and truth.

Paul's day was a dark and cheerless day. A long life's ardent work was ending in seeming disaster. The thrill of the 'nine-days' wonder of faith had petered out for so many of his faithful friends. For the nation too, the handwriting was on the wall. A fearful doom lay just ahead; both people and city were fated to be laid in the dust. The work of God for centuries past was near collapse and the children of Abraham, God's friend, were to be ousted from the land. From the bleak depths of that forbidding environment the eye of Paul could look onward down the years, and see the better things which Abraham saw. Like that worthy sire, who, aged and childless, looked onwards with faith's unfailing eyes to see a seed grown numerous as the seaside sands, so Paul, with enlightened vision, took the long view against all life's odds, and saw the Kingdom of the Lord begun. "*We shall reign with him, if...*" Yes, he could see the King in power, the Son of David, and withal the Son of God, upon the throne, and if now the martyr kept his vows, then he would ascend to the Master's side. Out of the dense darkness, the light of faith shone out more clear, because it knew that God's well and truly laid foundation stood fast and sure. God's word of promise could not fail, because Jesus Christ, the Son of David, God's living Foundation, had been raised from the dead. Other foundation there is none.

TH

"If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 4.6 NIV)

"If you lay these things before the brothers ..." (Barclay)

"Hupotithesthai ..." does not mean to issue orders but rather advise, to suggest. It is a gentle, humble and modest word. It means that the teacher must never dogmatically and pugnaciously lay down the law. It means he must act rather as if he were reminding men of what they knew or suggesting to them, not that they should learn from him but that they should discover from their own hearts what is right."

The Daily Study Bible. Letters to Timothy Titus and Philemon (St Andrews Press)

The old Lollards were called "Holdfasts" not only because of their firmness under persecution but of their strong grasp of the truth. Coleridge said with a practical aptness unusual with him: "What does not withstand has not standing ground." Hold fast, then, the form of sound words, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus. Be modest, unostentatious in all that is yours, over willing to concede everything you have a right to yield, but be scrupulous and immovable about all that is Christ's.

WORSHIP

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!"

"Rejoice in the Lord always!"

I sing the words aloud, but no,

My heart's not in the praise

True praise mounts up on eagle's wing -

I only read the words and sing.

I go to church and kneel in prayer

Correctly as I should,

I seek God in the open air

And worship in the wood -

No use, whatever place I try

My phrases bounce back off the sky.

I bow my head, I lift my hands,

I worship like the rest,

Obedient to their commands,

Trying which way is best.

Silent or spoken, sung or said,

My words are vain, my worship's dead.

O Lord, I want to praise You, Lord,

For sunset, seas and foam,

For Jesus, come to show Your love,

Who brings us safely home:

You are so great, forgiving, kind,

Help me to praise with heart and mind!

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,

Praise Him on high through all the days!

I'll praise His love where e'er I go

And I'll rejoice in Him always.

No need to search for worship's art

With quiet rejoicing in my heart.

"The universe is not a steel gauntlet, hard and inflexible, it is a silken glove. And what is more wonderful still, it is a silken glove with the hand of God in it."

(Prof. Cairns)

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

A Story of the Apostle Paul

The assembly sat in silence, heads bowed in prayer and meditation. The Church at Antioch was a large one; many Jews and many Gentiles had come together to constitute a healthy and active Christian fellowship. Under the wise guidance and instruction of their Elders, Barnabas of Cyprus, Saul of Tarsus, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen, they were making rapid progress in the knowledge and practice of the Christian faith. Already they had implemented one of its main obligations in sending a generous gift of money to their less fortunate brethren in Jerusalem threatened by famine. Barnabas and Saul had been their ambassadors on that occasion and now, that mission accomplished and the messengers returned with their report, the Church was considering what outward activity their Lord would have them next undertake. So they sat, as they had done for more than a few meetings, quietly listening as first one and then another rose to expound their views and outline their proposals. Afterwards they joined in prayer for guidance toward a right decision or silently considered the things that had been said.

The extension of the work of the Gospel was in all their minds.. The injunction left by their ascending Lord as a commission binding upon His disciples until the end "*Go ... into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation*" lay before them, a challenge not to be ignored. Barnabas had told them of his own native country of Cyprus, lying only a hundred miles across the sea opposite their home city, unevangelised, waiting for Christ. Saul had spoken of the wider Roman world, the provinces of Asia and in Greece dotted with cities and towns the homes of God-fearing Jews and pagan Gentiles, a widespread field of missionary endeavour waiting to be harvested. The occupations of life were forgotten and every other obligation even to the taking of food and rest and sleep was reduced to the minimum in the intensity of their seeking Divine guidance. Thus they fasted and thus they prayed, until at last the thoughts of the many began to channel into one agreed direction. The light commenced to dawn and they knew that the power of the Holy Spirit of God was at work within them all leading to a clear perception of the Divine will. So they discerned the voice of the Holy Spirit directing them to commission Barnabas and Saul, their well loved and trusted elders, with John Mark as companion and assistant, to the first missionary enterprise ever to be organised.

It was perhaps natural that Cyprus should be the first objective. Barnabas was senior of the two, in length of Christian service and possibly in age, and Barnabas would naturally have thought of his native land. Saul was very soon to take the lead, but at this time he was evidently following. The name of Barnabas in Acts narrative always precedes that of Saul until the incident at

Paphos, that now was imminent. So they sailed the hundred miles across the blue sea. They were the forerunners of all those Christian adventurers who in after times were to traverse the seas of the world to take the Gospel to strange and unknown races of people that before had walked in darkness and sat in the shadow of death.

The work seems to have started on a minor key. Landing at Salamis, the capital city of the island and its chief port, they preached in the synagogues of the Jews. There is no record of the results; perhaps there were no results to record. Old associations die hard, and although their mission was equally to Gentile and Jew it is, perhaps, to be expected that they would tend first to associate with those who at least worshipped the same God, and attempt to build upon that common basis. Be that as it may, there is no record of a Christian church community being established in Salamis. Jews and Gentiles—in that busy port and market of exchange between ships from west, east and south, between Rome, Antioch and Alexandria—were busy making money. They could not pay much heed to these three travelling preachers who spoke of giving up all for Christ's sake and devoting life to His service. The rest of their ministry in the island provinces is summed up in one sentence in Acts 13.6 "*And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos*".

That was a land journey of about one hundred ordinary miles, the entire extent of Cyprus from east to west. In all that journey, wherever and to whoever they preached the Word of Life, there seems to have been nothing of sufficient moment for Luke to record. It was only upon arrival at the last place of call, the town of Paphos, that they seemed to find a flicker of interest. and that not from a Jew but from a Gentile.

Sergius Paulus was the Roman pro-consul, or governor, of Cyprus, and therefore the most important political figure, responsible directly to the Emperor for the administration of the country and the preservation of law and order. Nothing is known in history regarding this man although an inscription has been found at Soli in Cyprus giving his name and rank. Luke calls him a 'prudent man', meaning that he was a wise and just administrator. Rome did produce such rulers as well as corrupt ones like Pontius Pilate and Felix. News of the missionaries having reached his ears, the governor invited them to his residence with the object of hearing what they had to say.

Upon keeping the appointment Saul found that he was not going to have things all his own way; there was a rival already in the field in the person of Bar-Jesus, a soothsayer, a Jewish renegade. The word "sorcerer" in the Authorised Version is the same as that used for the three wise men in the Nativity story and does not imply the practice of magical arts so much as foreseeing the future and being well versed in "other-worldly" knowledge. It is clear that Sergius Paulus was already to some extent under the influence of this

man, and he, having no intention of conceding his position to the newcomer, entered objection to Saul's teaching.

The miracle performed at this time by Saul, the first of many during his life's work, must have profoundly impressed the witnesses. Following his stern denunciation, one in which the would-be magician was openly branded a child of the devil, the unhappy man was smitten with near blindness and reached out for someone to lead him. It is evident that the infliction was of a temporary nature only. Saul's words indicated that, but it in no way mitigated the evidence of Divine displeasure. The astute Roman rapidly realised his mistake in giving credence to this charlatan and as quickly professed faith in the teaching brought by one who gave this convincing evidence that he was in truth a messenger of God Most High. But that was all. The pro-consul became a believer, but nothing is said about any general acceptance of the message at Paphos, as is recorded of other places visited. It does not seem as if any decided success attended this visit, despite the impression produced by the miracle. In fact the really noteworthy circumstance associated with Paphos lies not in the realm of conversion at all, but in the change of Saul's name to Paul.

No one knows how or why this change came about. At this point in the narrative (Acts 13.13), Saul as a name is dropped and never resumed. From now on the Apostle is always referred to as Paul. The Hebrew name Saul is an understandable and obvious one for a child born into the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe which gave Israel its first king. 'Paul' in the New Testament is the Roman Paulus, which is said to mean "least", and the Apostle's adoption of the name is suggested to have been a token of his humility. There does not seem to be much substance in that suggestion. Others have surmised that Paulus was his family name, a kind of surname, but there is no evidence to support that hypothesis either. Much more likely is that Saul, realising his life's work was going to take him increasingly into the Gentile world, and coming into contact here at Paphos with the Roman, Sergius Paulus, formed the impression that this Roman name, so like his own, would be a better one by which he might be known to the Gentiles, and without more ado decided to make the change. The coincidence of its occurrence just at the time he found himself associated with a man named Paulus seems to be too much of a coincidence not to hold some connection.

So Paul *"and his company"* left Paphos and sailed nearly two hundred miles across the sea to Perga on the mainland, in the Roman province of Pamphylia. It was whilst at this town that John Mark decided to leave them and return to Jerusalem. No reason is given for his action; it is evident that Paul was considerably displeased for it was many years before he was willing to accept Mark as a co-worker again. Had Mark's motive merely been to avoid the continuing and increasing trials of the journey he would most likely have returned to the home church at Antioch. It was to Jerusalem that his steps were

turned where there was a rising tide of persecution, now afflicting the Christians in Judea. He may have felt it his duty to be in a better position to protect his mother Mary, and so he returned to be with her.

There does not seem to have been any spectacular success at Perga. A little community of Christians was formed, for Paul visited them on his way back, but after Mark's defection there is nothing more said about Perga. Paul and Barnabas were soon on their way again. A long trek of a hundred and twenty miles over the mountains lay before them and at its end was Antioch of Pisidia, a place about which they hoped great things. It is to be noted that there were two Antiochs, the city of that name in Syria from which Paul and Barnabas had started, and this one in the province of Pisidia which lay many hundreds of miles distant. Both places became the seats of flourishing Christian churches. Up to date, this first missionary journey had not yielded any really spectacular result. In no case, either in the various towns of Cyprus, nor yet in Perga, is there any statement of the formation of a Christian church. Small communities must indeed have been left, for later visits were made both by Paul on the mainland and Barnabas in Cyprus. It is probable that all the Apostles had to show for his labours up to this point were small communities who were prepared to accept the message he brought them. Perhaps even this very minor achievement was part of the Divine provision for Paul. He was to learn that the work of the Lord flourishes best with small and insignificant beginnings, and that *"not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit"* the purposes of God are executed.

But the dawn was growing brighter. At Antioch in Pisidia, the Apostle to the Gentiles was to meet the first of those searching experiences which combined both acceptance and rejection. The joys of widespread conversion and the sharpness of bitter opposition were to become so much a part of the pattern of his life hereafter.

AOH

Family Corner – "If we really want the best for our children, then we must be quite clear in our own mind just where that best is to be found; in fact, unless and until we have found it for ourselves we can scarcely direct them to it. And this best must be greater than ourselves toward which we are always moving. It must be the dynamic focus of all our thinking and striving and around which our personalities are built up and integrated ... The God whom we serve in Christ is Himself the Source and origin of all parenthood."

From Barrie Flint's 'Towards Christian Parenthood', The Churchman Publishing Co Ltd – in Homes and Parents CSSM July 1952.

THE JOURNEYINGS OF THE TABERNACLE

From the full account of the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the interest of the Tabernacle in Bible symbolism, we might expect a fuller account in Israel's history through the centuries. That is not so; after Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua almost nothing is known about the structure which was the centre of Israel's worship and sacrifice, the place which more than anywhere else was the place of God's dwelling with His people. The Tabernacle was made at Mount Sinai in the year after the Exodus. It continued until the fourth year of King Solomon nearly five hundred years later when it was superseded by the Temple in Jerusalem. During that five hundred years virtually all that is known about it has to be pieced together by stray allusions and isolated texts.

The Tabernacle was a transportable building consisting of two apartments, the "Holy" and the "Most Holy", surrounded by a "Court" bounded by white curtains carried on poles about seven feet high. Within its limits the central worship of Israel was conducted, the solemn ceremonies of sacrifice and cleansing, including the all-important annual "Day of Atonement" which in ritual fashion cleansed Israel from sin. The Lord was pictured as dwelling within the "Most Holy", forever hidden from mortal sight. Only the High Priest could enter that sacred apartment when once a year he went in to make atonement for the people. Wherever the people went, the Tabernacle went with them, taken down and re-erected every time they moved a stage further in their journeys. When at last they reached the Promised Land, it became the focal centre for meetings of the tribes.

The story begins in Exodus 25 to 31, where Moses, alone on the Mount with God, received the two Tables of the Law and at the same time detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle, the institution of the Priesthood, and the ceremonial which was to be observed. Chapters 35 to 40 of the same book record the execution of the work and at its completion, says the chronicler, *"the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle"*. With its central building *"overlaid with gold"*, (gold leaf), the altar in the Court of burnished copper, the gold and silver ornaments, jewels and gorgeously coloured tapestries, this place of Israel's worship presented a magnificent sight. But its true glory was of another world. That glory was symbolized by the "Ark of the Covenant" which reposed inside the Most Holy. A box about four feet long, gold covered within and without surmounted by two solid gold figures of winged cherubim, this was the place where the High Priest met with God.

The unknown history of the Tabernacle commenced when their forty years of wilderness wanderings were over at Jordan and Israel crossed into the Promised Land. Their first thought was to re-erect the Tabernacle in what they

hoped would be its permanent location, although that hope was not to be fulfilled. A site undefiled by death had to be found, to be clean in the eyes of the Lord (Num. 19.16). Such a site was found near Jericho, a level uninhabited plain, and here the limits of Israel's camp was marked out with twelve boundary monoliths and the Tabernacle erected in the centre. They named the place Gilgal, meaning a great circle (Josh. 4.19-20).

The Tabernacle remained at Gilgal only about seven years, whilst the Israelite warriors were conquering the land. It soon became apparent that Gilgal was not a good choice, right on the eastern boundary of the land and not at all conveniently placed for the gatherings of the tribes. A near central location was needed, somewhere in the natural centre of the land. Another virgin spot, undefiled by human habitation, was found in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim in a locality which was as near to the geographical centre of the land as could be wished. It was just about midway between Dan in the north and Beer-sheba in the south, Gilgal in the east and Joppa in the west. A complete circle of hills creating a plain about ten miles across in the centre of which a slightly elevated area was probably the site of the sacred structure. They named the place Shiloh, and here the entire nation gathered to see the Tabernacle erected and to make this their national place of meeting for conference and decisions (Josh. 18.1). It was here that the will of the Lord concerning tribal territories was sought by the casting of lots (Josh. 18). Here the Tabernacle remained until the disastrous time of Eli the High Priest in the days of Samuel, about three hundred and fifty years. Around it there grew, as the years passed by, a settlement of priests and Levites, attendant on the sanctuary, which developed at length into a sizable town. It could have been a holy town, a place memorable for the devotion of its inhabitants to Israel's God. Unhappily, it speedily became the reverse, and its immorality and debauchery became proverbial in Israel, until the Lord allowed it to be destroyed by the enemies of Israel and not inhabited again. Even then, only a few years after the death of Joshua, while Phinehas the grandson of Aaron was still High Priest, it figured in a scandalous proceeding which showed how quickly and how far Israel had fallen from the high ideals of their covenant with the Lord.

The story is recounted in Jud. 19-21. A certain Levite of Mount Ephraim, a few miles from Shiloh – probably one of the Levites in attendance at the Tabernacle – whilst passing through Gibeah of Benjamin with his concubine, had her seized, maltreated and killed by some unruly Benjamites. The outcome was a punitive expedition against the people of Gibeah which developed into a war of revenge by all the other tribes against Benjamin. Phinehas went into the Tabernacle to ask the Lord if they should continue this war to the death and the Lord told him to do so and He would deliver the Benjamites into their hands. At least that is what Phinehas told his compatriots. The consequence was that the

war was pursued with such zeal and fury that the entire tribe of Benjamin, some fifty thousand and probably as many children, were wiped out with the exception of six hundred men. With a swift reversal of sentiment the victors then came to the Tabernacle and bemoaned to God the fact that a tribe had been lost out of Israel, and that because of a great oath they had sworn before God to the effect that none of them would ever give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite they were precluded from doing anything to rebuild the tribe. In this extremity the elders of Israel evolved a stratagem to overcome the difficulty (Jud. 21.17-24). There was to be a feast at Shiloh in which the "daughters of Shiloh" came out and danced. The men of Benjamin were to lie in wait, abduct the girls and retreat to their home town and nothing would be done by their erstwhile enemies in war. Thus the terms of the oath would be circumvented. Not made apparent in the story as it appears in Judges is the fact that these '*daughters of Shiloh*' were the young attendants in the Tabernacle, their lives consecrated to sacred service, and inviolate, as were Jephthah's daughter and Samuel in much later days. The fact that without any compunction the elders of Israel should recommend and the priests in charge sanction so gross a contempt of the Tabernacle service and worship is a measure of the extent to which, in less than a couple of generations, Israel had fallen short of its own high ideals. Perhaps this is why the historians of the Old Testament did not record the names of any High Priest after Phinehas. Josephus does assert that he was followed by Abishua, Bukki and Uzzi as High Priests at Shiloh but all the OT does is to include their names in the genealogies. The glory of the Tabernacle began to depart almost as soon as it was erected at Shiloh.

For more than two centuries after this, the story of the Tabernacle is a blank; nothing is known of its history. This is the period of the oppression of Israel by the Moabites, the Syrians and the Philistines which of itself indicates that Israel had largely turned away from God and so earned the penalty of the violated Covenant. If, as Josephus asserts, Ahishua, Bukki and Uzzi did indeed serve as High Priests, this would be the time of their service but it is doubtful if there was any real adherence to the ordained Tabernacle ritual and sacrifices. It is of this period that the writer of Judges says "*In those days there was no king in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes*". It was a time of anarchy in which a few remained faithful to Israel's God and the rest were indifferent.

Towards the end of the period came the upheaval in the Priesthood which resulted in the line of Eleazar being deposed and priests of the line of Ithamar, Aaron's younger son, seizing the duties of office. So when the child Samuel was brought to the Tabernacle by his mother to be devoted to Divine service, Eli of the line of Ithamar was the serving High Priest. The account in 1 Sam. 2 shows how decadent the priesthood had become.

Twenty years later came the crowning tragedy. The warriors of Israel, beaten in conflict with their hereditary enemies the Philistines, decided to take the sacred symbol of the Divine presence with them, the Ark of the Covenant into battle. From its place in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, they carried it into battle before them, in the belief that God would never allow it to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised, and so victory would be assured. This act of sacrilege met with due retribution. The Lord did allow the sacred Ark to fall into the hands of the Philistines and the Israelites were soundly defeated once again. The High Priest Eli, when news of the Ark's capture was brought to him, fell off his seat and died.

This was not only the end of Shiloh; it also marked a turning-point in the Lord's dealings with Israel. At the first Joseph had received the birthright from his father Jacob and passed it on to his son Ephraim. Now the tribe of Ephraim in whose territory Shiloh stood had become the leading idolatrous tribe in Israel. This supreme example of their godlessness moved the Lord to reject Ephraim and pass the birthright to Judah, as represented in his descendant David, soon then to be born. Psalm 78 records the sad circumstances of that fatal battle, the loss of the Ark and the Lord's consequent action. *"The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in his law ... they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel, so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity and his glory into the enemy's hand ... the fire consumed their young men; their priests fell by the sword ... he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which he loved"* (Psa. 78.9-70). It was at this point that Judah became the royal tribe of Israel, destined to produce Israel's kings.

Shiloh was destroyed. The Old Testament gives no hint of what happened to the priestly settlement surrounding the Tabernacle. There can be no doubt that the Philistines, flushed with victory and capture of the Ark, soon covered the forty miles from Beth-Shemesh where the battle was fought, and carried fire and sword through the little town. It never recovered. Shiloh was erased from the face of the earth. Five hundred years later the Lord said to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, reproving them for their apostasy, *"Go ye now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works and I called unto you, and ye answered not, therefore will I do unto this house"* (the Temple at Jerusalem) *which I gave unto you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh"* (Jer. 7.12-14).

The Tabernacle escaped. It is probable that before the Philistines reached the spot, Samuel and those with him succeeded in dismantling the structure and transporting it out of harm's way. With the death of Eli, Samuel remained the only person of authority in Israel and he probably assumed control. He re-erected the Tabernacle on its original site at Gilgal, without the Ark of the Covenant, and there it remained for something like fifty years into the reign of Saul. It was at Gilgal that Samuel offered the sacrifices connected with Saul's appointment as king and at Gilgal that Saul was formally crowned king over Israel (I Sam. 10.8; 11.15). The High Priesthood was restored to the legal line of Eleazar in the person of Ahitub, father of the Zadok of David's time. Because in the absence of the Ark, the Day of Atonement ritual could not be performed, he was merely given the courtesy title of "Ruler of the House of God" (I Chron. 9.15; Neh. 11.11).

By this time Saul had become king. After his breach with Samuel he took matters into his own hands, dismissed Ahitub and moved the Tabernacle to Nob, on the north side of Jerusalem, then known as Jebus. He appointed as High Priest, Ahimelech, son of another Ahitub, a grandson of Eli, who as a child had survived the massacre at Shiloh. This Ahimelech had sided with Saul in the troublous period of his early kingship and acted as a kind of personal priest to him (I Sam. 14.3). This arrangement did not last long; Saul, suspecting Ahimelech of treasonable communication with David, who was then on the run from Saul, sent men and massacred the entire priesthood of Nob, Abiathar son of Ahimelech alone escaping, and removed the Tabernacle to his own home town of Gibeon (I Sam. 22.9-23). This fact is known only by inference. When, later on, David became king of all Israel, the Tabernacle, complete with the altar of burnt-offering but without the Ark, was standing at Gibeon. Zadok, of the line of Eleazar, was its priest (I Chron. 16.39; 21.29). This must have been done by Saul after his slaughter of the priesthood at Nob. Here it stood throughout the reign of David and until the accession of Solomon (I Kings 3.4; 2 Chron. 1.3-15).

Now Saul was dead and David king over all Israel. Somewhere about the twelfth year of his reign he decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant, which had laid in the house of Obed-Edom at Kirjath-Jearim in Judah for about eighty years, to Jerusalem. He erected what was evidently a replica of the Tabernacle Most Holy and Holy, with an altar for offerings, and eventually installed the Ark in its proper place, to the rejoicing of all Israel. He did not, however, interfere with the true Tabernacle, with its Brazen Altar made by Moses, at Gibeon. Thus for another thirty years there were two Tabernacles in Israel, and two High Priests. The original Tabernacle was at Gibeon with Zadok of the legal line of Eleazar as serving High Priest, but the Levitical sacrifices could not be performed there because it did not possess the Ark of the Covenant. The new Tabernacle at Jerusalem had the Ark and a new altar of burnt offering but the

High Priest was Abiathar of the condemned line of Ithamar. At neither place could the full ceremonies demanded by the law be carried out and it is probable that the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice had long since become obsolete.

It was left to Solomon to regularise this state of affairs. As soon as the Temple was completed and dedicated in the fourth year of his reign he had the Ark of the Covenant brought into it (2 Chron. 5.5) and instituted a grand opening ceremony. Zadok was appointed High Priest, thus fulfilling the condemnation passed upon Eli and his posterity a century earlier. Although nothing is said about the fate of the original Tabernacle at Gibeon, it is evident that the service conducted there, as well as that connected with David's Tabernacle in Jerusalem, were terminated, and from now on the Day of Atonement ritual was celebrated in the new Temple.

The meeting-place between God and men, made by Bezaleel under Moses' direction at the time of the Exodus, came to its end. It had been the centre of Israel's worship for five hundred years and now gave place to a greater and more permanent Temple, destined, as Solomon said in this dedication, to be "*a house of prayer for all nations.*"

This article appeared in the Bible Study Monthly 20 years ago. It has been slightly abridged. The author is unknown.

"Oh, ponder this! – The Father wrought perfectly in the yielded nature of Jesus, and the result was summed up in this cry, 'This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.' In some such manner it is possible to walk worthy of God unto all pleasing. It is possible to have this testimony, even in our mortal life, that we have pleased God ... But you can only have it by allowing Him, in silence, in solitude, in obedience, to work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Will you begin now? He may be working in you to confess to that fellow-Christian that you were unkind in your speech and act. Work it out! He may be working in you to give up that line of business about which you have been doubtful lately. Give it up! He may be working in you to be sweeter in your home, and gentler in your speech. Begin! He may be working in you to alter your relations with some with whom you have dealings that are not as they should be. Alter them! This very day let God begin to speak, and work, and will; and then work out what He works in. God will not work apart from you, but He wants to work through you. Let Him! Yield to Him, and let this be the day when you shall begin to live in the power of the Mighty Indwelling One."

Dr F B Meyer in 'How to Die Daily' by B M'Call Barbour – used by permission.

NOTICES

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BFU reprints its own publications according to demand. The leaflet 'Salvation For All' was reprinted as a booklet and there is a leaflet – 'Jesus the Challenge'. Jacob's Trouble has been reprinted.

We look to younger brethren to assist in the publishing activity and two already give great assistance. Please join with us in prayer for God's guidance and blessing in each step that we take, so that we might do His will.

Gone from us

Dorothy Petran (Wausau, USA)

Lily Barrett (Seven Kings)

Pam Pegg (Nuneaton)

Edie Gresham (Milborne Port)

Mabel Lambert (Milborne Port)

We remember their loved ones in prayer.

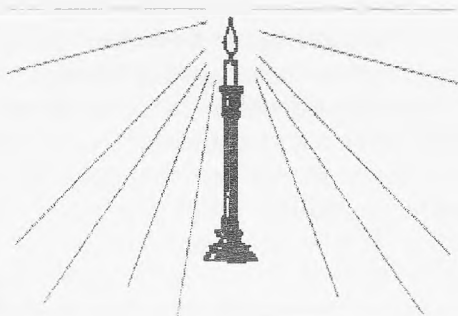
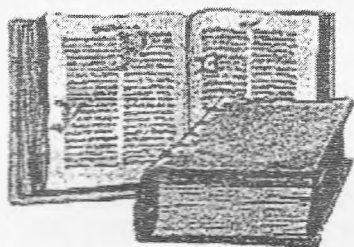
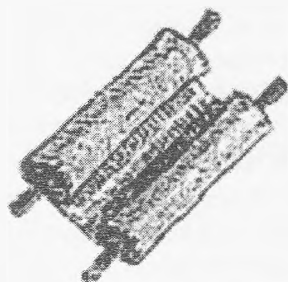
The serenity and tranquility of heart and mind which a firm and convinced faith in God produces in the life, is something which cannot be imitated or produced by any other means whatever.

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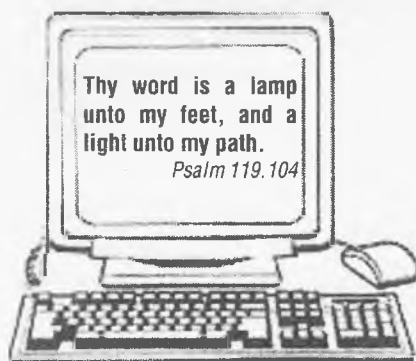
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)

It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP – Walking with the Lord

"He set his face to go to Jerusalem" Luke 9.51. It was at about this time that Jesus gave further warning of His betrayal. As they walked towards Jerusalem His disciples argued with one another about who was the greatest among them. Is it difficult to imagine that scene? No wonder they were blind to His warnings. His most trusted friends were competing for leadership. A little further on Jesus rebuked James and John for wanting to destroy the Samaritans who refused Him hospitality. As they drew near to Jerusalem it was the disciples who tried to stop mothers bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing and a little further on, it was apparently the disciples who tried to hinder Bartimaeus from receiving his sight. Jesus showed His clear determination to do His Father's will by going to His death on Calvary. Yet as He walked He had time for the needs of those around Him. Have we? What are our thoughts as we walk with the Lord?

There are one or two marked contrasts among those who watched Jesus' final walk from the Praetorium to Golgotha. While Jewish leaders stirred up the people to shout 'crucify Him', the women of Jerusalem wept. Those same religious men taunted Jesus as He hung on the cross, the 'disciples' ran away but some women from Galilee stood round the cross. Various people reacted in different ways to Jesus. How would we have responded to Jesus as the Son of God died as a criminal.

How are we responding to Jesus? It was not our privilege to walk the roads of Israel with the Son of God. Sometimes privileges are not appreciated until they have vanished. The little things we do for Jesus' friends, we do for Him. When we rebuff them, we rebuff Him. Jesus told us to turn the other cheek to our enemies but He never told us to turn our back to our brethren. Embrace the opportunity today while we may—tomorrow may be too late and we shall walk alone.

DN

LET US KEEP THE FEAST

The ceremony and words used by Jesus at the Last Supper, that have given inspiration for two thousand years of Christian celebration, must have followed close upon, and indeed were probably intermingled with, the disciples keeping of the Passover according to Mosaic law. It is not so much that the one ceremony is distinct from the other in point of time and sequence as that it was distinct in purpose. The Passover, as a ceremony of tradition, looked back to a deliverance of fourteen centuries past. The Last Supper was the inaugural ceremony of a new fellowship, looking forward to a deliverance that was at least two thousand years in the future. The one was a remembrance of the past, the other a pledge of the future.

We therefore need to balance the future with the past. When Jesus said "*This do in remembrance of me*" He meant us to remember not only His life on earth and death on the Cross, but also His promised coming again in the glory of His Kingdom and His revealing (*apokalupto*) to all men when that Kingdom is established in power. Ours is not a faith that dwells forever on the things of the past, however soul-stirring and inspiring they may be, however mighty in Divine power for the furtherance of God's Plan. It is a faith that looks forward to the future, that beholds with clear, undimmed eyes those glories that shall be when the Son of Man has fully come in the power of His Kingdom. Then all nations will gather before Him to learn the pure language that He will turn to them, that they may call upon the Name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent. It is *that* coming which we have in mind as we raise the cup to our lips and repeat together "*Till He come!*"

There were eleven gathered with Him in that upper room. The others were not there – those who, beside the apostles, were constant attendants upon our Lord during His ministry. There were the three Marys, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Mark, but they were not there. Others not there were Lazarus, Mary and Martha of Bethany, nor were Joanna nor Salome there, nor were those secret disciples, Joseph and Nicodemus. The "five hundred brethren" to whom the Lord showed himself after his resurrection were elsewhere, all unconscious of the ceremony that was being enacted for the first time and which they themselves would repeat, year by year continually, for the rest of their lives. It was in the truest sense of the word a family gathering, and it marked the institution of a new family, the Christian family, a family that was to hold together and endure, through centuries of suffering and persecution, until our own day; and endures still. Despite misunderstandings, difficulties, disappointments, disillusionments, we remain a family still, and those who have grasped this truth and practice it in their relations with their brethren are the ones who alone have remained truly faithful to the cause of Christ.

It was appropriate therefore that the institution of the Christian family should be marked by a ceremonial which, whatever else it was intended to symbolise, did in fact bring home to the disciples one vivid realisation. They were to eat bread in the presence of their host! That meant a great deal more to those men in that day than ever it means to Western Europeans today. From time immemorial until today, in the Arabian deserts, to eat bread in a man's house, or in his tent in the land of the sons of Abraham, meant that the host was forever bound to accept the visitor as one of his family, even to the extent of sacrificing his own life if necessary in the defence of his guest. It was no idle word that Jesus uttered when He said "*This is my body, broken for you. Take, eat*". By that action He was assuring them, in symbol, that, having partaken of bread at His hands, they were forever under His protection and members of His family. "*Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" He knew full well that He must lay down His own life on behalf of those who had eaten bread with Him. In the earnestness of His communion with the Father He prayed that these who by this ceremonial eating of bread had signified their desire to be of His family forevermore might be as one family whilst still in the flesh, "*that they may be one, as we are one*". We need to reflect here that to be one body in heaven means to be one family on earth. The unity for which our Lord prayed is not one to be achieved, as it were, instantaneously upon our 'change' to spiritual conditions and our entrance upon heavenly glory, but here and now in our fellowship together and our common pilgrim walk toward the Holy City. "*The bread which we break,*" says Paul in 1 Cor. 10.16 "*is it not the communion — the common union — of the body of Christ?*" It is only as we enter into the real meaning of the term "communion of saints" that we can perceive the basis of that fellowship which shall be our inheritance beyond the Vail but for which we must be prepared here and now if we are ever to inherit it.

The significance of the bread, then, is His life given for us, our acceptance into his family binding us together in one body. If we take the symbol to ourselves and partake of the broken bread, we must identify ourselves with that position. But the eleven were to be initiated into an understanding even deeper than that. Not only were they to enter into a passive relationship as members of the Christ family but they were also to enter into an active partnership as blood-brothers with Jesus Christ Himself. He called them, not only to accept of His hospitality and sacrifice upon their behalf but also to become associated with him in a work of service which should make them for all time "*joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer (endure) with him, that we may also be glorified together*" (Rom.8.17). So He bade them drink of the wine that represented His blood.

The assimilating of blood meant the acquiring of blood relationship to the donor, to these men of the Eastern world. Two Bedouin Arabs, resolved to

become blood-brothers to each other, would each open a vein in his wrist and the two together would allow their blood to mingle. From henceforth they were blood-brothers – each had the other's blood run in his veins. Drinking blood, meant the acquiring of life from another. *"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you,"* said Jesus. Hence this symbol of the cup involved a second and deeper obligation, one more personal between each believer and his Lord. It implied eternal association together in as close a sense as two brothers together. It implied a companionship with the beloved partner in all things, in life or in death. So if Jesus spent His life in serving mankind and doing good to all, so do we. If Jesus forsook earthly ambitions and aims in order to further the interests of God's Kingdom, then so should we. If Jesus went into death at the hands of wicked men rather than swerve one iota from the course that Divine wisdom had planned, then we should be ready to do the same. *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Rom. 6.4)

The symbol of the cup is that of a voluntary sharing with Him in all that He does, both in the service of mankind now, limited in scope and power though it must be, and in the infinitely wider sphere of Millennial work when that Age shall have come. *"Are you able,"* asked our Lord, of some who desired to reign with him, *"to drink of the cup that I shall drink, and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"* – *"Lord, we are able,"* was the confident reply. They knew not what they said. So often, in our confidence, we say the same thing and understand the implication of what we say as little as did those disciples. May we have grace and sincerity to enter more deeply into the spirit of these things, and, approaching the holy table with full awareness of our responsibility and privilege, let us *"keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"*.

BJD

Our lives are songs; God writes the words,
And we set them to music at pleasure;
And the songs grow glad, or sweet, or sad,
As we choose to fashion the measure.

We must write the music, whatever the song,
Whatever its rhyme or meter;
And if it is sad, we can make it glad,
Or if sweet, we can make it sweeter.

THE DESTINY OF MAN

Part 1 Loyal to the Principles of Creation

If it were not for the demerits of life – its disappointments, its failures, its dangers, disease, calamity, fear and violence, there is not much doubt that most men and women would wish to live for ever. There is so much in life to give satisfaction and pleasure. There is the thrill of experiment and exploration; the joy of achievement, the endless variety of interesting things to see and to do. Given good health, pleasant companionship, freedom from fear, the world becomes a most desirable place in which to live. There are so many good things in creation. This earth, on which we find ourselves, is so admirably fitted to our needs and pleasures and capable of meeting all our requirements for daily living.

It was like that at the beginning. When in the course of God's creative activity the first human beings walked this earth the unpleasant things of life had not made their appearance. Not only the Bible narrative but also the oldest traditions of the most ancient nations tell of the primal Golden Age when man lived in communion with God and there was peace on earth. The modern view that the earliest humans lived in a condition of unintelligent savagery and depravity from which they slowly emerged as they became less like beast and more like man, has no support in ancient lore. All the old legends picture the first men and women as perfect and upright, fair of form and sound of mind, serving and loyal to a Higher Power. The first society was one based on equity and benevolence; the first human era one in which men lived in happiness and security, into which the dark shadow of evil had not as yet entered. One Sumerian epic, (*"Sumerian Epic of Paradise"* Pinches 1932) written some twenty-two centuries before Christ, describes that primal world as a glorious and holy land in which the wild beasts were tame and gentle, living in peace with the cattle. Men were kindly and just to one another; no violence, neither sorrow nor grief. The sun shone warmly and rivers of living water fertilized the land producing rich crops. It is easy to dismiss these traditions as folk-lore having no basis in fact, but it is true that the most ancient peoples did have this fixed impression of an original Golden Age and there must have been some reason for that impression; the fact that the Bible with its story of the Garden of Eden adopts the same position should be accepted as strong presumptive evidence that there was such a time of peace and equity in the days of the first man and that the after history of mankind as well as Divine intentions regarding the race must be viewed in this light.

All this highlights a principle, the acceptance of which is essential to a reasonable understanding of the riddle of life. God makes all things good! It is inconceivable that God is incompetent or impotent, as though He has to experiment a little and perhaps register a failure or two before achieving His purpose. In creating at all, He does so for a good purpose and the elements of

His creation are in themselves good and fitted for their intended function. This is true of man; as he left the hand of his Creator, he was perfectly fitted for continuing physical life and free from inherent evil. That characteristic entered later. *"God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good"* (Gen. 1.31). *"What is man"* asked David *"thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet"* (Psa. 8.4-6). And all this that man should enjoy the gift of conscious existence thus given, find happiness in life and discharge a useful function in this creation of which he is a part. God created man for happiness and usefulness, as well expressed by the Wise Man in Eccl. 3.10-13 (RSV) *"I have seen the business that God has given to the Sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time, also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil"*. The extent to which men in general do not measure up to this ideal is a measure of the extent to which they have departed from the state of goodness in which they were created.

But what is goodness? What is the yardstick by which must be measured such qualities as morality, rightness, benevolence? Can these things be defined as evidences of an orderly harmony with creation? The actions of every man has an effect upon the conduct of creation and what a man is and does either advances or retards the orderly progress of creation. It either facilitates or obstructs the Creator's purpose. That is why the individual life ought to be conducted in accord with the standards laid down by the Most High and why man owes a duty of loyalty to God, of co-operation and collaboration with Him. God is the source of the life that is in man and He is responsible for man's existence but He has made men in the form of creatures who are measurably independent of Him and of each other. Men depend for continued life upon their interaction with their environment, which affords them the necessities of life. That same environment allows them to express the life that is in them and to make use of it in exploration, experiment, achievement and enjoyment. But to experience all these things in their fulness and to gain the greatest satisfaction from them, it is essential for man to live the good life. Physically, he must play his part as a biological creature in preserving the balance of Nature, a duty he shares with all terrestrial living creatures. Morally, he must live as a member of a community, a community that embraces all humanity. seeking the welfare of all other members, playing his due part in all the labours and activities necessary to the continuance of the community. *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* is not only a theological precept but a fundamental maxim for daily life.

Now in order, intelligently, to discharge this responsibility man must have a free-will, capable of willingly, without constraint, accepting the position and taking action accordingly, or rejecting it. He must either be so, or a robot, incapable of independent thought and action. "mere puppets which would dance only at the call of the master" as Gatland puts it (*"The Inhabited Universe"*—Gatland 1957). It is the glory of God that the intelligent creatures to whom He has given life do possess this quality of free-will and free choice. Everlasting life under any other condition would become an unendurable agony. Men are intended to become companions of God, to develop so intense an awareness of the tie that binds them to Him that they can enter into communion with Him and realise that they are integral parts of that which He has brought into being, *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord"* (Isa. 1.18). That such an invitation can be given and recorded is a striking testimony to the exalted position men may occupy in the sight of God, if they choose. 'Choose' is the operative word; it is unthinkable that creation can be effectively administered by responsible beings unless those beings have accepted their duties willingly and voluntarily and are heart and soul in sympathy with the principles and objects of creation.

It is obvious though that the reverse of goodness is possible in free-will creatures. There is a story told by Jesus in which a nobleman was called to the supreme Court of the Empire to receive appointment as king over his own little territory, and his citizens, hating him, sent a message to the Court saying *"We will not have this man to reign over us"* (Luke 19.14). In like manner it is a necessary corollary of free-will that the man may reject goodness and the good life and opt for the opposite; so we come face to face with evil and sin.

What is evil? What is sin? To say that sin is disobedience to God's commands and evil is anything which is of the Devil may be popular theology but is altogether too much of a simplification of the problem. If in fact it is the will of God that certain things should not be done then there is a valid reason; the prohibition must be for the good of mankind. If there are certain things credited to the power or activity or influence of the Devil as the arch enemy of God, then those things have no rightful place in the progress of God's creation. They are in opposition to it and therefore must be opposed and eliminated. So it emerges that what is called evil, and what is called sin, are forces exerting a disruptive effect on creation. Whatever it is, in the physical sphere, that opposes or hinders the creative work of God, that is evil. Whatever it is, in the moral sphere, that opposes or hinders the progress of the individual towards God's ideal, or limits or destroys the God-given life that is in Him, that is sin. Sin cannot be defined by an arbitrary code of rules such as the Ten Commandments. That code listed certain prohibitions and admonitions which were applicable to a certain people in a certain stage of culture, and ceased to be applicable to its

letter when the people and the culture that called it forth had passed away. Jesus made that plain when He said that love for God and love for neighbour included the whole of the Law.

Whatever tends to destroy the link that ought to exist between God and man, or between man and man, or whatever threatens or destroys the orderly relationship which ought to exist between man and his environment, this is sin and evil. So is anything that disrupts the interaction and interdependence between life and energy that sustains His creatures. If God defines a thing as evil, it is because it is harmful to man. If God says "*Thou shalt not*" it is for man's own benefit and ultimate happiness, even although in his present state of development man may well be ignorant of the fact. The pollution of rivers with chemical waste and refuse is sin just as heinous in God's sight – perhaps more so – than the violation of the seventh commandment. The training of children in the principle of self first and the practice of the law of selfishness may merit greater retribution in the eyes of the Most High than a breach of the eighth commandment. A proper appraisal of what constitutes evil and sin demands an understanding of the Divine purpose in creation and man's intended place in it. Perhaps sin can be defined as the deliberate practice of evil by an intelligent being. Animals cannot sin.

All of this exemplified is in the first story of the Bible – the story of the Garden of Eden. These principles are included in that simple narrative. The first man and woman were brought into being by God, compounded out of the elements of the earth, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur, potassium etc., infused with the power of life by the Holy Spirit of God and became living, sensitive beings. *'The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul'* (Gen. 2.7). He was set in a garden, a cultivated and prepared parkland, amid the surrounding wild and untamed countryside. In it were *"made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food"* and a river, *"to water the garden"*, a perfect environment, affording all that human beings would need to sustain continuing life. They were given a mandate or commission expressed in the words *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the face of the earth"*. The earth was to be man's domain, to be brought under control by his labours and become as much a Paradise as the garden in which God had placed him. Then there was the admonition; refusal or failure to preserve his loyalty to God or transgress the laws of his being, would involve the loss of all that God had given him, the loss of life itself. *"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."*

AOH

DARKNESS OF THE CRUCIFIXION

An Historical Study

The darkness which Matthew, Mark and Luke all record as enshrouding the land from the sixth hour to the ninth – noon to 3.00 pm is often assumed to be the result of an eclipse of the sun. In fact, the NEB, Dr. Moffat and the 20th Century NT, use this term. In so doing they have all fallen into what ought to have been a fairly obvious error. The Crucifixion was at the time of the Passover, when the moon is of necessity at the full, and there cannot be an eclipse of the sun at full moon. Furthermore, the darkness is said to have continued for the space of three hours whereas the longest time that an eclipse of the sun can persist at any one place is seven minutes. Whatever the nature of this rather mysterious darkness, it certainly was not an eclipse.

The happening is mentioned in Matt. 27.45, Mark 15.33 and Luke 23.44-45. Matthew and Mark would have been eye witnesses: Luke got his information from someone who had been an eye-witness. Matthew says that there was an earthquake at the same time; the others say nothing about this. Apart from that remark, the three accounts are identical in detail and this points to a very clear and undisputed recollection of what actually took place. Throughout all time since the event, this darkness has been accepted as having actually occurred and generally taken as a sign of Divine displeasure with those then guilty of the condemnation of the Lord. Matthew's statement that the Veil of the Temple was rent in twain, throwing the sacred Most Holy open to public view at this time, is taken as pointing to the same conclusion.

Confirming evidence that this darkness did in fact occur is extant from a secular source. Phlegon Trallianus, a Greek historian, who was born not long after the Crucifixion and died in the middle of the Second Century, wrote a history of the times from 776 B.C. to his own day. and had this to say, "In the Fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad there was a great eclipse of the sun, greater than had ever been known before, for at the sixth hour the day was changed into night and the stars were seen in the heavens. An earthquake occurred in Bithynia and overthrew a great part of the city of Nicaia."

Although existing copies of Phlegon's statement use the word *ekleipsis*, from which our technical word "eclipse" is derived. it is not implied that he intended the modern meaning since the word in his day was used to denote darkening of the heavens from whatever cause. Of greater importance is the relation of the date given to that of the Crucifixion. Dates in Greece at the time of the First Advent were denoted by Olympiads, four-year periods starting from the institution of the Olympic games in Greece in the midsummer of 776 B.C. Thus summer 776 B.C. to summer 775 B.C. was the First year of the First Olympiad, and this system of dating continued until AD. 394. On this basis the Fourth year

of the 202nd Olympiad would commence in July A.D. 32 and finish in June A.D. 33. At some time during that twelve months occurred the darkness over Asia in which lay Bithynia and Nicaea to which Phlegon refers. It is astronomically established that during that year there was no eclipse of the sun visible from the territory in question.

The date of our Lord's death is generally agreed nowadays, in the light of modern knowledge of relevant history, to have been in the spring of AD 33 and of course at the time of the Jewish Passover, on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year, Nisan. One of the essentials in this matter is that 14th Nisan in the year of the Crucifixion must have fallen on a Friday. There are only two years in the relevant period when this was the case. In A. D. 30 the 14th Nisan fell on Friday 7th April (Julian) and in AD. 33 on Friday 3rd April (commencing at 6.00 pm. on the evening of 2nd April in accordance with Jewish custom). Phlegon makes no mention of the happening as affecting Judea. It is doubtful if he ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and Bithynia is six hundred miles from Jerusalem. The fact that the year he specifies is the same as the year of the Crucifixion is presumptive evidence that Phlegon records the same darkness and the same earthquake as do the three Gospels. It extended over the entire Middle East from Bithynia on the shores of the Black Sea, across Greek Asia and Syria into Galilee and Judea. Thallus, a Syrian historian contemporary with Phlegon, is credited with recording a similar day of darkness without, however, giving the date of the occurrence, which does at least give some ground for thinking that it was also observed in Syria.

The cause of the darkness, apart from being an act of God remains a mystery. The apparent area affected precludes its being the effect of low-lying clouds blotting out sunlight, such as does occur sometimes over valleys when by a vagary of the wind dense cloud masses build up and remain stationary over a relatively small area and block all light. Volcanic dust from an eruption has been known to produce the same effect, but always in the vicinity of volcanoes and there are no volcanoes. A rather interesting parallel to this darkening at the Crucifixion is the celebrated 'Dark Day of 1780'. This happening is so near to our own time that it is fully authenticated, although despite investigation by the best scientific minds of the time, the cause has never been established. It does seem, however, to have been a similar phenomenon, from the physical point of view, to that associated with the death of Jesus.

May 19, 1780, dawned on the eastern coast of North America without incident and the customary daily routine of the citizens of New York State. Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont and New Hampshire was soon under way. But at 10am sunlight began inexplicably to fail from the sky and by 11 o'clock an area of some six hundred and fifty miles in each direction was completely dark. Work ceased and workers returned to their homes, where lights burned as

at night. The Connecticut Legislature, in session at the time, adjourned its proceedings and noted the phenomenon in the Journal of the Senate. A few hours later, discovering that an impression was gaining ground to the effect that the Last Day had come and the Judgment was at hand, the members returned to the House that they might be found doing their duty should the Lord return unexpectedly. The darkness continued until about 2.00 am. the following morning, although the moon was full at the time. The disturbance, whatever it was, affected sunlight and moonlight equally. By 4.00 am. on the morning of the 20th, normal conditions were restored everywhere.

No explanation has ever been found. Sir William Herschel, the celebrated British astronomer, who lived at the time, said "*the dark day in Northern America was one of those wonderful phenomena of Nature which will always be read of with interest, but which philosophy is at a loss to explain*". A New Hampshire eye-witness, Judge Tenney, writing on the subject five years later, said "*I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the Universe had been shrouded in impenetrable darkness, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eye was equally invisible with the blackest velvet*". Another eye-witness, Rev. Elam Potter expressed himself in a sermon nine days after the happening "*Specially I mention that wonderful darkness on the 19th of May last. Then, as in our text, the sun was darkened; such a darkness as was probably never known since the crucifixion of our Lord. People left their work in the house and in the field; travellers stopped; schools broke up at 11 o'clock; people lighted candles at noon-day and the fire shone as at night. Some people, I am told, were in dismay, and thought whether the Day of Judgment was not drawing on. A great part of the following night also was singularly dark. The moon, though in the full, gave no light, as in our text*".

The minister was, of course, referring to Biblical references associated with the Second Advent such as Joel 3.15 "*The sun and the moon shall be darkened and the stars shall withdraw their shining*" and Matt. 24. 29 "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven*". It is not surprising that some sections of the Christian world hailed this strange happening as the fulfilment of such predictions, a physical sign that the time of the Second Advent was at hand. Who shall say that they were not justified, even although these texts are primarily symbols of realities greater by far than a transient darkness over a small patch of earth's surface on a particular day. As a literal sign, repeating that given at the Crucifixion, incomprehensible to men and incapable of explanation by the then state of human knowledge there is much to recommend the conclusion.

One other related point is of interest. If Phlegon's record is accepted as factual, the area covered by the darkness in our Lord's day must have been

almost identical with that known to have been covered in 1780. From Bithynia to Jerusalem is about the same distance as that across the extremities of the dark area in North America. The two incidents appear to be of one and the same nature and both inexplicable to human scientific knowledge. Is this an indication that God does from time to time in the course of human history interject an occasional reminder that there are things outside not only the understanding but the control of man, by means of which all humanity's boasted powers and achievements could be rendered impotent? Suppose there was a third such inexplicable darkness, not of three hours this time, nor yet of fifteen hours, but of fifteen days or fifteen weeks; not limited to Judea or to a few American States, but over all the world! And all life on earth depends on sunlight. Without the sun we perish! How easily God can cry "Halt!" to human self-will when in His wisdom He sees the time is ripe, and that without necessarily losing a single human life, just by taking the light away for a short while.

AOH

THE GIVING OF THE MANNA

The giving of manna to the children of Israel for food was an outstanding feature of the Exodus. The imagination of generation upon generation, first of Hebrews and then of Christians, has been stirred by this inexplicable provision of food for a multitude in the otherwise barren wilderness. It is true that modern discovery has established that Sinai in the days of the Exodus was by no means so barren and desolate as the popular expositors conceived it, or as it is now. Even so the marvellous story has lost none of its appeal, and the wonder of it has passed into the language of every day so that "manna from heaven" has become an expression denoting any unexpected and beneficial gift. It was no less so in Old Testament days, for the Psalmist (78.24-25) sings exultantly "*He ... rained down manna for them to eat and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels' food, he sent them meat to the full*". The language is poetic; the Psalmist did not mean to convey that this white substance "*like hoarfrost upon the ground*" is literally eaten in heaven by the glorious angels who in their perfection of spiritual life, do always behold the face of the Father. Rather does the Psalmist, in a flight of poetic fervour, attribute the provision and the qualities of the manna to the direct intervention of Heaven at a time of sore necessity. He quite naturally speaks of God as sending down food from His own table to meet the need of His people on earth.

Let the narrative be examined in the light of all that the twentieth century can tell us regarding the district in which this thing happened and the circumstances under which it took place. The wonder of the story will be by no means lessened and our reverence for the Divine power which brought this about just at the time when it was needed will be immeasurably increased.

"And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost upon the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another 'It is manna' for they wist not what it was ... And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot, it melted ... And it was like coriander seed, white: and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." (Ex. 16.14-35).

It was at Elim, just after the passage of the Red Sea, that the manna first appeared (Ex. 16.1) and at Gilgal following the crossing of Jordan, forty years later, that it ceased (Josh. 5.12). During the whole of the intervening period, throughout the length and breadth of Sinai, wherever the people wandered, there was the manna, ready for gathering, fresh every morning, *"except on the Sabbath"*. When they lived in Egypt, manna was unknown. After they settled in Canaan it was seen no more. The phenomenon was confined entirely to the Sinai peninsula and the green hills of Edom and Moab. So integral a part of the whole account is this story of the manna that unless we accept the fact that this thing really did happen we must reject the historical trustworthiness of the entire Exodus narrative.

The story never died. Long after the strings of the Psalmist's harp were stilled Nehemiah encouraged his brethren by telling them of the *"bread from heaven"* (Neh. 9.15). Jesus, in His teaching, reminded His hearers that *"their fathers did eat manna in the wilderness"*. (John 6.49). The Psalmist's *"angels' food"* was not able to arrest the processes of death at work in the bodies of the Israelites, and their daily gathering sufficed only to sustain life for another day. Jesus turned their minds to Himself, *"the living bread which came down from heaven"* (John 6.51) and talked to them about those things without which no man can enter into life. So, in words intended for His disciples for all time, the consecrated members of the Church of Christ on earth, the resurrected Lord promises (Rev. 2.17) to give to *"him that overcomes ... to eat of the hidden manna"* that spiritual quality, immortality, the Divine nature, of which the earthly manna of the Exodus was but a symbol.

The same truth is taught in the fact that a vessel of the literal manna, miraculously preserved, was laid up and preserved in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle throughout Israel's national existence (Ex. 16.30-34; Heb. 9.4). There, where the supernatural Shekinah glory blazed out over the mercy-seat, where the presence of God in His Heaven was symbolized, stood the sacred vessel, century after century, its contents the incorruptible symbol of that *"life-in-itself"* which is to be the inheritance of those who are *"faithful unto death"* (Rev. 2.10).

Now what is there known about this manna? Can it be identified today? Did Sinai's hills and valleys no more receive the *"bread from heaven"* after Israel's

hosts had travelled that way and departed? Or was it that God did take hold of something in Nature to meet the needs of the occasion?

Through the centuries it has been commonly reported that the manna of the Exodus is still to be seen in Sinai. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century, said that it never disappeared but was even then to be found in the places where Israel gathered it. In the fifteenth century, a traveller, Breidenbach, declared that manna was common in the valleys surrounding Mount Sinai, hanging in drops on twigs and grass and stones, sweet as honey and sticky. Since then various travellers have reported finding this substance and have hazarded various theories as to its origin. It is established that the Sinai Arabs have known and collected it for centuries and in the sixteenth century it could be found on sale in Cairo. In the eighteenth century it was observed that the substance is connected with, and found upon the tamarisk tree. Burckhardt, the eighteenth century traveller, describes it thus, "in the month of June it drops from the thorns of the tamarisk upon the fallen twigs, leaves and stones which always cover the ground beneath that tree in its natural state. The manna is collected before sunrise, when it is coagulated but it dissolves as soon as the sun shines upon it. The Arabs clear away the leaves and dirt that adhere to it, boil it, strain it through a coarse piece of cloth, and put it into leathern skins. In this way they preserve it until the following year, and use it as they do honey, to pour over their unleavened bread, or to dip their bread into. I could not learn that they ever make it into cakes and loaves. The manna is found only in years when copious rains have fallen, sometimes it is not produced at all."

The Arabic name for this substance is '*mann*' and this has been its name so far back as it can be traced. The writer of Exodus says that the children of Israel called it 'manna' "*for they wist not what it was*". The Hebrew word is *man hu* - "*What is this?*"

Appropriately enough, however, it is the glory of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem finally to have cleared up the question of manna. Dr. Bodenheimer, of that University, has investigated the problem upon the spot and published a book on the subject, illustrated by photographs. The manna, it is definitely established, is produced by two insects which feed upon the tamarisk tree. They bear the somewhat terrifying names of *Trabutina mannipara* and *majococcus serpentinus minor*. Just as bees visit flowers to produce honey, so do these insects live on the tree and from its sweet juices manufacture manna. Dr. Bodenheimer has photographed them in actual process of producing manna in beads varying in size from pinheads to peas ("like coriander seed, white"). At first the beads are transparent as glass and later they crystallise, becoming milk-white to yellow-brown. They are found all over the leaves and twigs on the ground and are soon carried off by ants. The modern counterpart of Moses'

golden vessel of manna is now in the University, where glass vials of the "bread from heaven" are preserved.

In thus identifying the manna we have not disposed of Divine intervention and reduced this wonderful story to the mere level of a commonplace happening which might be repeated any day. The scanty amount of manna which Sinai produces at the present time would not feed a hundredth part of Israel's multitudes. We need the fruits of research in other directions to illuminate this wonderful story.

The first chapter of Numbers gives the number of men of twenty years and upwards, able to go to war, as being 603,550. The twenty-sixth chapter gives the number at the entering into the land, forty years later, as 601,730. These figures are confirmed by the numbers accredited to each tribe and it makes nonsense of the record to assert, as do some modern scholars, that the word translated "thousands" properly means "families" and that actually there were merely six hundred families that went out of Egypt. According to a leading present-day economist, Colin Clark, in *"The Economies of 1960"* (1942), the proportion of males between the ages of 20 and 60 to the whole population can be taken as averaging 1 to 4. On this basis, and allowing for the tribe of Levi, there would be about two and a half millions of men, women and children in that long trek through the wilderness. One might say, hastily, that all of Sinai would not produce manna enough for such a multitude.

The Scripture itself gives us the data necessary for a calculation. The ration for each person was to be one omer per day (Ex. 16.16-18). An omer is roughly equivalent to three pints, as far as Hebrew measures are at present understood. A little less than a million gallons or 150,000 cubic feet of manna therefore, would be required daily to satisfy the terms of the Bible account. It has been shown that the manna, or rather the insects producing it, depend upon rainy years and the presence of the tamarisk tree. It is known that in former times Sinai was thickly forested with tamarisk and acacia (the latter is the "shittim wood" of which the Tabernacle was constructed). Much of this forest lingered until the nineteenth century. During that century there was a great burning of the trees by the Arabs for the sake of producing charcoal, which was carried into Egypt. So much trade resulted in Sinai becoming almost completely deforested and transformed into the sterile barren waste that it is now. It was only in 1944 that the Egyptian Government decided to undertake the systematic forestation of Sinai to restore its ancient productiveness.

It was shown, some years ago, in a paper *"Climatic changes since the Ice Age"* read before the Victoria Institute, that the world in general experienced a period of intense wet weather about the time of the Exodus and to the 9th century BC. Several features of the plagues on the Egyptians confirm the thought that the time of Moses was one of plenteous rainfall. We have evidence

therefore that the two factors necessary to the production of manna, that is trees and rainfall, were present to an unusual degree. This is with the assurance that Divine control over the powers of nature is constantly exercised in the interests of God's purpose and we may be certain that this was of design. Given the climatic conditions indicated above, the quantity of manna just mentioned could be produced, and gathered over an area of no more than two square miles. The host of Israel, with all the tents and impedimenta required for camping would be spread at any one time, over an area of fifteen square miles, the size of a British city such as Coventry. It need not be thought incredible then, that such a vast host should be able to find sufficient manna for their needs, gathered day by day on either side of the line of march.

But the wonder of the miracle remains. Men of science may reveal to us the nature of this mystic food, showing that God laid hold of that which the wilderness already brought forth. They can bear unwitting witness to the unerring foresight of God for His people's needs and His control of natural resources when they tell us that the climatic conditions at that period were unusually favourable to the satisfaction of those needs. But they cannot explain why it is that for forty long years those myriads of busy insects worked unceasingly for six days in every week and rested on the remaining day! For when the Israelites looked out of their tents on every Sabbath morning, there was no manna on the ground! They needed to gather on the sixth day enough for two days. That mysterious cessation of the natural course on one day in every week has a regularity which is not of Nature unaided – it is of God. Only the One who rules the universe from above could so command and restrain the labours of His creatures that they rested every sixth day so that there might be no manna on the seventh. Therein is the hand of God revealed, as it is revealed throughout the whole of this wonderful account, taking up the ordinary, insignificant things of earth and bending them to His purpose. In that totally inexplicable fashion which men call 'miraculous' He uses them to fulfil a vital need in the execution of His plans.

AOH

'Tis not the duty of the day,
The race you ought to run.
But just the thing you needn't do;
That earns the great "Well done".
The willingness for love to go,
Beyond the single mile.
The measure pressed and running o'er;
That wins the Master's smile.

It is not necessary to be always audibly speaking to God in prayer, or always to be hearing from God by the ministry of his Word to have communion.

GOD IS WORKING HIS PURPOSE OUT

Some thoughts for the newly interested.

"In the beginning" God planned to use a small sun and planets system from among many others out of innumerable galaxies and then took one planet and prepared it as a home for living things. So far as we here on Earth can discover, God has done that no where else in the vast universe, in spite of endless searching. The Bible has nothing to say about exact lengths of time in which God prepared the Earth for mankind. We are given just the simplest details of how He arranged solids, liquids and gases into a home for plants and animals and the process of making the whole system culminated in the appearance of human life. Research has demonstrated the exactness of the Genesis 1 record.

Why did God create the Earth and all that is in it?	<i>"The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork"</i> (Psalm 19.1)
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What God has made demonstrates His incredible love – although that may not always be easy to understand. Towards the end of the Bible we are told that "God is love" (1 John 4.8).

The wonder of God's workmanship is the way that the whole ecosystem fits together. All types of life balance each other in a wonderfully economic arrangement of living things. The first people were told to be stewards to take care of everything upon the planet. Paul tells us in one of his letters that everything that God planned was made by His son, Jesus Christ and everything that has gone wrong will some day be put right in Him (Col. 1.15, 20).

Sadly, those first human stewards of the Earth disobeyed their Creator and the idyllic environment of Eden turned to suffering and misery. Their descendants still need to learn that good stewardship is best done not by selfish, arrogant domination of each other and of the wild life all around them, but by the exercise of love. In His wisdom God had taken rebellion into His reckoning and the entry of wrong-doing did not defeat His purpose, but actually provided Him with an opportunity to demonstrate how effective His love is.

Men and women were firstly to be companions for one another – and also to build up a family. In spite of their initial failure to obey God, they were allowed to continue to fulfil God's purpose and their descendants multiplied and became the first human society. Human sin multiplied too, to such an extent that God planned to remove the whole of human society. His purpose in developing the Earth's resources included a world wide Flood and in the event mankind were washed away in that Flood.

Did drowning everyone in a Flood show God's love?

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of the human kind was great in the earth."

(Gen. 6.5)

God doesn't give us the answer to all our questions but had mankind been left to its own wicked devices, it would have caused more suffering and probably destroyed itself in a much worse catastrophe.

God selected Noah and his family to build a huge floating house and live in it with selected animals for a year. And so eight persons passed from one great epoch to another. Afterwards God promised that he would never again destroy all living things by flooding the Earth and for a while the new humanity lived peacefully and contentedly. But it didn't last and the downward trend in human behaviour continued. God's attention now centred on another family in which he could save the human race from its own self-destruction.

The great father of that family was Abraham, a Hebrew, a man who trusted God and whom God could trust. Abraham was a wonderful man yet his story in many ways is a very human story and details of his life clearly reflect the age in which he lived except, unlike his contemporaries, he lived a godly life. God was so pleased with Abraham and his wife Sarah that He made promises to them and made an agreement (called a covenant) with them. God said that in Abraham's descendants He would bless all peoples on the Earth and to do this He would give the old couple a son (Gen. 12.1-3; 15; 18.10).

Abraham originally lived near the Persian Gulf but God directed him to migrate towards the north-east. Eventually they came to rest in Canaan, a land that God promised should be the possession of Abraham's descendants for ever. They continued to live a nomadic lifestyle until food shortage caused Abraham's grandson, Jacob, to move to Egypt where his son Joseph had risen from slave and prisoner to be the ruler with Pharaoh. Four hundred years later the Hebrews had become enslaved by the Egyptians and God decided it was time for them to move back to Canaan.

Israel's exodus from Egypt is a classic story of an oppressed people's struggles for freedom. The movement of more than two million men, women, children and their livestock through the Sinai desert was in itself something of a miracle. There, Israel's great leader and lawgiver, Moses, had a wonderful revelation of God - who Israel knew as Yahweh. Moses mediated a very special relationship between God and Israel - another covenant - based on God's Law. It was the most far reaching and ethical legal code that mankind has ever had. It was yet another miracle that so many slaves could be formed into a social unit. God prepared His people for their Messiah and His Son during the next thirteen centuries.

Sometimes the various phases of Israel's history appear to be one step forward and two steps backwards. It also appears to be something of a cycle of

religious failure and political devastation followed by repentance and restoration. Yet through it all, Israel were unique among the nations and religions because they believed that their history was progressing from its beginning in Egypt to their ultimate deliverance from their enemies and all evil things, when their cause would be vindicated by the coming of their Messiah.

God gave them leaders who restored their confidence in their Law and more importantly, in their God. Those 'judges' helped Israel to consolidate their establishment as a nation in their own land. God later inaugurated Israel's royalty, and through their kings God's people discovered supremacy among the nations ruling as it was promised to Abraham, from the River Nile to the River Euphrates. By them also Israel were led into moral and spiritual decadence. Again they knew defeat and exile. But God countered their failure by instructing remarkable spiritual leaders called prophets who rekindled the ethics of their Law and led them to spiritual heights quite unknown before. The teachings of these prophets have been imitated by eastern religions. They prepared Israel for their Messiah and His kingdom. Their orations were couched in the most wonderful poetry and prose the world has ever known. They inspired Israel to look forward to a Golden Day when they would lead the world to salvation and reconciliation with their God.

Messiah - Son of God comes at last - what would He be like?	<i>"For to us a child is born" (Isa. 9.6) "a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger." (Luke 2.12)</i>
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At last, the long looked for Messiah came, but because of spiritual blindness, the leaders of the first century did not recognise their Saviour. Instead they slew Him by handing Him over to the Romans on a false criminal charge.

In Jesus Christ of Nazareth, God's purpose had reached the high point of all time. He gave a unique revelation of God and He demonstrated the love that first inspired Creation. Jesus came to express that love in suffering and sacrifice. Unlike the Jewish religious leaders of the first century He taught in ways that ordinary folk could understand. His stories illustrated what God and His kingdom are like and they have never been surpassed. Jesus invited some from among mankind to follow the pattern of His life. He pointed to a time when He would reconcile the fallen human race to their God - who He taught His people to call 'Father'. This was the real turning point in human history, and gave new direction to the day when He would establish goodness and justice in human society. He gave hope in the promise of His return to this planet to raise everyone to life. The work of Jesus and His followers is described in the last quarter of the Bible, and he showed people how to live to the glory of God. That is the ultimate aim of the Christian faith - the aim of God working through history.

"God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year." So ran the old hymn as it pointed to the fact that "... nearer and nearer draws the time - the time that shall surely be, When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea". Many Christians still share that great hope. It is God's purpose to establish Christ's Kingdom although today many feel helpless in this mad, mad world and cry for help. God's people cry out because of the suffering and the all time low of human morality - 'How long, O Lord, how long?' - but God's purpose works itself out in God's time, not ours.

What does God's purpose hold?	<i>The Age old prayer "Your kingdom come"</i>
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And it will come when God is quite ready. Mankind will some day look back to realise that not a tear has been shed nor a drop of blood spilt that has been needless or in vain. God's salvation of mankind will not be a second late. God is always on time - but for good reason He doesn't tell us everything. All Jesus asks for is that we shall be ready - truly ready - for every phase of God's 'Outworking Purpose'.

Jesus promised that He would raise all who are in their graves. Jesus' great friend Peter reinforced this when He spoke of Israel being restored "*that the rest of men may seek the Lord*" (Acts 15.17). Jesus' great ambassador Paul, clinched the matter, when discussing how God's Deliverer will come from Zion to banish ungodliness in Israel and take away their sins. He writes "*God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all*" (Rom. 11.25-32). It is clear that leaders in the early Church believed that what the Hebrew prophets had written about the 'Golden Days' of Israel's restoration would surely come. It is to be a day of rejoicing, when the tears are finally wiped away. It is to be a day of learning to do what God wants, because that is the right and good way of doing things. It is to be a day when the weeds and diseases that have afflicted mankind in the present time will have gone forever. It is to be a time when the Evil One is restrained, never again to tempt those who want to obey God's laws. But those laws will be seen to be based upon love - love of God and love of fellow men and women. We can, if we will, learn to love like that now. But as in the days to come, those lessons of love can only be learned by God helping us - He waits to bless. That is His purpose - the blessing of all mankind as He promised in Genesis 12.

DN

Do not count, when day is o'er
Daily loss from life's rich store;
But the gains however small,
Count them daily, one and all.

A DRUNKARD AND A GLUTTON

Did they laugh, I wonder, or smile? The occasions when Jesus shared a meal with His disciples must usually have been happy occasions, though not without a sense that Jesus was there as their teacher, their Master. But on this occasion?

Jesus had realised that the time had come for Him to leave this world and return to the Father. He loved these men who were His own, and He loved them to the end. "With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer."

Then, knowing that the Father had put everything into His hands, that He had come from God and was going to God, He got up from the table ... and put a towel round His waist and took a bowl of water, and began to wash the disciples' feet.

He came to Peter, who refused. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?... You must never wash my feet!" "Unless you let me wash you, Peter, you cannot be my true partner."

"Then Lord, please, not just my feet but my hands and my face as well!" How typical of Peter! How hasty a reaction! How humble and loyal! And then, how impulsive, from one extreme to the other.

The other disciples looked at one another. Peter was doing it again, trust him to be an embarrassment to them. Did they, on this solemn occasion, exchange a quiet smile? Did they even laugh? (John 13)

* * *

The high, holy and serious purpose of Jesus in coming into the world might seem to conflict with the methods He used in drawing all men to Himself. There is no doubting the serious purpose. "All creation took place through Him... in Him appeared life... the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness Wherever men did accept Him He gave them the power to become sons of God" "Come to me, all of you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, my burden is light." The Word came as a human being, into a world where He could be rejected. For some people, whatever He might do would be wrong. John the Baptist had come in the strictest austerity, and people said he was crazy. "Then the Son of Man came, enjoying life, and people say 'Look, a drunkard and a glutton'." (John 1, Matthew 11)

There were various occasions when Jesus went to parties, or enjoyed a social gathering. The first and most notable recorded in the gospels is the wedding at Cana. This revealed the turning point in Jesus' life which had just occurred, marked by His baptism. It was a family occasion, similar to other weddings which must have occurred in past years, when Jesus was at Mary's right hand. So it was no surprise when the problem about the wine arose that she should turn to Him, invoking their customary alliance. "Ask Jesus, He'll sort it." Judging by

His words, Jesus was no longer willing to get involved. But Mary knew better, and told the servants to do whatever He might say.

He did solve the problem, but the action marked an end as well as a new beginning. For Jesus had left home, He had moved on, and came to the wedding with some of His new disciples. The miracle with the wine was not just a kindly helpful deed to meet the family's social responsibilities, not just the provision of best liquor at a cheerful party. It was a token of what His coming ministry would mean: practical love in action; power expressed in miracles; something far better than people had experienced before; new wine, that would transform society if the Jewish people could accept it. In the immediate situation, Jesus' disciples saw what He had done, and believed in Him, and hoped for more (John 2).

Another notable social occasion followed the call of Levi (Matthew). As Levi sat in his tax office, Jesus had looked him in the face, and said "Follow me"; which he did. He left behind all the paraphernalia of the tax business, but he still had his own house, and there he gave a reception for Jesus. A great crowd of tax collectors and other disreputable people came along to the party with Jesus, and the scribes and Pharisees were not impressed. Jesus gave an explanation for His socializing, which was relevant throughout His ministry. It was analogous to the work of a doctor (conducting group therapy, perhaps?). His aim was to heal people's lives. These disreputable sinners were being helped to change their ways, they were being accepted as people despite their past conduct, with a view to repentance. Jesus' methods constituted a break with the tradition of keeping apart from the criminal, the bawdy, the irreligious. They were being given a taste of the new wine, even if it did not appeal to conservative tastes (Luke 5).

The contretemps between Martha and Mary at Bethany fell upon a social occasion. It may not have been a special feast, but simply the almost routine large scale hospitality which was given when a special guest such as Jesus arrived. Both Martha and her sister were giving proper attention in their different ways to the honoured guest. Meals we know are important, but Martha had become too preoccupied with the many preparations. In the circumstance of Jesus being there, food and drink became secondary, His teaching had priority, and also a personal concern for the Teacher. We need not assume that Mary was being less practical than her sister, to pay close attention and memorise what Jesus was saying was very practical. What Jesus was looking for was not a feast, but sympathy and a sharing of thought (Luke 10).

One Sabbath day Jesus accepted hospitality at the home of a leading Pharisee after the morning's worship. He was meeting with good respectable people, people with strong opinions and set in their ways, people who knew they were on God's side, and people who were very wary of Him, to say the least. His approach was direct and challenging.

A man with dropsy was there, needing healing. The diplomatic thing would have been to leave him alone, hoping for healing another day. Jesus in fact healed him, and brought the question of healing on the Sabbath into context. Jesus asked the company whether they would do anything to save an animal who had fallen into a cistern on the Sabbath day – this is something that the Qumran community who were ultra-strict sabbatarians would not have done. If the Pharisees would not go to that length, what was so very terrible about stretching another point, and meeting the man's sad need straight away? It was a formal occasion. Jesus spoke openly to the guests who were choosing the best places. Socialising means giving as well as getting. It is best to give to those who are not able to return the favour.

One of the guests was inspired to remark how blessed it is to eat a meal in the kingdom of God. Jesus embodied the kingdom, and He knew that there were many there who did not want anything to do with Him. He was reminded of the story then going the rounds about a tax collector (*nouveau riche*, and persona non grata with the Jewish elite) who gave a banquet, but everyone found an excuse for not attending. He told a similar story, which challenged His fellow guests to think, not how cosy it would be to feast in the kingdom, but am I at risk of cold-shouldering God in the same way? What an uncomfortable question to ask (Luke 14).

One social occasion was a lakeside picnic to which Jesus did not invite the guests but found Himself confronted by them. It was a crowd of thousands who needed Jesus - to heal them and to teach them. It turned out that they also needed someone to feed them. Were they a desperate, slightly feckless crowd? Jesus found a way to feed them, with the result that they wanted to have Him for their king. On this occasion Jesus was not the guest but the provider of the feast, responding to sheer need (John 6).

It was to a need that Jesus responded when He had a meal with Zacchaeus. He had spotted the unpopular little man perched in the tree which he had climbed in order to be able to see Jesus. He saw the misery of rejection and loneliness - admittedly self-inflicted - etched on the face above the crowd. He chose a meal as the ideal opportunity for what He needed to do (Luke 19).

It was her need that drove the woman at the feast who wasted precious ointment pouring it over Jesus. She was condemned and criticised, but Jesus spoke up for her. Did she realise that she was preparing Jesus' body for burial, that His time was so short? That was the sense in which He received her action, seeing the love which prompted it. It was once again a question of priorities. Money could indeed have been spent to help the poor, time and time and time again. But this was a unique farewell for a unique person (John 12).

Later, there was the meal that never was. The travelling guest at Emmaus got as far as blessing the bread in a characteristic way, and being recognised Then

He appeared again a few hours later to eat food with His disciples, so as to assure them that He was real and alive. And there was one last meal by the lakeside, reminiscent of past lakeside meetings. Seven disciples were fed, and reassured, and delighted, and forgiven for their lack of faith, and from that simple meal with their Lord they were sent forward to walk the path of discipleship in the new era (Luke 24, John 21).

It would be possible to consider how sharing meals fitted into Jesus' 'mission plan' for His ministry, how eating and drinking together was part of His technique for spreading His message. After all, part of the plan in sending out the Seventy disciples two-by-two was for them to accept hospitality. He used a large gathering for a demonstration of His power, as at Cana or when feeding the 5000. A meal with a Pharisee was a platform for teaching. A feast with Levi was a bridge to the tax fraternity. A meal became a schoolroom for personal teaching and pastoring, as at the Last Supper, or with Mary and Martha, with Zacchaeus, or beside the lake for Peter and John in particular.

We do not know to what extent these occasions were carefully planned, or whether Jesus was simply adept at seizing the opportunity they provided. Certainly He enjoyed life, but He kept the pleasures of the table subordinate to the greater needs of those around Him. In living life, and eating and drinking, and dying - and in being raised from the dead - our Lord was truly one of us.

GC

'JUDGE NOT'

"Welcome the man who is weak in faith, but not with a view to pass judgment on his scruples" (Rom. 14.1 Barclay). Paul uses the word for 'welcome' again in v.7 to include everyone in the church at Rome so why this special word about the 'scrupulous'?

Evidently, this community of Christians was a mixed group, some of whom were of Jewish origin and some had a Gentile background. Perhaps some of the Gentiles in the Rome church had been greatly influenced by Jewish teachers, but not so strongly that they insisted that all men in the Church should keep the Law of Moses and be circumcised, as Jews had in the church of Galatia about ten years before. These 'scrupulous' brethren were being fussy about what they ate and in the keeping Jewish traditional 'fast days'. They were also fussy about what they ate because they refused to eat meat.

In those days, where Gentiles were prevalent in a town, there would be widespread worship of idols and the offering of sacrifices to pagan gods. Nothing really happened to such food and the meat was then sold in the 'shambles' or market place. It may have been difficult to buy meat that was not under suspicion of having been offered to idols or of having been killed by other means than 'kosher' method.

Now the broad-minded Christians were looking down on those who refused meat offered to idols and who observed certain days for religious purposes, and criticised this 'weakness'. But why was it wrong to be fussy? Surely it was good to be careful - circumspect? One of the problems in religious communities is that some feel they can 'buy' their salvation by being 'good' - by keeping rules and regulations. This was the problem with the Pharisees and lawyers of Jesus' day. They lacked faith that God can pardon sin without any help from the sinner. It is an external practice of religion instead of an inward living faith. Religious people must be seen by those around them to be 'good'. This is spiritual weakness and in the Christian context is a failure to trust in Christ for complete salvation from sin. In Rome there were members of the community, who relied entirely upon Christ to forgive their sins and for Him to live within them. Their faith was strong but they were faultfinders and critics of their brethren. Worse, they appeared to be failing to welcome their Christian brothers and sisters into the family. If they were indeed more spiritual, more full of the Spirit, mature and strong in the faith, then they should have shown it by expressing their Christian love in a hearty welcome to their brethren whom they regarded as 'weak'.

Gossip behind the back, criticism to the face, is often due to envy. The one being 'judged' has in reality qualities that the critic would like to have. If this is so, then the way to develop those qualities is to stop judging and be positive by admiring what is good about others. Jesus had something to say about 'judging others' in the 'Sermon on the Mount', recorded in Matt. 7.

"Judge not," He says, *"that you be not judged"* and then goes on to give a parabolic lesson in the 'log and splinter'. We just cannot see the speck in our brother's or our sister's eye because of the log or plank in our own. We must remove the obstruction from our own spiritual vision before we dare attempt to remove the infinitesimal dust in our brother's. Criticism is a very dangerous and damaging weapon and it can be deadly. Who are we to damage or destroy the good name of one for whom Christ died? Who are we to criticise, says Paul, the servant of another - especially when that 'other' is the Master Himself?

Paul (in Rom. 14) knew perfectly well that meat offered to idols was fit to be eaten. If idols are meaningless lifeless statues, putting food in front them will not hurt the food. Paul knew also that all days were the 'Lord's day' - all were Sabbaths or days of resting in Christ. Keeping days special was an outward ritual, harmless in itself but certainly it should not preclude helping others on it. What was really important was that each should be thankful to God for the food He has given and the days of rest from work that He has given.

In Romans 14 Paul had a spiritual lesson that he wanted to impress upon his readers and it concerned the willingness to accept differences of opinion that were conscientiously held. These were about ideas that did not affect the spiritual growth of the individuals. Paul knew that carping criticism did more

damage to the spiritual life than the actual behaviour that was being judged. Perhaps by this time Paul was familiar with the life of Jesus who rebutted criticisms of His disciples by the Pharisees about washing before eating and 'threshing corn' with their hands as they nibbled the grain while walking through the fields on the Sabbath. Jesus also rebuked the disciples for their desire to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village that refused Him entry; and also for their criticism of Mary when she anointed Him with costly perfume. As He said, it wasn't what went into a person's mouth that made him unholy and unacceptable to God but what came out as the spoken word, which were expressions of the heart.

The problem arises when traditions and opinions become obligatory observances. The same difficulty occurs when personal opinions are upgraded to vital teaching. This attitude is apparent today in Christian communities that elevate their personal interpretations to the rank of doctrines but which do not affect spiritual growth. When this takes place within a Christian community true piety is obscured and eventually is lost. Sadly, really important aspects of the faith - notably the relationship with God, is not developed in an atmosphere where scoring debating points is important. This occurs because groups of individuals criticise one another. It occurs because of envy. It occurred in Corinth. *"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time"* (1 Cor. 4.5) *"There is only one lawgiver and judge and he is able to save - who are you to judge your neighbour"* (Jas. 4.12).

O be not the first to discover
A blot on the fame of a friend.
O be not of discord the mover,
For hearts may prove true in the end.

We none of us know one another
And oft into error we fall.
If we cannot speak well of each other
Let's not speak of each other at all.

DN

(The editor would be very grateful if any reader could supply the full poem quoted above.)

Build a little fence around Today
And therein stay;
Look not through the shelt'ring bars
Upon tomorrow, -
Sufficient for each day, the evil
And the sorrow.

‘GOD PUT IT IN MY HEART’

Nehemiah, the pious and zealous patriot who led the Jews in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem at their return from the captivity in Babylon, was greatly used of the Lord in the work of reformation among His people. Although a Jew of distinction, holding the eminent office of cupbearer to the Persian king, he was moved with deep concern and disinterestedness for the returned remnant of his fellow Jews, making great personal sacrifices and enduring much suffering on their account. Yet the credit for the motives that inspired him in all this he humbly attributed to God by his use of the words *"God put it in my heart."* (Neh. 2.12; 7.5).

This mission of Nehemiah nevertheless depended upon the agreement of King Artaxerxes, and the favourable decision made by the king must have been put into his heart also by God. This was true of the earlier commission given to Ezra the priest and he acknowledged this in his prayer of thanksgiving. *"Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem and hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors and before all the king's mighty princes"* (Ezra 7.27, 28).

How often in our experiences we have a sudden impulse to say or to do some kind and thoughtful thing from which we afterwards derive a quiet satisfaction and joy. But do we too readily assume that it has arisen from some innate goodness of our own instead of recognising that God put it in our heart? On the other hand we receive an unexpected reception or some unforeseen treatment from somebody that we thought would react in a quite different way towards us, and we give them the credit and forget that God put it in their heart so to speak or act.

We all think or say many foolish things but occasionally manifest an unusual wisdom. Does God not put that in our heart? In the carrying out of His instructions regarding the construction of the tabernacle, God put wisdom in the hearts of the workers (Ex. 31.6; 35.34; 36.2). The wisdom of Solomon that all the world sought to hear was put into his heart by God (1 Kings 10.24). We may be sure that God who *"hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* is alone the true source of wisdom and any wisdom that springs inherently from ourselves is foolishness to Him.

God can control the heart whether the possessor is willing or not. Those who walk after the imagination of their own evil hearts are just as surely under His restraint. Mysterious as the unlimited license of the wicked may sometimes appear to be, it is not only under God's control but is also working out a purpose for the benefit of His people and His plan of salvation, that eventually will be understood in all its wisdom. How strange otherwise would be those words

"God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will and to agree and give their kingdom to the beast until the words of God shall be fulfilled" (Rev. 17.17). Men do not have to be Christians for God to put things into their hearts. He so overrules their motives that He causes them to do the very thing that will result in a blessing to those who are looking to Him for help.

God put things into the hearts of despotic eastern monarchs who did not acknowledge Him that He might effect His purpose on behalf of those who did. He brought Joseph to the remembrance of the chief butler by means of Pharaoh's dreams (Gen. 41.9) also causing Pharaoh to raise up Joseph from prison and elevate him to the throne. The queen was used to remind Belshazzar of Daniel when the mysterious writing appeared upon the palace wall (Dan. 5.11). By means of a sleepless night (Esther 6.1) king Ahasuerus was reminded of a forgotten service that in the wisdom of God had remained till then unrewarded. As a result Mordecai and his nation were delivered from death and their enemies were destroyed.

We may plan to serve God and make an immense effort to do so, but unless we possess a humble and submissive spirit we shall accomplish nothing. We need to wait patiently for God's time and method and be ready when He calls to us to do His will. Then He will put it in our heart to perform whatever insignificant task He has appointed for us to do, or He will put it in someone else's heart to ask us to do it. We too often neglect to allow for this method by which God uses others in our behalf. There are many instances in the prayer lives of God's children where some unexpected person, who knew nothing whatever about their circumstance, was moved to do the very thing of which they were in need. It was often done unconsciously providing the exact sum of money that was required to meet the particular emergency. God put it into their hearts to answer quite unwittingly the prayers and wants of those who were calling upon Him. Do not the varied experiences in our own lives, covering many other things than material needs, confirm this wonderful truth?

Although God sent faintness and fear of their enemies into the hearts of His disobedient people Israel in the lands of their dispersion (Lev. 26.36) He promised that He would put His fear in their hearts in the time when He will recover them to Himself forever (Jer. 32.40). As the Lord opened the heart of Lydia when Paul spoke to the women at the riverside, so God will open the hearts of Israel under the new covenant. He will pour upon them the spirit of grace and supplication and they shall look upon the One whom they pierced and who was pierced for them, and they shall mourn with a *"godly sorrow working repentance to salvation"* for *"there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."*

"Thou hast put gladness in my heart", said David (Psa. 4.7), comparing his joy in the Lord and its accompanying peace with the inferior pleasure derived

from earthly things. Within us God has implanted such a joy, springing from our faith and hope in the Lord Jesus. He is working in our hearts to supply the needs of others. Sometimes it happens that the thought of someone long forgotten and far away comes persistently into the mind, try to banish it as we will. Is this something that God is putting into our heart? Perhaps a friend is in need of our prayers or of a letter. We have forgotten all about him but God has not, and it may be He is giving us a warning on his behalf, a personal responsibility we cannot pass to others.

If we are of an impetuous nature and quick to act upon impulse, it may not seem easy to distinguish between our own impulse and something that God has put into our heart. Any kindly word or act, however, will be acceptable to God as we seek to serve and follow our Master, and we do not need usually to question whether we are doing right in this respect. We must accept firstly the guidance of the Word of God as our supreme authority. Then if there is still any doubt God will guide unmistakably, the only stipulation being that we are willing in our heart to follow His guidance. For it is He that wills to do the will of God whether pleasant or disagreeable - he shall know. The heart that is continually open to God will be ready to receive whatever He puts into it. For "we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God before hath ordained that we should walk in them." It is God who is working in us both to will and do of His good pleasure. Let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

(From the Forest Gate Monthly)

THE HUNDREDTH PSALM

This psalm is one to be sung before the Throne of God. It is an expression of worship designed to be uttered in the Divine Presence. It is not given to us, as it was to Isaiah, to see in vision the Temple of God opened in Heaven, and to behold the Lord, high and lifted up, His glory filling the sanctuary. It is given to us to approach and worship Him in the beauty of holiness, to draw near in spirit and behold Him by the eye of faith. This Psalm is one of those 'spiritual songs' written aforetime for our encouragement and strength, and it is in the spirit of songs such as this that we can, each one of us, "appear before God in Zion".

Now it is because this is a Psalm to be sung in God's presence that it opens with praise, and more than that, with jubilant praise. No restrained, subdued harmony of quiet notes, this. No softly sung solo, audible to the ears of the faithful few and reaching no farther. This is a universal acclamation of joy, resounding to the ends of the earth, "*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with thanksgiving*". The call is a general one; all peoples, nations and languages are bidden to join in this anthem of praise. Gladness and thanksgiving form the

keynote; sorrow and sighing have fled away. The day of the Kingdom of God upon earth, the day when *"the trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth"* (Psa. 96.13). Then will be fulfilled the words of Isaiah *"It shall be said in that day, '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). That day is to be one of universal rejoicing and the words of this Psalm will find their richest fulfilment in its light.

Although the words are specially applicable to that future day of blessedness, they also have a rich fulfilment now. True, the nations do not now make a joyful noise unto the Lord neither do all peoples come into His presence with thanksgiving. It would be more correct to say of them that they make a discordant noise unto the god of this world and enter into his slavery with lamentation. But in this world of today, dark and evil as it is, there do exist outposts of the new Kingdom, communities of God's ministers of reconciliation. Those ambassadors represent the new world that shall be, they must accept the obligation and privilege of fulfilling the exhortation in this psalm, of making a joyful noise before the Lord and coming into His presence with thanksgiving.

In the literal sphere audible praise occupies a very important place in Christian worship. There are many who cannot discourse or contribute to discussion; nor able to lead in prayer but who can join with all their heart in the voicing of praise. A Praise Service, where the entire congregation joins in the singing favourite hymns, is a very important and profitable form of corporate worship and fellowship. Such a service, well conducted, is a spiritual stimulus to many devoted souls whose voices are otherwise rarely heard in the assemblies. If those voices are sometimes a little out of tune, or grate somewhat harshly upon the ear of those trained to appreciate the technique of good music, of what real consequence is that? We may be sure that by the time those imperfectly rendered songs have mounted the heights and echoed through the halls of Heaven all the harshness and lack of tune has been smoothed away and only the perfect rhythm of pure praise remains,

We need not be afraid of heartiness in our songs of praise. There is a dignity about God's Word but it is not the dignity of a cold, lifeless statue. It is the dignity of a warm, vibrant, living thing, animating all with which it comes in contact and ennobling all that it touches. So when the situation calls for praise to be loud, then let the praise be loud, *"Praise him upon the loud cymbals"* said the Psalmist, and then, upon reflection, decided that he was not being thorough enough, and so wrote *"Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals"* (Psa. 150.5). It was something of this that the Apostle must have had in mind when he spoke of our *"singing and making melody in your hearts unto the Lord"* (Eph. 5.19) for there are high-sounding cymbals in our hearts too, and even although

they are of a kind that only God can hear, they are there to be used.

It is now that a new note of urgency appears in the Psalm. *"Know ye"*, cries the singer, *"know ye, that the Lord, he is God. It is he that made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture"*. These sentiments do not command general acceptance today. To an increasing degree people endeavour to persuade themselves that they owe nothing to God, no need of gratitude for the blessings of life, no acknowledgment of the rightness of His laws, no service and no praise. They will not know the Lord, that He is God, and as they gather together to worship at the shrine of Darwin they chant in unison *"it is we that hath made us, we ourselves"*. God looks down from His Heaven upon them. Who can doubt that there is a gentle, indulgent smile of tolerance as He watches these self-opinionated and so ignorant children whose whole world revolves around their own constricted circle of vision. They will know better one day, and God is quite content to wait.

These verses point to the future Age as the time of their application. It is then that men will know that the Lord is God; then that the manmade theories of modernism and humanism and every other "ism" that at present *"darkens counsel without knowledge"* will dissolve and vanish away like the early morning mists before the sun, and men come to realise at last that they live, and move, and have their being, in God. Then they will become conscious of the great truth that they are the sheep of His pasture. The symbol of the shepherd is a predominant one of that Age. *"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd and shall gently lead those that are with young"* (Isa. 40.11). Men will appreciate that relationship between themselves and their God, and will come willingly under that rule of the iron rod which is the rule of the shepherding rod, firm and wise, yet loving and benevolent guidance towards God's way of life.

What wonder then that the Psalmist, seeing these things, sings exultantly *"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. Be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good, and his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endures to all generations"*. There are several 'gates', metaphorically, by which man may enter and come face to face with God. In the days of Israel there was a Tabernacle, a tent of curtains with a surrounding enclosure, and at the eastern end of that enclosure a 'gate', a way of entry to the sacred mysteries that lay within. But not everyone in Israel could enter by that gate; only Levites. Thus was pictured the great truth that *"he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he rewards those that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11.6). That gate represented the entrance to the condition of justification by faith enjoyed by those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour. To such the world has been left behind; they are pressing forward to a life of service for God. It is with thanksgiving and praise that the advance is made and such can very truly *"enter into his gates"* in that attitude of mind. But inside the "court" of the

Tabernacle another "gate", the "porch" or "door" of the tent itself, stands before the believer, and entrance through that door denotes consecration unto death, a presenting our whole selves living offerings, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service (Rom. 12.1). Even here the progress is not ended, for the sequel to that consecrated life is entrance into "Heaven itself through yet another door, the "veil" in the Tabernacle dividing the Holy from the Most Holy. The believer, progressing from sin to righteousness and from time to eternity, must pass these "three" gates in succession, but he has good reason to pass through them all with thanksgiving and praise.

There are gates, too, through which mankind will be invited to pass, when the time has come. *"Open ye the gates"* cries the prophet (Isa. 26.2) *"that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in"*. What gates are these? They are the gates of the Age to come, the portals through which men will pass from the darkness of this present evil world to the light and warmth of the future Kingdom. John the Revelator in his vision saw the new Jerusalem come down to earth and those gates flung open that all mankind – save the unclean, the wilfully wicked – could enter in. They will enter with thanksgiving and praise. *"The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."* (Isa. 35).

So, at long last, men will realise that *"the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting and his truth endures to all generations"*. Goodness, mercy, and truth; these are the distinguishing characteristics of the Divine dealings. One great song of universal praise and thanksgiving will ascend to the Father when at length all men have tasted of His mercies, sin has been driven away, and the Lord Jesus has said to His redeemed ones *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"*.

BJD

Getting ready to move. The premises were old and dilapidated. When the long lease ran out the house would be demolished. It had been the home of an old couple for a long time. The rooms had their secrets. It was a shell to which they returned with all their troubles. But the very bricks had become porous. The mortar hardly held them together. Would it help to have a little paint here or a bit of new carpet there? Anxious thoughts about what had been "home, sweet home". The world is like that today. It is old, dilapidated and nearly run its lease. The site needs to be cleared. It's a place that had shared our secrets – our cares and troubles but it can't be patched up. A 'League of Nations' and a 'United Nation Organisation' have failed to do that. It is time for the 'Owner' to make it anew. The world's institutions have bled the inmates dry. Get ready to move. (AK – BSM 19439)

NB World (Kosmos) refers to social order – Earth (Geo) refers to our planet.

PAUL AT LYSTRA

A Story of the Apostle Paul

It was not the mere fact that he was speaking to a great crowd which impressed Paul with a sense of exhilaration. It was something else, an indefinable presence which seemed to be overshadowing him, waiting to exert power in some momentous fashion. True, this concourse in which the men and women of Lystra had been brought together in order to hear the message of Paul and Barnabas was a noteworthy thing in a city composed almost entirely of Lycaonians. These were neither Jews, Romans nor even Greeks, and they owned only scanty allegiance to the Roman Empire. As the Apostle looked down upon the upturned faces beneath him and observed the attention with which the people hung upon his words, and their apparent receptivity of the Gospel message, he must mentally have compared them with the cities he had already visited. At Antioch of Pisidia he and Barnabas, attending the synagogue services like all good Jews, had been invited to address the congregation of the faithful. He had received the close attention of his hearers, Jews of the Dispersion, and they were Hellenistic Jews for the most part. Warming to his subject, he had given them a rousing sermon which took them back to the birth of their nation at the coming out from Egypt and led to the time of their famous King David and the promises of God which centred in David and David's seed. From that it was a simple thing to tell them of the events which had taken place in Judea in their own day, of the coming of John the Baptist and then of Jesus of Nazareth, of His life and untimely death, of His innocence and unjust condemnation. Having thus gained their interest, in his own masterly fashion, Paul had connected the giving of the promise to David, that of his seed God would raise up to Israel a Saviour, with the fulfilment of that promise in Jesus, whom God had raised from the dead in order that He might accomplish the salvation foretold. Then in his own inimitable fashion he had issued the ringing challenge "*Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, to you is the word of this salvation sent*" As, now, Paul's gaze roamed over the crowd at Lystra hanging on his words, his memory must have flickered back to Antioch and how he had laboured hard to present his message to his Jewish brethren. But he found that the Gentiles were the more receptive, asking for more of these words to be preached the next Sabbath, so that when the time came he found gathered "*almost the whole city together to hear the word of God*". Again he felt the surge of triumph which flooded his mind as Jews and Gentiles alike acknowledged their acceptance of the message and the call, professed their faith in Jesus the Saviour and came together in that spontaneous Christian fellowship which developed into the Church of Antioch at Pisidia. And again he felt the bitter disappointment when the unbelieving Jews, determined to get rid of him,

made representations to the civil authorities and had him, with Barnabas, expelled from the city.

Here at Lystra, speaking now to just such an attentive audience as he had first found at Antioch, he wondered if events were going to repeat themselves. Expelled from Antioch, he and Barnabas had trudged sixty miles along the high road to Iconium where again they went into the synagogue. Again they were invited to speak and again they found a great multitude of both Jews and Gentiles believing. But again there was a vicious opposition built up by those who did not believe, so that they were constrained to leave the newly formed Church of Iconium and take the high road still farther into the unknown. Was Lystra to repeat the heart breaking sequence and send them once more upon their way with yet another group of immature believers in Christ left to grow in the faith as best they could?

Once more Paul felt that quick stab of feeling, the certainty that this time there was a difference. The power of the Spirit was moving in a different direction; God was about to manifest Himself in a manner not yet experienced. Paul's mind was still upon his subject, the clarity of his exposition unimpaired and the word finding its way into hearts and minds. However, apart from a relatively few Jews this audience was composed of men of another race, and Paul could not be sure to what extent the fundamentals of his appeal were being understood. Was he talking to them in a language they could understand? Did the story of a dying and resurrected Saviour, the fulfilment of Divine promise and the embodiment of Divine purpose, mean as much to them as it had done to the Scripture-trained Jews and proselytes of Antioch and Iconium? That was the question that oppressed his mind as his glance swept over the throng. It was when that glance was intercepted and arrested by a gaze equally compelling, that Paul suddenly knew why and in what manner this day was going to be different.

The man lay there on a little strip of matting, twisted feet hunched up underneath an ungainly body, right in the front line of the crowd just as he had been dumped by his friends. The trouble was obvious; his feet and legs were hopelessly deformed and had evidently been so from birth. From babyhood to manhood he had never walked, never stood on his own two feet, always had to be carried from place to place or make his own way by laborious and painful crawling. But it was not his misshapen limbs which caught and held the Apostle's glance; it was his eyes, fixed upon the preacher with a burning, painful intensity which told more than any eloquent speech how much the spoken words meant to him. In that one moment of time a link was forged between the two men which excluded all else, a link which immediately became a channel for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul had stopped speaking - abruptly broken off in mid-sentence. The crowd stood rigid with attention. Those eyes were fixed on him still, eyes mute with

unspoken question and appeal and with something else. Paul could see it; faith reaching out towards the deliverance it already knew would surely come. Paul realised within himself that the time was at hand for a demonstration of the reality of that saving power inherent in the risen Christ about which he had been discoursing to these Lycaonians.

Slowly Paul raised his hand until he was pointing directly at the afflicted man. The onlookers watched, fascinated. He saw, first wonderment, then hope, last of all certainty flicker into those steadfast eyes. He saw an unconscious effort to move those useless limbs *"Stand upright on thy feet"*. The command rang out over the heads of the audience. The crowd at the back surged and jostled to see what was going on. Those near the crippled man gazed in fascinated attention. The man looked around at the curious faces, made a little movement of his hands, stretched his body – and got to his feet. For a moment he stood, uncertainly. Then, he took a few faltering steps: his confidence grew, he turned towards the crowd and in a surge of emotion leaped into the air. He wheeled back towards the watching Apostle and raised his hands high in the air in acknowledgment and gratitude. A hubbub of excited comment arose from the crowd. This man was healed because he had faith to be healed. So says Luke in his chronicle of the events. There were no Christians as yet in Lystra; this was the first impact of the Christian evangel on the city, so the faith this man manifested was not as yet an instructed faith in Christ. The pagan gods of Lystra could not and did not heal; it was not faith in them which effected the healing. The man must have been a Jew, a Jew of the Dispersion, and the faith he had must have been faith in the God of Israel. But there is more to it than that. The account says that Paul perceived *"that he had faith to be healed"*. His faith told him that the power by which alone he could be healed was of God; but through the risen Christ whom this visitor to his city was preaching. It was not until the crippled man realised for himself and accepted for himself the fact that God was in Christ reaching out to the world of men for reconciliation and healing, whether of mind or body, that he felt the life-giving power energize his muscles and he was able to stand, and leap, and glorify God.

This was perhaps the first outward demonstration in Paul's career of the fundamental truth which he came to understand so well and that forms the basis of all his teaching. Life comes to man from God through Christ, who is the manifestation of God to man and the only channel through which life can come. There are so many occasions in the Book of Acts where the Apostles insist that there can be no life or salvation without faith in and acceptance of Christ. Jesus Himself laid down the same principle. *"He that hath the Son hath life, but he that hath not the Son shall not see life"*. One might ask why this apparently arbitrary dictum should be so stressed. Why must it be that *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath*

raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved"? (Rom. 10.10). The answer is that all life comes in the first place from God, and all life is sustained by God. Jesus is the channel by which all that is of God comes to man, faith and belief is the only means by which that channel can be opened into the mind and heart and body of man. The degree of subnormal life which unregenerate men now possess is like that which the cripple had before his healing defective, incapable of full expression and full use, forever restraining the man from attaining his full development. Later on Paul was to enshrine this principle in one of his grandest utterances. *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 6.23).

The reaction of the people gave Paul his opportunity to drive home the deeper aspects of this truth. After the first moment of stunned silence, pandemonium broke loose. Never before had such happening occurred in their city. There could only be one explanation. *"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men."* Paul's preaching had not as yet reconciled them to the falsity of their many gods. They jumped to the conclusion that Barnabas was Zeus, the principal god in the Greek pantheon, and Paul, because he did most of the speaking, was Hermes, the messenger of the gods. (These are the Greek names as given by Luke in the original; the A.V. has adopted the Latin equivalents, Jupiter and Mercurius). Without more ado the High Priest of Zeus set about acknowledging this signal honour conferred upon the city by collecting oxen and garlands and preparing to offer sacrifice. His enthusiasm was probably considerably increased by the fact that, according to the ancient historians, Zeus had once before, many ages previously, visited the district in the guise of an old man and had been treated rather unceremoniously by the citizens. Finding only one old couple who would give him hospitality Zeus took his revenge in the fashion quite normal with the proverbially short-tempered supreme god of Greece. The priests and people of Lystra were not going to be caught a second time, and so Paul and Barnabas found to their dismay that they were being accorded full divine honour. The sheer horror with which Paul and Barnabas must have realised this situation can perhaps be fully appreciated only by members of the Jewish race brought up, like Paul and Barnabas, to believe in the unity of God who alone is the object of all worship. To be adored as gods must have sent a wave of revulsion through every fibre of their being, and the instinctive reaction is immediately understandable and in full accord with what might be expected. Directly the Apostles realised what was happening they ran in among the people, crying out *"Why do these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways; nevertheless He left not himself without witness in that he did good, and*

gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14.15-17). A wonderful sermon, that, and the more telling because of the circumstances under which it was delivered. Perhaps as a sermon it is as appropriate to the Twentieth Century as it was to the First. The God whom Paul preached was not as the gods of the Greeks, as Zeus and Kronos and Uranus and the rest of them, heedless of the welfare and happiness of mankind, capricious, unjust, lustful, cruel. The stories of Greek mythology show how far the pagans were from thinking of God as inherently good, benevolent, loving, planning and working for the welfare of mankind. But that was God as Paul saw Him and as he preached Him. Later on as his theology developed he was able to show, as he does in his Epistles, how that, in Christ and by means of Christ, the Father will reconcile to Himself every one who has any capacity whatsoever for right doing. To show too that the experiences of this present life are but one part of a mighty purpose that is being steadily worked out. It is the object of preparing and fitting for his designed place in God's creation, every one to whom God has given the blessing of life, and will elect to use that in God's way. He whom I preach, Paul might have said, has no pleasure in the death of him that dies but would that he turns from his evil ways and lives. He was made man for a definite purpose and to occupy a definite place in His creation and works to see that purpose accomplished.

So the little group of converts at Lystra entered into the joy and zeal of their new fellowship in the light of this revelation of the nature of God. It was not long before the revengeful Jews from Antioch and Iconium had traced Paul to Lystra and inflamed the people against him. Those who yesterday had been about to worship him as a god were now found stoning him and leaving him for dead. But Paul was not to be disposed of so easily. He was soon on his way to Derbe, twenty miles distant, where he preached again and waited until tempers had cooled. It was at Derbe that he first made the acquaintance of Gaius, who was probably converted at this visit and afterwards became one of the Apostle's travelling companions in Greece.

Derbe was the end of the journey. The missionaries had been away from their home church for more than a year and probably Paul felt that it was time to report progress. They retraced their steps through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia and so to the seacoast, confirming the disciples in each city *"and exhorting them to continue in the faith"*.

From the port of Attalia they took ship the two hundred and fifty miles back to Antioch in Syria, where their brethren eagerly awaited them.

It had not been a long journey, as journeys go. About eleven hundred miles altogether – not much more than a trip say from London to Cardiff, thence to Glasgow and back to London. But it was the first missionary enterprise of Christian evangelists and it resulted in the establishment of at least half a dozen

or more new centres from which the Christian faith would afterwards extend in turn. In later days Gaius of Derbe and Timothy of Lystra were to become well known in the Church as men who laboured abroad, in the work of the Gospel, co-workers with the great Apostle. Paul and Barnabas must have set foot in the familiar streets of Antioch again with a feeling that it had all been well worth while; they had tasted success and failure, acceptance and opposition, the joys of Christian fellowship and the hardships of persecution. They had sown the seed; now it must be left to God who gives the increase. That must surely have been their inmost thought as they rehearsed before the Church *"all that God had done with them"*, and how in this first missionary journey He had *"opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles"*.

AOH

The Christian African Relief Trust is a charity that sends large quantities of clothing, food, medicines, educational supplies, literature, computers and very much more to Africa (and India). CART began in one Christian gentleman's home - Christian brethren sent needed materials which snowballed so that storage was needed in a barn. Small parcels grew into huge 20 and 40 foot containers. The progress continued as schools and churches began to add to the flow of items sent - bicycles and typewriters - knitting machines and computing materials - aqua boxes and the initiation of major projects. The trustees of the charity never took a penny for expenses and all monies donated went directly to help those in need overseas. Representatives of CART visited the recipients in Africa - and those who distributed the huge quantity of materials were seen to be genuinely in accordance with the charity's Christian ideals. Today CART operates in a well refurbished warehouse in Huddersfield, and close by is the shop, profits of which go directly to the large transit costs of the huge containers. God has truly blessed this wonderful work which in every respect expresses Christian love.

We should fill the hours with the sweetest thoughts
 If we had but a day;
We should drink alone at the sweetest springs
 On our upward way.
We should love with a lifetime's love in an hour
 If hours were but few;
We should sleep, not for dreams but for fresher power
 To be and to do.

Poems of Dawn

NOTICES

Reprinted booklets are available on request- 'Samuel the Greatest of the Judges' - 'The Beauty of Holiness' - 'The Cup of the Lord' - 'Jacob's Trouble'. Also to be reprinted - 'Bible Book for Today' and possibly 'Watcher in Gethsemane'. We are grateful to the Brother who has undertaken the reprinting because we now need only stock several hundred copies of each title and this obviates handling heavy boxes.

* * * * *

Some readers may be disappointed that the next part in the series Studies in the First Epistle of John have been omitted this time. DV it will be included in the contents of the May/June issue of the BSM.

* * * * *

The Bible Fellowship Eventide Trust is a registered charity that owns and manages Gainsborough House - a Christian Retirement Home at Milborne Port.

Gainsborough House is a large Victorian villa where existing buildings surrounding a courtyard were developed into self-contained flats. Several of the flats are immediately available as permanent accommodation or for holidays. The centre is under the care of a Housekeeper who resides on the premises and who prepares an excellent mid-day meal. There are two lounges, a library, a pleasant garden and laundry utilities. It is set in beautiful rural surroundings with the sea and many places of interest easily accessible.

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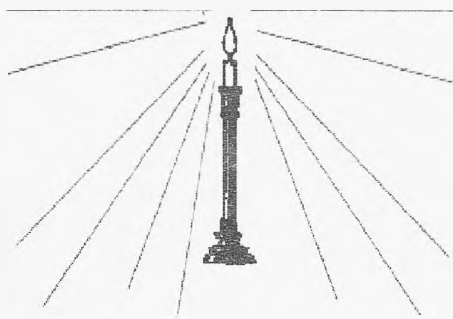
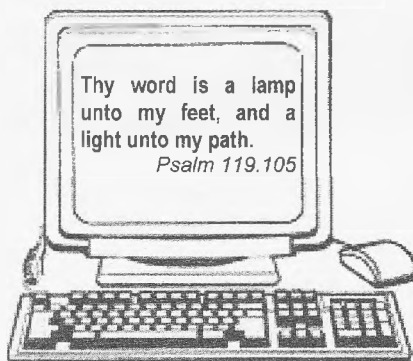
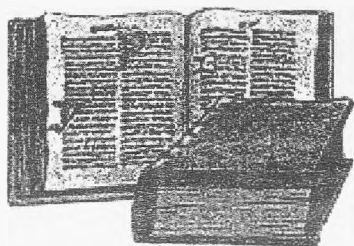
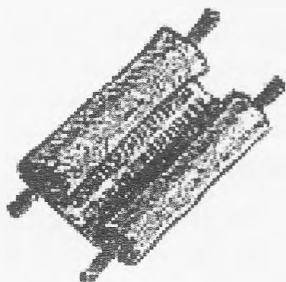
Medical & Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, a charity that has done wonders in those devastated lands by supporting the work of medical teams and hospitals. Their help to the British Friendship Hospital and to the Highlands Educational Development Organisation has been invaluable. Many in those lands whose start in life was so beset by illness, deformity and the tragic results of war, have been given fresh hope and a fresh start. The charity has helped to equip clinics and units that operate in environments unimaginable to us in the West. May God continue to bless the work of this charity.

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)
It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP – Journeying Mercies

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." (Gen. 12.1); *"Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."* (Acts 13.3).

These texts tell us of two of the most important journeys in the history of mankind. They tell us of how God sent people on a mission to fulfil His purpose. These journeys are worth thinking of what they meant to those involved. They left behind friends, neighbours and an environment that were familiar to them in order to go to strange lands and live among strangers. They were pioneers, travellers, whose lives would change and who would change the lives of others. In some way their experiences would never be matched.

Journeys in the Bible are worth pondering so that we picture the conditions under which people moved and lived. What were their houses and tents like? What was food like? Their 'inns' were not 'five star hotels'. Did they walk or ride an animal from one village or watering place to another?

Conditions on some journeys were cruel, as for example for Joseph in chains walking to Egypt. Similarly, for Israelites who trudged to Assyria. But the return journeys were equally triumphant – from Egypt to Canaan and from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Some routes were exciting, like Jesus and His followers moving up the hill from Jericho to Jerusalem, and as Paul and comrades sailed from Troas to Neapolis. Men and women have since made many interesting journeys – some quite wonderful – to the top of Everest, across Antarctica, to the Moon. How did the people of the Bible prepare for their journeys? How do we prepare for our journeys? Do we need a map, a compass, a check list? And why do we make those journeys? Are they a good idea? Are they prompted by God?

Life is like a journey. There is a lovely song to that effect. Are we properly equipped for that journey? Who are our travelling companions? What is our

goal? Who do we meet? Do they need help? Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho ... go and do likewise."

DN

THE DESTINY OF MAN

Part 2 "The Way Back to God"

The doctrine of the Fall is vital to true Christian theology. There has been a strong tendency in modern times to decry the story of the temptation in Eden as quite irrelevant to modern thinking, outworn in the face of modern knowledge. In point of fact, the truth behind the story is much more logical and reasonable than the alternative claim that man is slowly lifting himself out of beast likeness by his own efforts. It is further claimed that there never was a time of pristine perfection followed by a fall into sin. In any case a long, cool look at the present state of human society provides the evidence that man has fallen into sin and is sinking steadily deeper. The Genesis story, stripped of its embellishments, indicates that the root cause of the Fall was disloyalty to God. This constituted the entry of sin into what was previously a sinless world. An old Sumerian legend, probably derived from a dim memory of the events narrated in Genesis, depicts the first man as placed in a garden that he was bidden to cultivate, just as in the Eden story. Variant to the Genesis story, the legend describes a garden in which there were two temples, one to the god who had created the man, and one to another god. But when the creator-god came down to talk to the man he found him worshipping in the other temple. So he had betrayed his creator and forsworn his loyalty. The sentence was pronounced upon the faithless man. *"The face of life until he dies he shall not see"*. Something like this must lie behind the more familiar story of the forbidden fruit as though the partaking of that fruit was a ceremonial act in which the participant formally rejected the good and accepted the evil, and in so doing automatically incurred the penalty. Having once embarked on the pathway of alienation from God, successive generations continued therein and sin in the world became increasingly obvious and increasingly influential. *"God made man right"* said the Wise Man *"but they have sought out many villainies"* (Eccl. 7.29 Fenton). One of the most scathing passages in the Old Testament is that describing how God on the eve of the Flood looked down from heaven upon the degenerating race *"and God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen. 6.5). Therefore, as Paul wrote to the Romans, *"sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom. 5.12). Logically, death is the antithesis of life. If life only continues when the individual is in a state of harmony with God, of loyalty to Him, then the entry of sin must indicate the extinction of that life, the dissolution of the *"living soul"* which subsists when life and organism are joined together and are on the same wavelength, as it

were, to the environment. Canon R. H. Charles in his *"Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life"* (1912) puts this well when he says "the soul is a function of the material body when quickened by the spirit. So long as the spirit is present, ... the soul a 'living soul', but when the spirit is withdrawn the vitality of the soul is destroyed and it becomes the soul of a dead man, that a corpse, the annihilation of the soul ensures inevitably at death". It has to be said here that the re-creation of the deceased individual by the impression of the identity upon a new bodily organism suited to its intended environment, in consequence of a fresh operation of Divine power, restores living, sentient existence (that is the ability to use its senses). This is the Christian doctrine of the resurrection.

Thus did evil come into the world, and increase its power and influence while age succeeds age. As men moved steadily away from God the intimate knowledge of Him, and the power of communion with Him, possessed by early man, became blunted, then obscured. Finally it was almost forgotten except by a few whose minds retained more of the original grasp than those of the majority. Concurrently with the progressive alienation of men's minds from God and the good standards of His creation, came the physical consequences, decreasing bodily vitality and increasing power of disease; the arising of evil traits of character leading to selfishness, greed, malice, hatred, resulting in strife and warfare. The misuse of the environment is becoming so apparent today in widespread pollution of land, sea and air that the entire fabric of human society is disintegrating and heading for a catastrophic end, unless God intervenes. *"The whole world is in the power of the evil one"* said John (1 John 3.19), and that remark is very apt. The forces of evil are rampant in the world, and God seems very far away.

It may be a natural reaction to enquire whether this state of things is by Divine ordering or an evidence that God has lost control of His creation. The answer to both questions is an unqualified 'No'. It is inherently impossible that the Creator of all good, can be the instigator of evil, or that at any time He does not retain full control over all that He has created. The practice of evil is by Divine permission, and is at all times subject to Divine control and could be limited or brought to an end at any moment by Divine command. The logical deduction is that evil is permitted for a wise purpose; a purpose that is connected with man's own development. The disastrous harvest of the twentieth century, is the reaping, the end result of man's attempt to live without God.

Perhaps this experience would be of great value should man find himself freed from the burden and given a fresh start in a world where evil does not occupy the influential position that it does here and now. Is it conceivable that God plans for man to experience the contrast between a world dominated by evil and one dominated by righteousness before he is called upon to make the irrevocable choice, for good or evil, for life or death? The power of evil is a

phenomenon of time only and not of eternity. It has entered the world, to become a means of teaching man the reason that right and good must stand as the governing laws of creation. By its means men pass through experiences which at the end do bring them to God. If all this be so then at least one can begin to understand why it is permitted and not lose faith in the power of God to control its course and its effects, and so it is possible to anticipate a time when evil will be no more.

Such a time must come. Evil being inherently destructive, it has no place in God's permanent creation. The revealed word of God is definite that evil is permitted only temporarily, for a wise purpose, and that the time comes in the history of human development when evil is to be eliminated. It is true that in the meantime the innocent suffer with the guilty and sometimes more than the guilty, but this is inevitable because in the Divine wisdom and order, all men are interdependent. Each man is a member of that unity which is the human race. The entire race is one component part of that greater physical entity which is this earth with all its variety of life, plant life, and basic substance, all of which are inter-related and must function together to maintain their continued joint existence. One is compelled to reflect that the eternal continuance of evil is incompatible with the Biblical assurance that eventually every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue confess Him Lord (Phil 2.10-11), that God will be all in all. Theologians of the past and present have pondered this fact and drawn the obvious conclusions - "the question we have to face is how God could be all in all, and how all things could be summed up in Christ, if evil were to exist eternally ... would not His victory be imperfect, and above all would not his kingdom be incomplete? His conquered enemies would be His enemies still, with wills and desires in opposition to Him, however unable to make that opposition effective. How then could His kingdom be truly universal, and He himself 'all in all'?" Thus writes Archdeacon Guillebaud in *"The Righteous Judge"* (1964). Two generations earlier, Dr. C. A. Row, Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral, had said in *"Future Retribution"*, "Will spiritual and moral evil continue to exist for ever? Will rebellious wills be capable of resisting for ever the power of his Divine attractiveness? Will He not succeed in destroying the works of the Devil, but after all that He has done and suffered, will He leave those countless multitudes, in numbers numberless, who will constitute the overwhelming majority of mankind, to exist for ever in a state of rebellion against God, and in a state of misery which, through the endless succession of aions of the future, will never know even the hope of a termination? To these questions, ignorant though we are as to the mode in which God will solve them, I think that everyone who dwells in love, thereby dwelling in God, and God in him, will answer, God forbid".

Dr. Row has not been the only one to perceive that there can be no

elimination of evil from the earth without having dealt with the question of sin in the hearts of men. Medieval theology thought to solve this problem by consigning the sinners to hell and leaving them there but this no solution, for immortal sinners living an eternal life of evil must forever frustrate the avowed purpose of God in creation. The elimination of evil implies and involves a process by which all men everywhere and all generations may, consistent with their prerogative of free-will choice, renounce sin and affirm their loyalty to God and acceptance of His purpose for them. In theological language that process is called repentance, conversion, acceptance of Christ as Lord, and dedication of life to God. And it involves the question of what happens if, after full opportunity and every possible form of persuasion, the individual steadfastly refuses to turn from evil and accept the ways of God. There can be only one answer. The laws of Nature decree that the wastage of natural processes returns to its native earth and is absorbed. So must the conscious being who will not accept the place in creation for which he has been created, who remains wedded to unrighteousness for its own sake despite the element of disruption he introduces into creation, be found no more. It may be that there will be none such; that the persuasive power of the Most High will have reclaimed even the most obdurate. But if such there are at the end, it can be only because they have, in full knowledge and understanding of the position, preferred to renounce life rather than accept the obligations of communal living and respect for fellow-men. It must be, it will be, that when the Divine purpose for man has been accomplished, *"all that hath breath shall praise the Lord"*.

AOH

NOTICES

TELL A FRIEND - Many readers of the Bible Study Monthly have passed the magazine to a friend and suggested that they become readers. BFU will gladly send the magazine to any address on request.

Another way of sharing your blessings with friends is to draw 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.

CONTENT OF PUBLICATIONS - we have a very wide readership in many countries with differing backgrounds and cultures. BFU tries to maintain high spiritual values and good communication using modern translations and current English. What is printed may not always be the opinion of all those serving with BFU.

THE NEW REGIME

The word regime may not be a Bible word, but it is certainly a Bible thought. One can call to mind the regime of, for example, King Solomon. He was rich, powerful, with many soldiers and horses and chariots, and wives, and he enforced levies on his people and used slave labour to achieve his magnificent building works, at some cost to others. And he died. He was succeeded by his son Rehoboam. At once the question arose what sort of regime Rehoboam would enforce upon the people (1 Kings 12), and encouraged by the young men, his contemporaries, he declared "My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. Whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions". The result was that ten of the tribes would not accept his rule, "*To your tents, O Israel!*" they cried, and Rehoboam was left with two tribes, a divided people and a divided kingdom. He had proposed a new regime, new but not better, and the results were disastrous.

Dictionaries define a regime as 'a systematic or ordered way of doing something', or 'a government'. There are many different regimes in our world, and they all have to be enforced in some way, people are made to do as they are told. There are ruling ideas which have to be communicated, whether by media or messengers, servants or ministers who pass on the word. A regime will have its own ideology, beliefs, inspiration. Some people believe in 'democracy', others in a system based on religion, or race, or nationhood. Regimes may be enforced by power external to people - 'whips or scorpions' - or by the power of ideas internally, when people are taught or encouraged how to think.

Regimes are not only political, there are regimes which we impose in our daily lives. For example, there was a regime we imposed when looking after our daughter's dog, Tess. At her home, in her old age, she was unavoidably left to potter about on her own, becoming more sleepy and fixed in her habits. When Tess came to stay with us, there was a different regime. We had the opportunity to take her for country walks to enjoy the smells of the neighbourhood, and she seemed to gain in health and energy and become altogether happier. In a regime of a different kind, there was once a head teacher who ran a happy school, with a smile for everybody. But his successor made everyone feel small, pupils, staff, kitchen ladies. There were the same children, equipment, classrooms, books, but it was a different school under a new regime.

We, because of what we are, and because of our habits, our character, and our beliefs, tend to impose a regime on other people. Perhaps we intend it, perhaps not. When we come to the meetings, we do things a certain way; or living at home with our family, we do things in a certain way. Thus even unconsciously we impose a regime, and we do need to be careful and aware about what we are doing, and the effect we have on others.

The word regime can mean much the same as 'kingdom', which is undoubtedly a Bible word. The kingdom of God exists wherever people obey Him. It is difficult to point to a place, and say that is a Christian place - or to a Christian country, or a Christian church even, because of imperfect obedience. His kingdom is not a place, not a time, but wherever God rules in people's hearts. This is the internal enforcement of His regime. We desire to obey. We acknowledge that His will is good.

When Jesus began His ministry, the watchword was "*Repent, the kingdom is at hand*". John the Baptist said it; Jesus said it, and the experience was absolutely good, this new regime that Jesus had brought. There was His teaching - the sermon on the mount - the healing, the sending out of the disciples with the good news of the kingdom, and the power of enforcement shown in healing. However, expectations did fade, and it wasn't so wonderful as many people expected. To explain the partial success, Jesus told some of his parables. In 'the sower' He explained why only some people accepted the kingdom, in the leaven He explained the secretness of the work, in the hidden treasure that you had to dig to find the kingdom. 'The mustard seed' showed the plan in the tiny beginning; the dragnet, how all sorts and conditions of people got caught up in following Jesus, not all genuine, not all proper 'fish'. So then there was the thought of the kingdom being future. 'Some of you will see the kingdom in power' and a week later some at the Transfiguration had a vision of the kingdom. Jesus began to tell His disciples that He was going away, and at the Last Supper He spoke of drinking wine with them in the kingdom to follow. The new regime at that time did not become countrywide or universal, but it did take root in people's hearts.

Jesus was quite fussy about who He would let into His kingdom. You must 'receive it as a child' - enthusiastic, no inhibitions, glad, determined, wholehearted, ready to be taught. Jesus foresaw there would be a lot of one-eyed people in the kingdom for it is better to lose one eye than to go somewhere else with two - there are sacrifices necessary to enter the kingdom, though the things lost will be replaced by something better. It was hard for rich men to get into the kingdom, though repentant tax collectors could do so. You can't even see the kingdom unless you have been born anew, there is that change that has to happen before we enter. But when you do enter, isn't it great! "I am a new creation" says the hymn - that is what entering the kingdom is as the hymn puts it, with "a lightness in my spirit" - even if there are times when we don't feel that way. And as another hymn goes, the kingdom is "turning the world upside down." It is not a safe option, not 'danger, men at work' but 'danger, God at work'. We find ourselves changed. Because of our Christ-like example other people are going disturbingly to find their ideas turned upside down. And we look beyond that, because the new regime did not just exist when Jesus was teaching on earth, it is not just our experience now, it will be the kingdom to come.

In her book, 'Heaven - what will it be like?', Joni Eareckson Tada has a section on what we will do in heaven, and which includes ruling over the earth with Christ. Joni, you remember, is the girl who aged 17 broke her neck in a diving accident, and since then has had an outstanding Christian ministry from her wheelchair. She speaks of being part of the way the regime is communicated and the way the work is done. "I wish I understood the specifics, but God hasn't revealed them all. We are priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years we will reign with Christ over the earth. For the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope it will be liberated from bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. The creation is groaning I sense this when I see smog or a junkyard or dead raccoons lying in the road Something's coming, something better. The possibilities are endless as well as invigorating. Maybe our reign on earth will include lifting up the poor and needy of Kurdistan, or reforesting the hills of Lebanon, or helping judge the wicked ... clearing the courts of corruption, schooling judges in godly wisdom teaching the nations a new definition of peace ... doing a patch job on the ozone layer ... telling everyone that a theocracy is the only rule in town ..." Each one of us will have a glimpse of the specifics of the new regime, and we may include the hope of all men being brought into God's marvellous light - those whom He has raised, those He will forgive, those He will heal.

In the meantime, this new regime needs to be established in you and me. I came across a little book entitled 'Submitting to God', which seemed very much to the point. Then I discovered the book was about introducing Islam. Well, 'submitting to God' is where they start, and it is a good start. Add to that, learning what God is truly like, and how Jesus reveals Him.

In another little book [written by a gentleman who became Queen Victoria's chaplain over a hundred years ago] I read the phrase that we belong to Jesus, the Son of God, "by purchase, conquest and self surrender". This indicates a process by which His regime is established in me, in you.

As for purchase, we understand that we are not our own but bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6.20). We're slaves of Christ (7.23). Sadly, some people because of their behaviour are in effect denying the Saviour who bought them (2 Peter 2.1). In Revelation 5 we are described as purchased, ransomed by His blood. We're His. Ransomed for God, to be kings and priests and reign. We belong to Him, His regime is established in us by right. He has given Himself for all the world and for us.

As for conquest, to be children of God is not merely a matter of 'legal' status, there is a process of each day being brought into conformity, time and again, time and again. A hymn speaks of the process of moving on from the position of "all of self, none of Thee" to that of "none of self, all of Thee". Lord, thy love at

last has conquered!

And so we come to self-surrender. This is not just giving in after an inward struggle. It is gladly accepting what He has done for us, what we are in Him, and what He can make us. This is the "new commandment" of the new regime, that we love as He has loved. Love encompasses all our lives, and all the gifts of the Spirit. Joy is love exulting, peace is love at rest. Patience is love put to the test ... and so on. Love is part of everything. It is more than struggle, it is lightness of spirit, it is song and dance, it is going to sleep in the meetings (and not being ashamed), it is serving each other, it is serving those we don't like too much. The presence of Christ's Spirit in us is love.

The new regime is love.

(Based on a Conference Address) GC

NIPPUR – CITY OF THE MOST HIGH

One of the world's earliest cities of which traces and records still remain is Nippur, the holy city of the people among whom Abraham lived, the Sumerians. Founded about seven hundred years before his birth, and not long after the founding of Babylon, it shared with that city the distinction of being, at first, sacred to the Most High God. This was at a time when paganism and idolatry had not as yet had its rise in the earth, and the God universally worshipped was the God of Noah. So although this city is mentioned only once in the Bible it is of some interest to the Bible student who would know more of the true faith as it was revealed and preached in those early days of human history.

Nippur is mentioned in Gen. 10.8 under the name of Calneh as one of the four cities springing from the dominion of the celebrated warrior Nimrod. The reason for the difference in name was not known until modern times although the Talmud insisted that Nippur was the city alluded to in Genesis. It has been found in our day that Nippur – in the native tongue Niffer – was its name in later Old Testament times and until its disappearance in the Twelfth Christian century. In ancient times, the days of Abraham, it was known as Enlilki, meaning the city of the Sumerian god Enlil, at that time the god of the heavens. At some intervening time a scribe translating the old cuneiform record of Genesis into Hebrew mistakenly read the cuneiform sign for the city name backwards. He thus produced the consonants k-l-n, which the later Masorites, when they came to add vowels to the Hebrew words, turned into Kalneh or Calneh as now in the AV. Here is one evidence of the antiquity of the Genesis record; had it been composed in the era of the Israelite monarchy as many text books still claim, the later name would have appeared.

The earth was still very thinly peopled when Nippur was founded, not yet a city, a small settlement of reed huts but already having a temple of baked brick, sacred to the Most High. The episode of the Tower of Babel was probably at

least two centuries in the past and the people had scattered, as Gen. 11 said they did. The sons of Japhet had gone north, penetrating Europe on the one hand and Siberia on the other. Those of Shem, Abraham's ancestor had taken the northern area of the Euphrates-Tigris plain and made Babylon their holy city, also sacred then to the true God. Bab-ilu, they called it, the Gate of God. The sons of Ham had emigrated, to the south, and in after years produced the Egyptians and the Canaanites and the peoples of North Africa, but one of them, Cusho remained in the plain and developed the first great world civilisation, that of Sumer. So Nippur became their holy city and was always held in veneration on that account. It is rather intriguing to think that in those early days, before Jerusalem existed, there were two holy cities where the worship of the true God was kept alive, continuing on from the days of Noah nearly a thousand years earlier, and that just about the time that worship was being corrupted by the development of idolatry and paganism, the eternally holy city, Jerusalem, the city of God, came into being in the land which the Lord had already destined to be peculiarly his own. There would seem to have been no time in those far-distant days when the worship of God had altogether vanished from the earth.

No one knows when Jerusalem was founded. The recent discovery of the ancient city-state of Ebla in northern Syria has revealed that Jerusalem was in existence at least three or four centuries before Abraham and that points roughly to the time when polytheism - the worship of many gods, began to be developed from the original pure worship and both Babylon and Nippur ceased to be holy to the Most High God of heaven. It could be conjectured that some faithful souls of the line of Shem before Abraham was born perceived the drift of events and forsook the land of Sumer as did that patriarch after them and migrated to the as yet undeveloped land of Canaan, there to establish a new holy city which should perpetuate their faith and their worship. Thus when Abraham in his turn entered that land he found Jerusalem ruled by a king who was also "priest of the Most High God" and the patriarch accepted him a fellow-worshipper with himself. He later found other fellow-believers, Abimelech king of Gerar in the south land, and Pharaoh ruler of Egypt with his people, all similarly believers. As the true faith died out in one place it become re-established in another, and thus it has been through all history. By the time of Abraham, Nippur was a sizeable city, very similar in nature to the two which do figure in Bible history, Babylon and Ur of the Chaldees. It is very likely that Abraham knew it well, for it was only a hundred miles from his own home at Ur. It must have been well known to Daniel also, fifteen hundred years later, for many of the Jews taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar settled in Nippur, and it carried a thriving Jewish population continuously from then until the Middle Ages. It was in fact then that the well known Jewish flair for commercial dealing came to the top. When the city was excavated in 1887-1900 by the University of Pennsylvania, there was

found among the thirty thousand inscribed tablets discovered on its site, what amounted to complete collection of records of the commercial dealings of a firm of Jewish bankers and dealers named Murashi and Sons. This covered the period from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC to the year 403 BC, a period of nearly two centuries. The enterprising Murashi (his Babylonian name) had apparently been brought from Jerusalem with the captives and had set himself up in business with his headquarters at Nippur and before long was trading in every conceivable kind of merchandise, including, regrettably, male and female slaves, banking and lending money at thirty per cent interest, financing state projects at considerable profit, and with complete impartiality supplying weapons and stores to both sides of any pair of city-states wanting to go to war with one another. (The armaments manufacturers still do the same today, of course.) The ramifications of Murashi and Sons extended all over the Middle East and their activities must have contributed in no small degree to the prosperity of Nippur. It is of interest to note that during the excavations, there were discovered a number of "banknotes" of the time, worded just like modern banknotes but made of baked clay tablets instead of paper.

Nippur was inhabited up to the 12th century AD and was by then not only a Jewish centre but the seat of a Christian bishopric. Then came Turkish domination and the whole land languished. The city lost its prosperity, the inhabitants drifted away, the houses collapsed into ruins, and the desert sands covered what was left until Austin Layard in 1851 discovered the site of the old city. Since then modern excavation has revealed much of its secrets and ancient history, and added considerably to the world's knowledge of Abraham's day and earlier. Like its sister city Babylon, it was once a holy city to the Most High, but idolatry came in. It became a centre of paganism, and the proud title passed to a city which will bear it to all eternity, Jerusalem, the city of the great king.

~ AOH

"To all ... lowly souls God gives grace and glory. With both hands He will give and give again. Only we must practice the habit of taking. Grace is the bud of which *Glory* is the flower. If God has given the one, He will not withhold the other (Rom. 5.12). If anything is withheld from us we may be sure that it is not absolutely for our good. No *good* thing will the Father withhold: but He will not give us scorpions, however beautiful their appearance; nor stones though painted to resemble bread. Prayer:- Teach us to abide with Thee in our daily calling, and to realise that each sphere may be a temple for priestly service. Amen"

(From "Our Daily Walk" - F. B. Meyer)

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 5 1 John 2.7-8

The 'beloved disciple' seems to have entered much more fully than any other of the Twelve into the depths of Jesus' teaching. Here and there in this epistle there are allusions and remarks which seem clearly to have their basis in some vital thing which Jesus said at some time during His ministry. Such a word comes before us now in this 7th verse. *"Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning."* Now this 'old commandment' can hardly be anything else than the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament and all that they had to say about Christ. In the next verse John goes on to talk about a 'new' commandment which he writes to the brethren. It must of necessity be that the new commandment is something that he received from his Lord, for John would not assume the prerogative of laying down even newer commandments after his Lord had ascended on high. The "old" commandment therefore must be that which Jesus had in mind when he said *"Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil"* (Matt. 5.17). One of the greatest truths of the New Testament is what John is endeavouring to impress upon his readers. It is that Christianity did not spring, as it were, fully fledged into the world without any previous preparation, but came as the logical sequence to a long process of development that had its commencement in the Law given to Moses at Sinai. Jesus never repudiated that past basis upon which His message was founded. To Him, the words and works of the fathers, the Law of Sinai, and all that these had meant to Israel was something that had come from God and because it had come from God must be held in due honour. True, He never failed to denounce the formalistic additions that men had built around and upon the Law and He condemned the hypocrisy and blindness of those who had done those things. But for the Law itself He always maintained that reverence and respect which was due to words that had at the first been written by the finger of God and given to Moses on the top of the Mount.

So John hastens to disclaim, in his turn, any intention of belittling or denying the principles which had made Israel what it was and had brought his readers to the position in which they could understand and accept Christ.

"The Law" said Paul in another place (Gal. 3.24) *"was our schoolmaster" (paidagogos or pedagogue, child-leader) "to bring us unto Christ"*. That allusion is to the family tutor, often a slave, whose duty it was in Greek families to instruct and guide the children of the family whilst they were young and immature. *"But after that faith is come"* Paul continued *"we are no longer under a schoolmaster, for you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."* The Law trained the believer so that he could recognize Christ when He came.

It is true that only a few, 'a remnant', as Paul elsewhere calls them, profited sufficiently by the training of the Law to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah: but in the training and development of those few the Law had done its destined work and was vindicated. For the successful accomplishment of that work, the Law stood in eternal honour, and John realized, as Jesus would have him realize, that the "old commandment" was the indispensable preliminary to the new grace in which all the believers stood and in fact was incorporated in that new faith.

Yet the very fact that the Law and Prophets were intended to develop, and in a sense, "bring forth" the newer and greater revelation of God in Jesus Christ, implies that the demands and the obligations of the Law and the restrictions of the Law must become of no effect. They must break down and fall away, as soon as Jesus ushered in the new dispensation. In all development, that which is developed is a greater and a grander thing than that from which it is developed, and as the new comes to birth so must the old give place and disappear. That is what John the Baptist meant when he said *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* The Baptist knew himself to be the last of the old order, the last of the prophets, the last to call Israel to full compliance with the Law. Christ stood before him, Christ who would make an end of the Law to everyone that believes, who would cause it to be swallowed up in the brighter effulgence of His own new message, and lift those who came to God to a plane of understanding and union with Him higher by far than anything that had ever been experienced by Moses or Samuel or Elijah or the son of Zacharias.

That is exactly what John, the beloved disciple, has in mind now. Knowing that he has given due recognition to the old law out of which the new has been developed he goes on to explain that, for Christians, the new commandment is necessary. Not for them the mere unreasoning adherence to ritual and ceremony, to sacrifice and keeping feast-days and 'washing of pots and cups'. *"Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines"* (v.8).

Jesus often spoke of the 'new commandment'. Sometimes it was a direct injunction, such as *"a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another"* (John 13.34). Sometimes it was not so direct but none the less a clear injunction to do something that was inherent in the spirit of the old Law but not covered by its letter. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time ... but I say unto you ..."* So many things there were in the whole scope of human relations that Jesus lifted to a higher standard; so much higher, that He virtually changed the law for His disciples without abrogating anything of the old injunctions. So it comes about that every disciple who keeps the law of love, enjoined by Jesus upon His followers, automatically attains to a higher degree of keeping the law of Moses than was ever achieved by any Israelite in all the fourteen centuries that the Law was incumbent upon them.

This new commandment, says John, is "true in him and in you". There is a wonderful indication of communion of common-union between our Lord and ourselves in that expression. The earnest, pious Israelite, who brought his animal for sacrifice to the Tabernacle or Temple, as prescribed by the Levitical ritual, was taught to feel a sense of oneness with his God as the smoke of sacrifice ascended into the sky. For all that God was still very far off and in any case the priest must stand as an intermediary. The offerer, no matter how earnest or how pious, may not offer on his own account and stand directly in the presence of God. With us it is different. We have *"boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus"* (Heb. 10.19) and we can by reason of our consecration of heart and life to God, and our acceptance by Him, enter into the privilege of full and direct communion. Nothing less is implied by the fact that *"now are we the sons of God"*. Nothing less than this is the honour bestowed upon those who have heard and responded to the call *"My son, give me thine heart"*.

"Because the darkness is past and the true light now shines." According to the Greek, John's words mean *"the darkness is passing away"*. Notwithstanding all that He has implied in his previous words as to the value and necessity of the Law and the Prophets, and his insistence that they are not to be rejected or repudiated now that the fuller light of Christianity has come to make the way more clear. Yet it is true that compared with the glorious radiance of the Christian evangel, the Mosaic dispensation was as darkness. That was the darkness that was passing away because *"the true light now shines"*. Perhaps John was thinking of the burning words of his namesake, that other John who stood and beheld the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sins of the world, and in beholding Him had exclaimed, rapturously, *"that was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world"* (John 1.9).

Out of the darkness of the Jewish era with its Law of Moses came the light of the Gospel with the higher law of love and its clearer view of the Divine purpose. It is not surprising to find light coming out of darkness. 'In the beginning' it was the same. The earth was enshrouded in darkness, and *"God said, Let there be light; and there was light"*. So Zechariah, looking forward to the grand consummation of God's Plan, when evil and sin and death have been done away forever, says *"At evening time it shall be light"* (Zech. 14.7).

The whole story of man's upward struggle toward the destiny that God planned for him at the beginning is one of the passing away of darkness and the final triumph of the light. So John looked to the great work of the present time, the Calling of God in Christ Jesus whereby the *"seed of Abraham"* is selected and made ready for the future Millennial work of the service. Realising how infinitely superior that work is to the old work with Israel after the flesh, he says, *"the darkness is passing away, and the true light now shines."*

(To be continued) AOH

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is probably the best known of Jesus' wonderful stories. Its perceived moral is used in all kinds of ways in ordinary conversation and its title has been used in various forms including a well-known charity. The record of the parable is in Luke 10.25-37 and Jesus told it in reply to the question 'who is my neighbour?' A scribe asked Jesus what he had to do to obtain 'eternal life'. He really started off on the wrong foot. Firstly, he stood up to test Jesus, which places suspicion on his motives for asking the question - did he really want Jesus to lead him to eternal life or did he just ask to see if he could trap Jesus? Was it all academic? Like so many religious people the lawyer wanted know what he had to do by which he could earn eternal life. Jesus replied by asking the lawyer what the Law had to say about the question. When the Lawyer recited the summary of the Law from Deuteronomy 6.4 and Leviticus 19.18, Jesus said that if he did that he would live.

Students of the Word frequently assume that perfect keeping of the Law would give people in Israel "everlasting life" and quote such Scriptures as Deut 30.15 but it may not be as simple as that. Firstly, the ancient concept of 'living for ever' may not be the same as our idea today. Secondly, Moses may have been speaking of the corporate body of the nation that would go on living for ever, if faithful to the Law, rather than individual Israelites. 'Eternal life' can be a concept of the quality of life rather than one of years and centuries and millennia. God knew at Sinai that He was giving the Law to sinful people and that as individuals they could never wholly keep the Law. That is why it contains means by which they could be forgiven but even that means was a picture of the real process of providing forgiveness in Christ.

Apparently the scribe already knew the answer to his question but he wanted to justify asking it in his effort to 'test' Jesus. In His interpretation of the Law, Jesus appeared in the eyes of Jewish religious lawyers to encourage His followers to break the Law. That was not so and now He advocated keeping it. In the 'Sermon on the Mount' Jesus had already shown that He interpreted keeping the Law in a very different way from the Jewish teachers. He now had an opportunity to show that living to please God is very different from that of human religion or philosophy. It is a life style that He demonstrated in His own life.

So Jesus answered the Lawyer's second question in a simple tale with a profound meaning. It is a parable which shows what God's love is like. 'Love', is like the word 'good', as used in the title of this parable, and has a very wide spectrum of meaning in English. We use one word 'love' in all kinds of ways, but a first century Greek speaking person would use several different words. God's love is denoted by the Greek word 'agape' and is described in Paul's

well-known chapter in 1 Cor. 13. The prophets of Israel had been working towards a clearer understanding of God's love, otherwise it was unknown until Jesus gave mankind the new concept. 'Agape' must be differentiated from the love between the sexes - eros - which is never used by New Testament writers, and the love within the family circle, 'storge', is rarely used. The love between friends - 'phileo' occurs more often in the NT and is carefully differentiated from 'agape' in John 21. The love of God is always described by 'agape' and is the love that bears the fruit of the Spirit. But the word is not actually used in the parable of the 'Good Samaritan'.

It may be surprising that Jesus used a member of the hated Samaritan race as the hero of this parable. It was to a disreputable Samaritan woman (John 4) that Jesus revealed His Father's requirements in worship - not in place nor form but in what is sincere and true. Jesus had wanted to stay for a night in a Samaritan village but the villagers rejected Him - it's in the previous chapter Luke 9.

When ten men with leprosy asked Jesus for help, he healed the medical condition of them all but only a Samaritan returned to say 'thank you'. Jesus commented on this and called the man a 'foreigner'. So what was the Lord doing by taking a different attitude to the Samaritans from what Jews usually took? Was He pointing the way that the Gospel would take after Pentecost? When He gave directions after His resurrection He told the disciples that they must go to preach the good news of the Kingdom in Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1.8). This began to be fulfilled when Philip the evangelist went to Samaria (Acts 8.4-25).

In the story, a traveller appears to have taken the lonely road, down from Jerusalem towards the River Jordan - a winding road that drops more than 3600 feet. It is still notorious for brigands and robbery. Robbers set upon him as he went and took all that was worth taking and left him dying by the roadside. Two 'religious men' looked at the injured man, and did not give him a second glance. They avoided the problem of defiling themselves by touching what might have been a corpse. As Barclay points out they "set the claims of ceremonial above the claims of charity" and "the Temple and its liturgy meant more to them than the pain of a man". Both worked in the 'holy Temple'. They could jeopardize their opportunity to serve God in His house. After all the man had been fool hardy to travel alone and with valuables worth stealing. The bandits might still be in the vicinity.

Then a Samaritan came by. Religious Jews had called Jesus a Samaritan (John 8). They thought of Samaritans as foreigners because their ancestry included people who had been moved there by the King of Assyria when he conquered the land hundreds of years before. They possessed the Pentateuch containing the Law of Moses and they had learned much of the Jewish religion, but they were regarded as a mixed race by pure-bred Jews. The Samaritan

stopped his donkey, got down to the injured man and examined him. He washed the man's wounds with wine to cleanse them, useful antiseptic in days when water was often contaminated. He then used oil to soothe the wounds as an ointment binding it in with cloths. Finally, he sat the man on his donkey, himself probably walking, and took the 'patient' to the nearest inn. He left him there until he should return and meantime paid for the man's care and keep.

The Lawyer spoke of the Samaritan as having 'mercy'. In Micah 6.8 the prophet tells Israel what the Lord requires of His people – "*do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God*". The Septuagint translation of that text uses the same Greek word for mercy '*eleos*' (Luke 10.37). But Jesus uses the word '*splanchnizomai*' which means 'compassion' (10.33). It is a word used in the Gospel to describe Jesus' deep concern for those in need. It is a word regarded by scholars as having not come into use until the dispersion.

The holy men of the Temple knew the Law of Moses by heart and the interpretations of it by the rabbis. What they did not know was that God's holiness is a positive quality not a negative one. Maybe they failed to see the glory of God that Moses had seen on the Holy Mount when he learned that his Maker was a God of compassion (Ex. 34). Or how the great man of God practised in his daily life what he had learned in the vision, when he prayed that his rebellious sister should be forgiven and that God would remove her leprosy.

As one child of God said as he neared the end of his long journey, just as he reached his hundredth year, "it isn't what we know or even what we do that matters, but what we are." We may know all manner of things about the Scriptures that help us on our way toward 'Life Eternal' with Christ in the Heavens. But that elusive quality of life is not ours till we have learned to be like Christ, totally compassionate and merciful. We begin to take on that quality, not from reading books but from reading the 'Good Book' itself and from walking every day with Jesus. Then when we walk our 'Jerusalem to Jericho road' we shall know exactly what we should be doing and we shall do it.

DN

"What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light" – Matt. 10.27. "There is music, tenderness, love-notes in these dark sayings, like those upon the harp, of which the Psalmist sings (Ps. 49.4); the voice that utters them is not harsh, but tender and gentle. They are intended to teach us how to teach, to enable us to help others who could not understand these hidden things. We have to be taken into the dark, as sensitive paper, to receive impressions that will give pleasure and help to hundreds who could never pass through our experiences."

(From "Our Daily Walk" – F. B. Meyer)

THE SERVANT OF THE PRIEST

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus" (John 18.10). The occurrence is recorded in detail by all four of the Evangelists: they appear to have invested it with some degree of importance. John even takes care to preserve the servant's name. It seems so irrelevant an addition to the story that one wonders if there is more hidden beneath the surface than appears at first sight. It was in all probability the Temple guard under the control of the High Priest, together with a party of Roman soldiers under their own centurion, which set out to arrest Jesus. Without doubt the High Priest's personal representative would accompany them to ensure that all went according to plan. Peter, the impulsive, would quite naturally pick on this official as the first object of attack in his unavailing defence of his Master. The subsequent action of Jesus is the last of His miracles of which we have any record before His death. Malchus was probably the last human being to feel the kindly touch of those life-giving hands and to experience the thrill of creative vitality run through his body as the healing power flowed into him and made him whole. But would this be the only reason for the prominence given to this apparently quite trivial happening?

Did Malchus become a believer as the result of his experience? Was his name preserved by John because in later years the Christian assemblies had been familiar with the presence of a man who had once gone out to assist at the arrest of Jesus of Nazareth and had ended, like Saul of Tarsus, by becoming a devoted follower?

There is a hint in one of the early Christian writings that seems to indicate that the Christians of the first century knew more about this matter than we do today. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 15.7 that our Lord, after His resurrection, *"appeared unto James"*, his own natural half-brother, the one who became the head of the infant Church at Jerusalem, presided over the historic conference recorded in Acts 15 and wrote the Epistle bearing his name. Paul adds no detail of that appearance. He speaks as though it was a story already well known to his readers, as doubtless it was. In the document known as the Gospel to the Hebrews which is thought to have been written about seventy years after the Crucifixion and therefore about forty years after Paul's death, the story then current among the Christians as to Jesus' appearance to James is given in greater detail: with it is a casual allusion that may constitute a link with the story of Malchus.

"Now the Lord, when He had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared to him." Who was this "servant of the priest" who, according to Christian tradition, was present at the tomb when the resurrection took place? It is recalled that the first witnesses of the resurrection

were the members of the guard, who actually beheld the rolling away of the stone, a feat which was already completed when the women arrived on the scene (Mark 16.4). These keepers were not Pilate's soldiers, but were drawn from the Temple guard, as is evident by a comparison of Pilate's reply, "*You have a guard of soldiers, make it as secure as you can*" (Matt. 27.65), with the action of the guard in reporting the sequel to the priests and not Pilate (Matt. 28.11). What is more likely then, that Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, present at the arrest in Gethsemane, should also be present with – perhaps in charge of – the guard at the tomb? And if this is so, what must have been his feelings, when in the very early hours of that morning, the ground heaved and the rocks shook, the great stone closing the tomb, rolled back, and Malchus and his men, confronted with an altogether unexpected and awe-inspiring sight – "*for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men*"? (Matt. 28.4 RSV).

Whether Jesus Himself appeared to the guard before their precipitate flight, and before the women arrived at the tomb, the Gospels do not say but the incident related in the "Gospel to the Hebrews" may enshrine a verbal testimony which has not been incorporated in the canonical books. Is it possible that this man who suffered at Peter's hands and was miraculously healed by Jesus was also a witness of the resurrection, knew in a flash that He had indeed triumphed over death, and in the wonder of that meeting became a believer?

Who was it that saw the mighty angel, glorious in appearance, roll back the stone (Matt. 28.2)? Not the women – the stone was already rolled back when they arrived. This particular piece of testimony must have come from one of the guards or from one who was present with them. And whose testimony was afterwards accepted by the infant Church and incorporated into Matthew's Gospel.

Is it the truth of the matter then, that Malchus became a Christian and, although his testimony to the Resurrection is not preserved in the Gospels, something of the wonderful thing that happened to him on that wonderful morning has been preserved in the traditions of the early Church?

AOH

There are very few who are not at some time brought under the shadow of false accusation. The natural way is to meet it with denial and self-defence. But that is not the New Testament way. There is a better, surer, higher way. It is to give the false accusation a plain, simple square denial and then leave the life and the truth to do the rest. It is not my business to take care of my reputation; it is all I can do to take care of my character. If that is clean and pure, the light that is within me will shine on and out and eventually pierce and dispel the clouds.

(BSM Feb 1939)

THE SPIRIT OF POWER

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1.8 RSV).

This was the promise which restored the disciples' faith just before our Lord's Ascension. For five or six weeks since His death they had been in a condition of perplexity, not quite sure what was going to happen or in which way they would continue the work they had been doing in these three years past. *"Stay in the city"* He had said *"until you are clothed with power from on high"* (Luke 24.49). That expression must have been associated in their minds with the promised coming of the Holy Spirit: *"before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 1.5). Jesus had made it plain to them that after His departure they would experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in a manner previously unknown to them; *"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance, all that I said to you."* (John 14, 26).

Now this association of the Holy Spirit of God with the idea of power or energy – the word is *dunamis* which means energy actively exerted and is the basis of our word dynamic – was a very familiar one to the disciples. They knew from their reading of the Law and the Prophets that the Holy Spirit is the power that executes the mighty works of creation. It gives life and vitality to all living things and conferred upon God's warriors of olden time superhuman physical strength whereby they wrought great works in His cause. It inspired His prophets with visions and dreams and knowledge of coming things beyond the ability of men to discover unaided. They knew all this, and now inconspicuous and untalented men that they were, they themselves became recipients of this mysterious ability to perform great and wonderful works which patently they could never have done in their own natural strength. *"You shall receive power"*, the reality of that experience is attested by the manner in which this group of untutored and inexperienced men set out after Pentecost to preach Christ and His Kingdom against the formidable opposition mounted against them. By the power of the Spirit they spoke in many tongues to men of many nations, withstood the threatening of the authorities who sought to suppress their work and in no uncertain fashion gave witness to the fact of the Resurrection. A few weeks earlier they had all been in hiding in fear for their lives: now they stood before the people preaching the new faith and defying the authorities to stop them. *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4. 19-20). That was the reaction of Peter and John to those who sat in judgment upon them, and there was nothing their judges could do about it.

This is the Holy Spirit, invisible but all-powerful. It effects the stupendous works of creation, bringing all things into existence. If the astronomers are right,

throughout the regions of space new worlds are continually being born in the mighty crucibles of the stars. Across the vast distances which separate star from star there constantly flow streams of radiant energy which eventually reach their destinations and accomplish some great work in the processes of Nature. So is the Holy Spirit, giving light amid darkness, illumining the minds of men and making them to understand things which could not otherwise take shape in human thought. The vehicle of all life, this power initiates new life in the hearts of believers, sustaining them in the vicissitudes of earthly existence. It brings them through the transition of death into a new environment, conferring upon them new bodies in which life is renewed and continues. There is nothing in space and nothing in time but is controlled and determined by this supreme and all-embracing power, the Holy Spirit of God.

This is the true doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The power of God operating to create and sustain all things, living and non-living, to convey His commands and fulfil His Will, this is the Holy Spirit. The ultimate source of the Holy Spirit in God the Eternal no man can understand, how it is that God is, and that we exist, and know that we exist. Nor can we know how, external to our own being and personality, there is a material universe which we can see and hear and feel. The mysteries of God and of existence are too great to comprehend. But we must accept and believe this Divine energy pulsates through all that God has made. It reaches out to the extremity of His creation and is effective in the performance of His will, whether it be in the physical process of material creation or the instruction and enlightenment of those to whom He has given life. That Divine energy which has its centre and source in God is the outward evidence to man that God is and that the things that happen in space and time have their origin in, and derive their reality from Eternal Deity.

Scientific men are devoting a great deal of their time nowadays to investigating the source of the energy which drives the Universe. One fruit of their labours has been nuclear research which produces and dissipates enormous amounts of energy in a fraction of time. Atoms are microscopic substances of which all material things are made and there are millions of atoms in a grain of dust. But atoms themselves are made of even tinier parts and when some of those parts are separated there is a tremendous release of energy. This occurs continuously in the sun and it is from the sun that the earth derives the energy to keep it going. We feel that energy as heat, and we see it as light. Every day the sun lifts forty thousand gallons of water from the ocean for each man, woman and child now living on the earth, carries it across the sky and drops it as rain so that the processes of life can continue. In the centre of the sun an atom divides and sets free a quantity of energy. By radiation that energy travels through space at the speed of light and when it reaches the earth it is seen as light. It falls upon a head of wheat growing in the field and sets in motion a series of changes

whereby through photosynthesis, the plant takes the air and moisture from the ground and produces the material substances of the wheat grain. That grain contains something from the air and the ground and the energy from the sun that has also been transformed into starch which is the food of the plant. As our food that energy from the sun, in a very real sense, supports life.

So is the Holy Spirit, Divine energy extending into all places of God's dominion, all-powerful in executing His will. Perhaps this is nowhere better shown than in the opening verses of Genesis *"In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light'".* The temptation to interpret those words in terms of modern science is strong indeed. The word "moved" in this text means to flutter or undulate and "waters" is, not the seas, but *"tehom"*, the primeval abyss. Sir James Jeans a generation ago was the first to point out how accurately this expression fits modern knowledge of the nature of light, a cyclic series of 'waves' of many frequencies. These two initial verses in Genesis might well picture the momentous happening at the dawn of time when the Holy Spirit of God began to operate in the primeval nothingness. This initiated the complex system of radiation and matter which constitutes the material universe - and at that time, in an instant, there was light!

In precisely the same manner the Holy Spirit is the vehicle of life, whether upon this earth or anywhere else. The ancients knew this. Speaking of the living creatures of the earth, the Psalmist says *"Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth"*. (Psa. 104.30). *"If he set his heart upon man"* says Elihu in Job 34.14-15, *"if he gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust."* The power that makes life possible in any organism is the Holy Spirit. The historians of the Old Testament recognised this when they credited the possession of apparently superhuman power to the influence of the Spirit, as in the case of Samson or Jephthah or others of whom it is said that the Spirit of the Lord came upon them and they performed mighty deeds. Whether in Old Testament or New Testament, the idea behind the expression Holy Spirit is that of Divine power, Divine energy, operating in creation to the accomplishment of the Divine purpose.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of our Lord during His sojourn on earth at His First Advent. The power of the Holy Spirit, which is of the Father, was possessed and exercised by the Son. Of His exalted position before coming to earth the writer to the Hebrews says that He upheld all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1.3). In other words, creation was maintained and directed by His command in the power of the Spirit. And that power was His even during the temporary period of His humanity. Jesus Himself declared that the Father *"gave not the Spirit by measure"* unto Him (John 3.34): in other

words, He possessed the power of the Spirit to an unlimited degree and that was manifested in one, out of many aspects, in the works of healing which He performed. *"The power of the Lord was present to heal them"* says Luke (5.17). In the three instances when it is said that 'virtue' went out of Him to heal the afflicted, that word 'virtue' is the same word *dunamis*, power, the same Holy Spirit by which all His works were done. This close association of the Holy Spirit with the Son is an important element of Christian doctrine and it is very plainly indicated in the Book of Revelation. In the 'Throne Scene' of the fourth chapter there are *'seven lamps of fire burning before the throne which are the seven spirits of God'* (better translated 'the sevenfold Spirit of God'). But in the fifth chapter, the One like a sacrificial lamb standing before the throne, has *"seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"* and this corresponds with the headstone which is Christ, of Zech. 3.8 to 4.10, where likewise are the seven eyes, *"the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro in the earth"*. "The seven spirits" of course allude to the Holy Spirit's function of universal surveillance and operation *"to and fro through the whole earth"*. The union and distinction between the Father, the Son and the Spirit is indicated in Rev. 1.4-5 where the salutation comes from the Eternal, and from the "seven spirits", and from Jesus Christ. The unity of the Son and the Spirit is shown in Rev. 3.1 *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches"* and repeated seven times in two and three. The Millennial invitation - *the Spirit and the Bride say, Come*" (Rev 22.17) is the proclamation of the Lord and His Church and here again Jesus calls Himself *"the Spirit"*. As though anticipating this, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians thirty years before John saw the visions of Revelation, announced the same truth. The Lord, he says, is the Spirit, and by the power of the Spirit we are being transformed into an image of the glory of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3.17-18).

But the greatest manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit is seen in resurrection. The work of the Spirit in material creation, in the development and sustaining of life, in the illuminating of believing minds, in the transformation of imperfect, death-bound men and women to the deathless glory of Divine sonship, all this is eclipsed in the revealed Word of God by the greatest exhibition of power of all time, the resurrection of our Lord Christ from the dead. *"The surpassing greatness of his power"* says Paul *"The energizing of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his own right hand in heaven."* (Eph. 1.19-20). The death and resurrection of the Son of God still has elements which are difficult for us to understand, but that a mighty operation of the Holy Spirit was responsible for the empty tomb and the entry into celestial glory of Him who died upon the Cross is incontrovertible.

And the Apostle indicates that a similar direct action by the Father will effect

the "change" to celestial conditions of those who follow the Lord to the end of the way. *"God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise up us by his own power"* - *dunamis* (1 Cor. 6.14). Divine energy will go forth to translate the life that is adapted to this world into another world, into another order of existence, with a new and different body adapted to the new environment. Like all changes, this change will require energy; that energy emanates from the Holy Spirit of God.

In the final age of this world's probation God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2.28). Isaiah saw something of this and he described the coming day when *"the Spirit is poured upon us from on high"* and the result will be peace and quietness and assurance forever (Isa. 32.15-18). Thus is pictured a period in human history when the power of God in active operation for world conversion and the rehabilitation of the planet will be so outwardly manifest that none can deny it. The wonders of present-day scientific achievements are as nothing to the marvels of Divine creation and the achievements of the future, to be brought within man's reach and understanding when he learns to co-operate with Divine power instead of fighting against it. The eyes of the Lord going to and fro through all the earth will find only peace and quietness and assurance for ever. For God said, long ago, in His immeasurable wisdom and foresight. *"My Spirit shall not always strive with man"*.

AOH

'LIFE' – (aion) eternal life

Perhaps the reason why the rich young ruler (Matt 19; Mark 10 and Luke 18) and the 'scribe' (Luke 10.25) asked Jesus how they might "inherit eternal life" was because they had heard Him speak about it more than once in His teaching. We come across the expression more often in John's Gospel than anywhere else in the Gospels. In John 3 Jesus spoke of belief in Him, recorded first in the well known verses 16 and 17, and the same thought occurs again in v.36. In chapter 4, Jesus spoke to the woman at the well about the water He gives, that springs up into eternal life (vv 10, 14). Later, when the disciples returned with food they urged Him to eat, but He replied that His food was to do God's will. Then He changed the figure and told them, in effect, to gather fruit for eternal life.

In chapter 5 there is a record of a discussion with the Jews and in verse 26 He speaks of how He has life within Himself granted to Him by the Father. This gave Him the power and authority to give life to those who hear Him and His voice will eventually be heard by all in their graves (vv 25, 28, 29). Later in the argument Jesus referred to the Jews searching the Scriptures to obtain eternal life and He commends them for this; but Jesus further says that they refuse to go to Him to obtain life.

The theme continues in chapter 6, after Jesus has fed '5000' and walked on

the lake to where the '12' were having trouble with a boat. Back on land He tells the Jews that *"this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day"*.

As the chapter unfolds Jesus tells the Jews that they have no life in them. *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"* This drove the Jews away – with their literal minds, but Peter acknowledges that their Master alone could provide the words of eternal life.

The theme develops through the Gospel, not least in the parable of the Good Shepherd (ch. 10) when he speaks of His sheep have 'abundant life'. In His conversation with Martha (11.25, 26) just before He raised Lazarus from the dead He declares to her that He is the resurrection and the life.

The climax of the revelation of what real life is, comes at the beginning of His high priestly prayer (ch. 17) when He says to His Father that *"This is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent."*

As we read through John's wonderful treatise of 'Life' it becomes clear that the vast majority of people hardly live – they just exist. Jews who thought they had so much more of life than their Gentile neighbours because they 'kept the Law' were believing a delusion. No amount of knowing the Law or any other part of Holy Writ unless it really and truly led them to know the Divine Author, had eternal life. Nothing we belong to, no particular knowledge can give the gift 'life'. Followers of Jesus Christ should understand that the only way to 'inherit eternal life' is to walk with Him and talk with Him and really get to know Him and His Father whom He revealed.

The Gospel of John draws to a close with the writer telling his readers that he has written about Jesus so that they might believe on Him and believing might *"have life in his name"* (John 20.31).

The same theme continues through 'Acts' and is expanded still further in Paul's letters to young Churches. So he writes in Colossians 3.3 where the Apostle says that our lives are hid with Christ in God.

Jesus was, and still is, the great 'life-giver'. He wants us to share His life and to share the kind of things that most interest Him. The closer we get to Him the fuller our life becomes and the closer we become to those who truly love Him. As John says in His first letter, *"we know that we have passed from death to life"* ... because we love the brethren he shows us His love in that *"he laid down his life for us"* (1 John 3.14-16).

DN

We cannot see how all things will be made to work together for good, but we feel that God sees, and we have faith instilled into us to leave all things restfully with Him, and let Him unfold His plans little by little and show us our share in them.

AN ANGLE ON SUFFERING

Is suffering part of God's intentions for us?

Well, what do we mean by 'suffering'? A dictionary definition is: 'a state of bearing anguish, pain, injury, misery or loss?' We could think of examples of suffering, such as:

- a broken bone (which is hopefully temporary)
- bereavement (which is long term)
- senile dementia (which is progressive and permanent)

Suffering can affect people's bodies, minds (affecting how we think) and have an emotional impact.

Suffering is part of the natural order of things, and can come from a variety of immediate causes, such as:

- a crime
- a war
- economic circumstances
- an accident
- weather conditions
- a mistake
- the sufferer's failure to understand a situation
- someone else's failure to understand
- an illness
- breakdown of a relationship
- a hereditary condition through guilt
- a personal failure
- grief from our reactions to a person or a situation
- from doing your duty (or your job)
- from the beliefs you hold

You can probably think of an example for each of these causes.

We react to different types of suffering in different ways. Then we may go on to seek ways of alleviating it, or removing it, or helping someone to bear it. We may want to blame someone for it. But is there someone to blame in every case of suffering?

We may even feel as if we want to blame God, because He has made us capable of suffering. Is suffering part of His plan?

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1.31). At this point God is satisfied with creation, it is good. It is in working order. The human beings who are part of it have all sorts of capabilities, and are capable of suffering. So, is suffering also, 'very good'?

It is said that pain is useful, as when we learn not to touch hot things. Is this the explanation? But is all suffering like this, or only sometimes? 'It must be good for you because it hurts'! And who would learn this sort of lesson - the

person who suffers, or others? My suffering may benefit someone else, but is that why God lets me suffer?

These questions may themselves be painful for some of us, especially if we feel suffering has no useful purpose. It is part of the "permission of evil". If God is in control, why does He let suffering happen? If we are minded to blame the devil, then why does God not immediately destroy the forces of evil?

Another angle is to believe that though God's creative work is good, it is not completed but is continuing through time. The suffering we experience now is just one phase.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth. I saw the holy city... coming down out of heaven from God. Now God's home is with mankind He will live with them and they shall be his people He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared. And now I make all things new. These words are true and can be trusted." (Revelation 21.1-5).

If we can understand that God's final intentions are to end suffering, it may help us to bear our suffering now (or will it?).

This is far from a complete study, just an angle on the problem of human suffering as we experience it. There is so much more to be said.

GC

Suffering Transformed

"Blessed be... the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God." (2 Corinthians 1.3-4)

A good friend of mine is a doctor whose hobby is playing tennis. During a strenuous game, he injured his back and was confined to bed for months. He has had two operations, but he hasn't fully recovered and is constantly in pain. Because of this he can practise medicine only part time. During the last few years I have given this friend a copy of *The Upper Room*. Daily reading of the meditations has touched his heart and given him comfort. Recently, he asked me to subscribe to 50 copies so that he could distribute them to others who are suffering. My friend has become more sensitive to the struggles of others and wants them to receive the same comfort he has been receiving.

God uses our suffering and weakness. They can open hearts and minds to God's love Everything works for good for those who love God and who open their hearts to God's mercy (see Romans 8.28).

(Taken from *The Upper Room*, written by a contributor in Egypt.)

CONFERENCE AT JERUSALEM

A Story of the Apostle Paul

Fourteen years after his conversion Paul found himself in the middle of a major doctrinal squabble. Ten of those years had been spent in a fruitful and satisfying ministry in the Church at Antioch, the most important and influential Christian community after the original church at Jerusalem. In company with his brother minister, Barnabas, he had undertaken one journey – a charitable one, bearing a gift of money – to the Jerusalem church and one missionary journey into Asia. The rest of the time he had spent at Antioch, building up the faith of the believers in co-operation with his fellow elders. During all this time his principal theme was salvation through justification by faith in Christ. Acts 13.39 records his stirring declaration in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, *"by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"*. That was the keynote of Paul's early preaching. Later, he was to deal with every aspect of Christian theology, with dispensational expectations and with prophecy, with the Second Coming and the Messianic Kingdom, and what he had to say has immeasurably enriched our Christian heritage, but at this time he dwelt upon one main theme, justification by faith. It was not without reason that he stressed this foundation truth. Paul realised, what so many even in our own day fail to realise, that the Divine insistence upon faith in Christ as an essential to salvation is based upon a profound law which decrees that life can flow to man only from God and only through Christ. That all life originates in God and can only be lastingly sustained by God is a self-evident truth to every believer in God. Because the Son is the essential channel through which the Father is manifested to man He is also the only channel by which the life which is of God can come to man. So it is literally true that *"he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life"*. The Apostle must have contrasted this understanding with his former belief that life could be gained by adherence to the law of Moses, *"the man that doeth these things shall live by them"*. The law promised life to the man who could keep its provisions inviolate, but no man ever succeeded in doing so, for all men without exception are born imperfect, subject to human frailty, and unable from the start to stand upright and righteous in the sight of God. Of all the Apostles, Paul was probably the first to grasp the meaning of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This is to realize that in the Divine arrangement it only needs the man to come before God in frank denial of his former sin, failures and unbelief and open his heart and mind without reserve to God. He outreaches toward man in Christ, for the channel to be opened and life to flow into him and make him a justified and reconciled child of God.

It must have been with a sense of shock therefore when one day Paul found

visitors from Jerusalem assembled with the brethren at Antioch promulgating the old doctrine of salvation through the Mosaic Law. These Jewish Christians would, if they had their way, shackle the new virile faith of Christ with the old bonds of Judaism and virtually compel all Gentile converts to become Jews. They were quite definite about it too. *"Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved"* (Acts 15.1). Circumcision was the outward sign of the covenant made at Sinai between God and Israel and it bound the one who bore it, to a life of ritual observance and scrupulous adherence to a set of rigid rules that left little room for that free expansion of the spirit. Nor was the wide exercise of individual judgment possible, which is the privilege and the hallmark of true Christianity. This was a direct challenge to Paul's message of salvation through faith in Christ alone; it was immediately obvious that one or the other must give way, and so in a moment the first great doctrinal controversy was thrust upon the Church.

The brethren of the Church at Antioch, many of them Gentile converts, very evidently held their fellows at Jerusalem in high esteem and respect. That is not surprising. The Jerusalem Church was the senior, established at Pentecost some eighteen years previously, numerous and influential. It included many priests and Pharisees, was headquarters of the Apostles and those who had known Christ in the flesh, and almost exclusively Jewish in composition and outlook. Antioch was not more than ten years old, much more cosmopolitan in character, but conscious that it owed its inception and early growth to Jerusalem. This open conflict of teaching between the centre they had such cause to honour and respect and their own much loved teachers Barnabas and Paul, and doubtless their elders, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen, must therefore have been a puzzling and distressing thing. The brevity of Acts 15.2 probably veils a succession of tense church sessions at which the protagonists of the opposing views advanced their arguments and theses. They would each claim Scriptural authority and the reported sayings of Jesus for the stand taken, each seeking to carry the assembled Church with their own point of view.

This Church at Antioch, for all its relative youth as a Christian community, seems to have been a singularly well balanced and farsighted congregation of believers. Every reference to its activities in the Book of Acts gives the impression of a sober, zealous and harmonious company, possessing a clear outlook on the verities of the faith. Perhaps the mixture of Jews and Gentiles and the fact they were citizens of one of the world's principal cities tended to discourage extremes of thought and practice in their midst. At any rate, the decision to which they eventually came was one worthy of a Church over which men like Barnabas and Paul presided.

They determined that a commission of their leading ministers should go to Jerusalem and consult with the Apostles and elders of the Jerusalem Church

about this question.

One does not realise at first how deep a spirit of wisdom and love dictated this move. It meant that Antioch, whilst not for one moment yielding her own right as an independent Christian Church to decide her own matters of faith and practice, acknowledged her obligation to maintain harmony with her Jerusalem counterpart by entering into discussion on the matter. There was no slight cast upon those of the twelve Apostles of Christ who were still at Jerusalem. They were to be consulted and their views taken into full account. When it came to choosing the personnel of the commission, Barnabas and Paul at least were a foregone conclusion. From Galatians 2 which refers to this same visit, it seems that Titus, a pure-blooded Greek, was one of the party and there were one or two more whose names are not given. They travelled by land through Phenice, the ancient Phoenicia, and Samaria, calling upon local churches on the way. This was all Gentile territory and many of those whom they met must have been non-Jews – declaring their own convictions as they went to the joy and satisfaction of their hearers. So at last, they came to Jerusalem.

This was Paul's third visit since his conversion. He must have approached the city with mixed feelings, yet with a secret joy. On the first occasion he arrived a fugitive from Damascus and no one wanted anything to do with him. In the end he had to be smuggled out again and hurried out of the country before his enemies could get at him. The second time he came bringing a gift of money from the Antioch Church for the benefit of the poverty-stricken believers in the approaching famine. Now he was coming to contend for the principles of the faith with the leaders of the Church. He must have known what an important occasion this would prove to be. The forces working to make Christianity merely one more sect, even though a progressive sect of the Jewish religion were by no means to be despised. Here in Jerusalem and in all the country round about the Christians had been brought up from birth under the ritual and the obligations of the Mosaic Law. It was hardly to be expected that they could abandon, in a moment, their ingrained belief that the blessing and favour of God was indissolubly tied up with the observance of that Law. After all, they might have reasoned, these are the royal laws of God; they must be as good for Gentiles as for us. The faith of Christ must involve obligations of some kind. Believers must be different in some way from the pagans and the unbelievers around. What better distinction could there be than this system of laws and observances which had kept Israel apart from the nations as a people dedicated to God for fifteen hundred years past? This kind of reasoning could have had a strong appeal and it required the mind of a man like Paul to discern its fallacy. The whole future of his work as an ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles, if it was to be continued with the approval and endorsement of the Church, was bound up with the result of this conference.

The first session was apparently in the assembly of the entire church. Before them, and in the presence of the Apostles and elders, both Paul and Barnabas recounted all that they had done among the peoples of Asia, the converts which had been gained, and the churches that had been established. Without doubt Paul expounded his own understanding of the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ and the complete irrelevance of the Mosaic Law to the Christian dispensation into which they had now passed. More clearly than the others, perhaps, Paul perceived that at Pentecost a new Age in respect to the outworking of the Divine Plan had dawned and that the old Age of the Law had passed away. Not all the believers were prepared to accept that position. There must have been many who adhered still to the older view of only two eras. One, in which Moses was predominant until the coming of the Messianic Kingdom in power, the other when Messiah appeared to reign as King upon the throne of David and fulfil all the golden visions of the prophets. Jesus would fulfil His promise and come again to receive them to Himself and set up His kingdom of righteousness but Moses must remain. The newly emerging realisation that there was to be an intermediate Christian age between these two had not yet found acceptance. No wonder that, in the words of verse 7, there was "*much disputing*", even although the Greek word denotes debating or discussion without necessarily involving the acrimony which usually goes with modern English usage of the word "dispute".

It seems to have been Peter who turned the tide of the discussion. Peter, some fifteen years previously, had most reluctantly gone to Caesarea to accept probably the first Gentile convert to Christianity, Cornelius, the Roman centurion. He reminded his hearers of that story - they seem to have been familiar with it - and virtually demanded of the Pharisee believers present why they required a yoke to be put on the necks of the disciples, "*which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*". Then he came out boldly on the side of Paul and his thesis of justification by faith. "*We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they*". This was the strong turning of the tables. Not only did Peter deny the necessity of the Mosaic Law for Gentile believers, he denied its necessity for Jewish believers also. It says a lot for the sincerity and sense of responsibility of these Jews that the meeting did not break up into a riot. Instead "*all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul*". Perfect order and decorum reigned as the visitors from Antioch put their case and recounted the evidence of Divine approval upon all their work among the Gentiles and the evident purpose of God to bestow His Spirit upon all who truly believe, whether Jew or Greek, bond or free, civilized or barbarian. There must have been a long and impressive silence after that, a period of quiet cogitation on the part of all present. All men realised that the decision to be attained must be a generally accepted one if the future of the Christian enterprise was not to be threatened. A breach between the two main

churches, Jerusalem and Antioch was unthinkable. Calm, mature judgment was vital at this juncture. All eyes were fixed upon the tall, ascetic figure of the principal elder, the 'bishop' as he would be known today, of the Jerusalem Church, as he climbed the rostrum to deliver judgment.

James the Just, natural half-brother of Jesus, converted only after the Lord's death, was renowned and respected in all Jerusalem, even by the Pharisees and the priests, for his rigid uprightness and his devotion to the principles of the Law. The New Testament Epistle which bears his name shows very clearly how he set this devotion in proper relation to his Christianity. James could find no place for faith without works, and no place for works without faith. He was able to take a calm, unimpassioned view of the merits and demerits of Judaism and infuse that which was good into the new faith which now he professed. Completely convinced as now he was of the truth of Christianity - and he eventually died a martyr to his faith - he also understood the purpose of Judaism in God's Plan and the manner in which it made the advance into Christianity possible. Of all the early believers he had apparently, by common consent, been chosen the first elder of the Church at Jerusalem. Of all men he was probably the best fitted to voice the general feeling in this matter which had come before them for decision. The judgment of James, delivered on this occasion, is a most remarkable pronouncement. In a few well-chosen words, conspicuous for their brevity, he summed up the three-fold aspect of the Divine purpose. It is a pity that for the past three or four generations the tendency of Christian theology to diverge away from the older and well-established doctrine of the pre-Millennial Second Advent of Christ has beclouded current understanding of the implications of this passage. Christians of earlier centuries understood it perfectly and it is certain that James' hearers followed him in his application of Old Testament prophecy and endorsed it.

James' first word was to call attention to what Peter had just told them. God was sending the word of the Gospel into all the world to all hearers, making no difference between Jew and Gentile. He was reconciling to Himself all who came to Him through faith in Christ. Now this, said James, was God's first and primary work, to take out of the nations a people for His Name. This is a work of selection, a kind of first fruits of God's final harvest. To some extent the full force of this passage is minimized by the A.V. translators use of 'Gentiles' in Acts 15.14 for that suggests the idea that James was talking only of the gospel going to non-Jews, in contrast to the prejudices of the Pharisaic party in the Church. In fact the Greek word "*ethnos*" really means 'nations' as such and should only be translated Gentiles when the peculiar relationship of Jews with non-Jews is implicit in the context. In this verse, that is not so. James is quoting Peter's insistence upon the very reverse, that God is making no distinction whatever between Jew and non-Jew in this matter of proclaiming the Gospel

message to gather "*a people for his Name*". Hence 'nations' is the correct rendering here as in some other 64 places where the word is so translated.

So, said James, Peter has declared how both doctrinal belief and the logic of events concur in showing that God has taken a first step in sending forth the Gospel to gather a people for His Name. Obviously the Christian Church was then in its infancy but it was destined to grow through coming generations until this part of the Divine purpose should be fulfilled. To this conception, proceeded James, agree the Old Testament prophecies. He quoted in support the words of Amos 9.11-12 "*After this I will return, and will build again the dwelling-place of David, which is fallen down; and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the nations upon whom my Name is called*". To understand what James was talking about it is necessary to go back to the Old Testament. Here it is immediately noticeable that the Septuagint, from which James quoted as being the version then in common use, differs somewhat from Massoretic of the ninth century on which the A.V. is chiefly based. The A.V. of Amos 9 says nothing about the residue of men calling upon the name of the Lord and substitutes instead a meaningless statement about Israel possessing the remnant of Edom. James, however, was talking to men who knew the Book of Amos thoroughly. The general theme of that prophet is the fact that Israel as a nation was unfaithful to God throughout her history and because of that unfaithfulness would be scattered among all nations. That apparently hopeless state was to become the means in God's providence for the spread of His truth among all peoples. At the Last Day, that work having been finished, God would gather up the 'grains of wheat', the true-hearted among the sons of Israel and re-gather them to their own land, revived and restored. That is what James meant by "*After this I will return and build again the dwelling place of David*". The Septuagint in Amos 9.11-12 has it "*In that day I will raise up the dwelling place of David that is fallen ... that the remnant of men and all the nations upon whom my Name is called may earnestly seek me*". After the selection of the people for God's Name, the Christian church, and when the end of the Age shall have come, God will restore to the faithful of Israel a national existence. That is for a great purpose, that the remnant of men, those who are neither of the Church nor of restored Israel, may then have an opportunity to seek the Lord. This latter is quite clearly the work of the Messianic Kingdom following the Second Advent of our Lord, and it is this clear understanding of the future which makes James' words so remarkable. The church really believed and held that they had entered upon a period in which their unbelieving countrymen were to be scattered among the nations. That came true enough twenty years later when Titus destroyed Jerusalem and ended their national existence. During that scattering the Gospel would be preached and the Christian church developed and gathered out from all nations. Then, at the end of the Age and at the time of the Second Coming, Israel

would be gathered again in faith to the Holy Land. The Millennial Kingdom is for world wide evangelism and has its commencement that *"the remnant of men and all the nations may earnestly seek me"*.

It was this wide conception of the purpose of God, of Jesus Christ coming into the world, not in the interests of the few, but of the many, that finally steered the growing Christian community away from the shackles of Judaism. He came not *"to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved"* and to *"seek and to save that which was lost"*. The battle was not over; there were still disputes and objections: but henceforward James and Paul, Jerusalem and Antioch, saw eye to eye on this cardinal issue and the missionary work of the Church went on with new impetus. Much in Paul's later teaching must have stemmed at least in part from this historic conference. *"God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2.4). *"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order"* (1 Cor. 15.22-23). *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (Phil. 2.10-11). Some have accused the great Apostle of ignoring, in these and similar passages, the fact of sin and the consequences of sin but that is unjust. Paul never swerved from the basic truth that the wages of sin is death and that sin and sinners must one day perish together. What he unhesitatingly rejected was the old Jewish idea that God has His favourite people. These He will bring into eternal felicity and will condemn out of hand any from among the remainder who do not measure up to His standards, whether or not they have had a full opportunity to know and accept Him. That was the normal Jewish view of all the Gentiles, fit objects of Divine wrath and in no sense potential inheritors of the Kingdom of God. Paul, although once he had espoused that view, now would have none of it.

So the delegates from Antioch began their homeward journey, enriched and encouraged by all they had seen and heard, and bearing with them the precious letter which enshrined the judgment of James and the endorsement of the Church at Jerusalem. One or two concessions were asked of the brethren at Antioch, matters that if conceded would eliminate any tendency to misunderstanding and possibly scandal in the church. The Greek believers were recommended to abstain from the ceremonial pollution of pagan idols. This probably referred to the prevalent custom of adorning house and gardens with statues or busts representing the gods of Greece and Rome. Also in eating meats partly used for ceremonial offerings on pagan altars. This latter meant refraining from many social feasts and visits and could mean measurable sacrifice or loss on occasion. They were recommended to abstain from the eating of flesh with the blood, something abhorrent to every Jew and likely to make a barrier between Jewish and Gentile believers in their social intercourse, their fellowship and their *"agape feasts"*. They were warned against fornication, in this case the reference

is evidently to practices common in the pagan temples, associated with pagan worship and hallowed or made respectable on that account. It would not always be easy for a new convert quickly to realise the gulf that existed between pagan and Christian ethics in matters of this nature. But that was all. These suggestions were made in a brotherly spirit and with that the Church at Jerusalem gave its blessing and endorsement to all that was going on at Antioch.

AOH

THE SUNDIAL OF AHAZ

The story of a Divine sign

"Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down." (Isa. 38.8).

This is another of those Old Testament incidents which seem to set at defiance the known laws of Nature and hence receive more than the usual attention from sceptics and "modern" Bible scholars. In reaction to this, many studious Christians of the traditional school have sought to explain the account along lines of scientific explanations of the miracle, always on the basis of the Authorised Version translation.

It was in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign that the apparently fatal illness gripped him, and the word of the prophet Isaiah came to him *"Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live"* (Isa. 39.1). And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, for he was a devout man, and he had worked hard for the good of his people of Judah, and his work was not yet finished. There was more in Hezekiah's grief than appears on the surface, too, for as yet he had no son, and the promised seed, Christ, could come only through his line. It seemed as though God intended to abandon His own purpose and the glory of Israel never come at all. So Hezekiah prayed that he might live.

His prayer was answered. He heard that fifteen years were to be added to his life. Isaiah was commissioned to give him a sign that the Lord would both heal his sickness and deliver the city from the army of Sennacherib, which was at the time threatening Judah, for this was before the celebrated destruction of Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem (Isa. 38.6-7 and 36.1 and 36.37). According to the parallel account in 2 Kings 20.8-11, Hezekiah was given the choice of two signs. Either the shadow of the "sundial of Ahaz" was to go down ten degrees, or it was to *return back* ten degrees. Hezekiah chose the latter. It was a light thing, said he, for it to go down ten degrees; it did that every day anyway; *"nay, let the shadow return back ten degrees."* And the shadow went back!

This sounds like a most amazing happening. It would seem to the ordinary man that the only way in which the shadow on a sundial could return would be

for the sun to reverse its course and appear to traverse the sky from west to east, which, since it is the earth that moves, and not the sun, would imply that the earth had changed its direction of rotation and was turning backwards. On this basis the commentators of the nineteenth century endeavoured to demonstrate that such a thing did actually happen in the days of Hezekiah. A distinguished astronomer, E. W. Maunder, in the early years of the 20th century produced elaborate calculations to support this view.

Before discussing the nature of the miracle, however, let us examine the story itself, and particularly the language used, and let us try to reconstruct for ourselves the scene of which Hezekiah's sick-bed formed the centre-piece on that memorable day.

Hezekiah lay sick in his palace. There is still much that is not known about the Jerusalem of his day, but the position of the palace of the Kings of Judah is definitely established. It lay a little to the south of the Temple, facing the Mount of Olives, which rises from the opposite side of the deep valley of the Kedron. From where Hezekiah reclined he could see the Mount directly before him and the Temple towards his left. Somewhere nearby, near enough for him to witness the 'sign', was the 'sundial of Ahaz.'

Nowhere else in the Bible is there any mention of an instrument for measuring time. Until the days of Daniel, over a century later, there are no indications that the children of Israel divided the day into hours. One is justified therefore in looking a little more carefully at this expression 'the sundial of Ahaz.'

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a great admirer of foreign innovations, as is evidenced by the account in 2 Kings 16, and he might very well have acquired a sundial for his palace grounds were such things in existence in his day. The earliest known sundials are of Greek manufacture and date back only so far as the sixth century B.C., two hundred years later than the time of Ahaz. The Roman engineer Marcus Vitruvius, the author of a celebrated work on architecture and mechanical inventions, written in the time of Augustus Caesar, a few years before Jesus was born, says that the sundial was invented by Berossus, the Chaldean priest (*Arch.* 9.9); and Berossus lived only about 250 BC. Herodotus, the Greek historian (440 BC), states that the sundial was invented by the Babylonians (*Hist.* 2,109), whilst in Homer's "*Odyssy*" (900 BC) there is an obscure reference to a means of observing the revolutions of the sun in use in Syria (*Odyss.* 15,402). It is just possible therefore that Ahaz could have possessed a sundial.

It is when the word 'sundial' is examined that a totally different complexion is put upon the account. The Hebrew is *maalalah*, which denotes an ascent by means of steps or stages, and is used for "steps" or "stairs" in the Old Testament. The *steps* of the altar in Exod. 20.26, and of Solomon's throne in 1 Kings 10, 19, 20 and the *stairs* of 2 Kings 9.13 and Ezek. 40.6 are '*maalalah*'. So, likewise, are

the majestic words in Amos 9.6. *"It is he that buildeth his stories in the heavens"* where "stories" refer to the stages or terraces of the Babylonian *ziggurats* or temple towers, reared up into the heavens. And this word '*maalah*' is also translated *degrees* in the accounts of the miracle. The A.V. translators are guilty of an inconsistency here for both "degrees" and "sundial" are from the same Hebrew word. Rotherham translates 2 Kings 20.11, *"And he caused the shadow on the steps, by which it had gone down the steps of Ahaz, to go back ten steps"* and Isa 38.8, *"Behold me! causing the shadow on the steps, which hath come down on the steps of Ahaz with the sun, to return backwards ten steps."*

Nehemiah (3.15 and 12.37) speaks of *"stairs that go down from the city of David."* Jerusalem was built on several hills with two deep valleys – to those of the Kedron and Gay-Hinnom (Gehenna), intersecting them and there were various flights of stone steps built up the sides of these valleys. It is known that one such staircase descended the slope from the King's Palace eastward down to the Horse Gate in the city wall (Neh. 3.28; 2 Chron. 23.15; Jer. 31.40) and another ascended from the Horse Gate up to the south side of the Temple. By means of these two stairways the King possessed what amounted to a private way to the Temple, and there is one rather obscure passage in 2 Kings 16.18 which indicates that Ahaz made some alteration to one of these stairways. It seems then that the stairs leading down from the Palace to the Horse Gate are those to which reference is made in Isaiah.

Now these steps running roughly eastward down the slope, with the lofty buildings of the Palace at the top between them and the afternoon sun, were shrouded in shadow every afternoon. As soon as the sun had passed the zenith at midday, the shadow of the Palace roof would fall upon the topmost step, and thereafter as the sun sank towards the west, so the shadow would grow longer and creep down the stairs to the end. That is the shadow that had gone down ten of the steps ('degrees' in the AV) at the time of the sign. It must have been about the middle of the afternoon. Hezekiah had lain there many afternoons watching the shadow of his father's house creep down those stairs until at length, as it reached the Horse Gate at the bottom, the sun sank below the horizon behind his palace, the daylight rapidly faded and the short Palestinian twilight gave way to black night. So is the fate of my father's house, he must have thought bitterly: I am to die childless; there will be none of my line to reign after me on the throne of the Lord in Judah; all the promises made to the fathers will fail; there can never be a son of David to become David's Lord. God had forgotten to be gracious.

And then he saw the sign! Josephus makes it plain in his account of the circumstances (Ant. 10,2,1) that the shadow had gone down ten steps of the staircase and then returned. What had happened? What was it in this inexplicable phenomenon that convinced Hezekiah that God was with him and

would heal him?

It is not necessary to suppose that God interfered so much with the normal course of Nature as to halt and reverse the onward progression of the sun through the sky. Less spectacular and unlikely causes would have produced the effect. Under certain climatic conditions clouds of minute ice crystals can form at a great height in the upper reaches of the air; the apparent result as seen from the earth is the appearance of a band of light passing through the sun, and two additional suns, one on either side of the true sun. This effect, which is known as *parhelia*, or "mock sun" is due to the refraction of the sun's light as it passes through the prismatic ice crystals on its way to the earth. If now a cloud, at a much lower altitude, should obscure real sun and the western "mock sun" over a certain district, the only light reaching that district is from the eastern "mock sun," and the effect is as if the sun had receded eastwards by a certain fixed amount (always equal to one and a half hours of our time). Two occasions when this actually happened are on record; one was on 27th March 1703 at Metz in France, when the shadow on the sundial of the Prior of Metz was displaced by one and a half hours. The other occasion was on the 28th March, 1848 over parts of Hampshire when the same effect was observed.

Now this is a perfectly logical scientific explanation and the miracle could very well have been due to this cause, except for one consideration. Hezekiah had been at great pains to put down Baal worship, the constant curse of Israel, and to restore the worship of Jehovah. The sun was the visible symbol of Baal. Such a phenomenon as is described above would be probably interpreted by those who witnessed it as a manifestation of the power and interest of Baal. The credit for the sign, and consequently for the cure of Hezekiah's sickness, would have been given, not to the God of Israel, but to Baal. Much of Hezekiah's own good work would have been undone. For this reason it is unlikely that God would use the sun as an instrument for effecting the 'sign'.

Is there then another possible means by which the miracle could have been performed, more in keeping with the majesty and power of God and more indisputably attributable to Him? The fact that as Hezekiah looked down his staircase, the Temple of the Lord was in full view upon his left, at the summit of Mount Moriah, suggests that there is.

The shadow of the palace lay ten steps down the staircase. Only the return of the sunlight could remove it - or a *light brighter than sunlight*. Every Israelite knew that there was such a light; the holy '*Shekinah*', that supernatural light that shone from between the cherubim in the Most Holy, that had been the guide of Israel in the wilderness in those long ago Exodus days, a '*fire by night*', one that had been seen on rare occasions when God had cause to manifest His majesty and power in visible form. That fierce light, brighter than the sun at noonday, had flashed out from the Tabernacle to slay Nadab and Abihu when they offered

"strange fire" before the Lord (Lev. 10.2); it had flooded the camp at the time of Korah's rebellion (Num. 16. 42-45); it had filled Solomon's Temple at its dedication. Isaiah saw it once in vision when he received his commission of service (Isa. 6.1). Is it possible that as Hezekiah gazed still upon the staircase, waiting for the sign that the Lord had promised him, the wondrous glory of the Shekinah did indeed blaze out from that sanctuary on the hill, blotting out the brightness of the sun itself, lighting all Jerusalem with its radiance? The shadow on the steps would have vanished in an instant. The whole scene, the Palace Gardens, the stairs themselves, the city wall and the Horse Gate far below, and the Mount of Olives on the opposite side of the valley, stand out in sharp relief vividly delineated in that blinding white light. If this is indeed what happened on that memorable day, what possible doubt could remain in Hezekiah's mind? More convincing by far than any natural celestial phenomenon, this message from the sanctuary was as the appearance of God Himself.

All Jerusalem must have seen it. All Jerusalem must have interpreted it aright. The *Shekinah* came forth only for destruction or blessing. Hezekiah was a good king, a God-fearing man. It could only mean that he would recover, that he would live to play his part in the fulfilment of Divine promise, that there would yet be a son to sit upon the throne of the Lord after him, that the destiny of Israel would yet be achieved. The news would travel quickly, and before long all Judea would know what had happened, and that the king's life had been prolonged for fifteen years.

So the wonderful story concludes with Hezekiah going up to the Temple to sing his songs of praise to the stringed instruments, all the days of his life, for his deliverance and for the marvelous happenings (Isa. 38.20). Fifteen songs did he compose and named them "*songs of the steps*". They appear today in the Book of Psalms as Psalms 120 to 134, and they are headed "*songs of degrees*" by the A.V. Translators. (The ascription of some of them to David is incorrect). For ever afterwards they were used in the Temple ceremonies, and today we use them still, a memorial of that day when the Lord turned back the shadow that was over the house of Israel, and His glory was seen in Jerusalem.

AOH

God is looking, not for the person of ability but for the person of faith; that God is sufficient. He is looking for the person who believes not only that He can but is fully persuaded that God will.

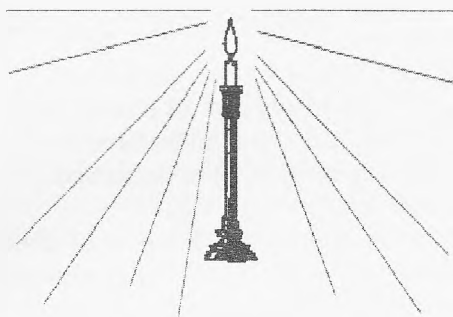
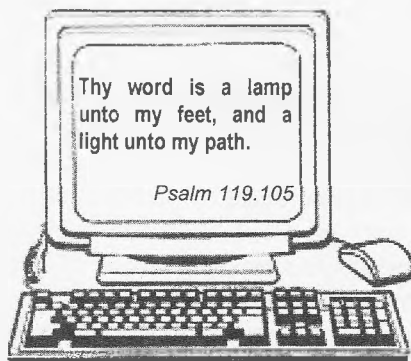
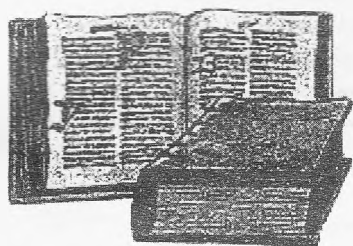
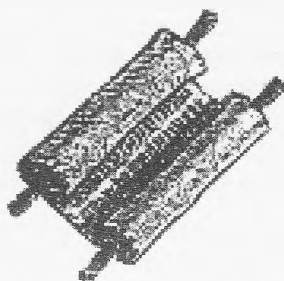
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)

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WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP – On Charity

Oh, be not the first to discover
A blot on the fame of a friend;
Oh, be not of discord the mover,
For hearts may prove true in the end.

We none of us know one another,
And oft into error we fall;
Then let us speak well of each other,
Or speak not of others at all.

A sigh or a smile may awaken,
Suspicion most false or untrue,
And thus our belief may be shaken
In hearts that are honest and true.

How often the friends we hold dearest,
Their noblest emotions conceal!
And bosoms the purest, sincerest,
Have secrets they cannot reveal.

Leave base minds to harbour suspicion,
And small ones to trace out defects;
Let ours be a noble ambition
To love as our Saviour directs.

With thanks to B & K K-S for so rapidly finding the above words
And in happy memory of SHF Birmingham 1947

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"You know nothing, you understand nothing, you walk in the dark, while earth's foundations are giving way" (Psa. 82.5 NEB).

Here in this 82nd Psalm there is a short and terse indictment of the men who are ruining this good earth which the Lord has made for the life and wellbeing of men. He tells them that despite their boasted wisdom and learning they know nothing, understand nothing, walk in darkness, while the very fabric of the earth they are despoiling is falling to pieces; *"tottering to its fall"* is the literal meaning of the Hebrew. There are so many ways in which the crass ignorance of scientists and the insatiate greed of commercial interests can bring this about in our own generation. Nuclear war is fast being outdated as the expected end of life on earth. The combined effect of uncontrolled drugs and uncontrolled pestilence could succeed in eliminating the human race before either of the super-Powers gets to the point of pressing the button. As possible alternatives we have the saturation of the earth's atmosphere with excessive carbon dioxide from the vastly increased, and increasing, burning of fossil fuel – coal, oil, gas – by world industry, and, too, by the thousands of super-jets continually winging their way through the air. This is leading to temperature and climatic changes hostile to life; pollution of the soil by sulphur dioxide from the same sources and the immoderate use of chemical fertilisers, destroying its capacity to produce food for man. There is the progressive decline in Nature's production of oxygen, essential to every form of organic life, by reason of the destruction of forests and loss of seaborne vegetation in consequence of the polluted oceans. For good measure, the spent gases from the enormous quantities of aerosols being used are rising to the upper atmosphere and destroying the ozone layer which from the time of creation has intercepted incoming cosmic rays which, falling upon unprotected humans, condemn them to premature death. There are so many ways in which man in his folly can bring about the end of the world and it seems that in his selfish heedlessness he is bent on trying them all.

But take heart. The destroyers of the earth will not be permitted to go too far. The Lord has no intention of allowing His plans for human happiness to be thwarted or even delayed by the misdeeds of men. Talking of this same day, Jesus said (Matt. 24.22) *"Except those days should be shortened (cut short) there should no flesh be saved"*. But He went on to say, God has cut short the days. Divine intervention in the form of the revelation of our Lord from heaven and the establishment of direct Divine rule on earth will in one moment halt the disruptive influences that are destroying the earth. It is foretold that under that righteous administration *"nothing shall hurt nor destroy"*. Nature has marvellous powers of recuperation and with the cessation of the corrupting processes it can be expected that the earth will be progressively restored to its

original pristine condition. It can be expected that the outlook will be completely reversed and men be able to look forward to a future unclouded by the fears which are gripping so many at present.

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STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 6 1 John 2.9-11

After showing his readers that the man who claims to know God and does not keep His commandments is grievously in error, John leads their minds to an even more searching question. What about the man who claims to know God but does not love his own brother in the faith? This is another aspect of practical Christianity, of the Christian faith in everyday life. *"He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now."* This word "hates" has a wide range of meaning in the Greek. It is 'miseo' and does mean the evil thing we call 'hate', in many instances, but it also can and does denote disesteem or indifference. It is not necessarily a question of departing so far from Christian principles as to allow the evil passions of hate and malice to take possession of the mind and heart; it also includes the act of despising or ignoring, being indifferent toward, the person and the interests of one's brother in the faith. *"One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren"* is the standard laid down, and to which we are all required to conform. Those whom our Lord has given us to be our brethren must be received and treated as such; and even then not as it were of constraint or compulsion, but spontaneously and of our own free will. *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."* Later on in this epistle John returns to this point and puts the question *"He that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"* (1 John 4.20). It is clear that in his mind this question of brotherly love is of the utmost importance. Perhaps John had learned, better than any of his fellow apostles, the lessons of those times of dispute and wrangling when they were with Jesus and some had sought to gain pre-eminence over the others. Perhaps he had realised more than most, the spirit that was being inculcated by Jesus. Jesus had reproved those who in mistaken zeal would have called down fire from heaven upon some misguided villagers or would have forbidden those whom they found casting out demons in the name of Jesus although following not with Him. There was so much they needed to learn before they could be *"made perfect in love"*. John, here at the end of a busy and devoted life, was perhaps in a position to have learned more deeply than the rest what was meant by the phrase *"the love of the brethren"*. Sometimes the meaning of this expression, to those who lived in New Testament times, comes out in the narratives in a totally unexpected manner. The wonderful little letter

written to Philemon by Paul is as lovely a gem of brotherly love as can be found anywhere in the whole of the Scriptures. *"I preferred to do nothing without your consent"* said Paul. What an example of true humility and Christian consideration! Paul, as an Apostle, must of all men have surely possessed the conceded right to require or expect the ready assent of Philemon to his request. But no, he would win his consent by love or not at all. *"Yea, brother"* he writes, *"let me have joy of you in the Lord"*. The affectionate manner in which he refers to his co-labourers speaks volumes. *"Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you"* - *"Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow soldier"* - *"Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord"*. So many references there are which show what the love and fellowship, no less than the ministry and service, of these loyal ones meant to the great Apostle of the Gentiles. And no doubt John had a similar experience.

The ease of falling into the condition of "hating" or failing properly to esteem or care for the interests of one's brother is shown in passages such as Romans 14 where Paul enjoins us not to destroy with our *"meat"* our brother for whom Christ died. There are times when for love of our brother we must impose some self discipline upon ourselves that he be not stumbled. James, in his epistle, leads our thoughts in a different direction. He speaks of the brothers or sisters who are destitute of daily food, and of our obligation in such case to do what we can to give those things whereby they may be warmed and filled. In so many ways in life do we come up against these words, *"he that hates his brother is in darkness"*.

Therefore, concludes John *"he that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goes, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"* (vv.10-11).

This verse is the end of a long warning, commencing at chapter 1, verse 6. In that warning John has traced the course of the disciple who has turned, at first ever so imperceptibly, from walking in the light to walking in darkness. From failing to attain and maintain true fellowship with God he descends to a wrong understanding of his true position before God, claiming to be literally sinless, whereas no man is actually so. From that, there is a retrogression to failure to keep God's commandments and from that to a position of antagonism towards the brethren of Christ. At that point he enters into the darkness which blinds his eyes so that he knows not the direction in which he is going and is unable any more to perceive the light of the truth of God. It is he is going and is significant that the first step in this drifting away from the light is loss of fellowship with God. *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."* It is a point that maybe ought to be stressed more than is usually done, that the first effect of our consecration is entry into communion, fellowship with God. In our progression toward Divine things we first of all

accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour and are justified by faith, in that acceptance and the belief that prompted it. Then - and not until then - do we properly hear and understand the call to consecration of heart and life and all our powers and possessions and abilities. *"My son, give me thine heart!"* The result of our Father's acceptance of that consecration is that we become His sons. *"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God"*; that we should be called by that honoured name. By virtue of that fact we came under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a manner that would have been impossible otherwise. We have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear son. The fellowship into which we enter is not only a fellowship of the "saints" here below, a communion that can be seen and experienced in tangible fashion, as when we come together in conventions, assemblies and gatherings. It is also a fellowship in which we, believers on earth, are included with God in heaven. The medium of that fellowship is prayer, and meditation, and a silent lifting of the heart to God in worship and adoration and gratitude amid the manifold activities of the day. That is the fellowship that we each ought to have with Him and which can be ours and assuredly is ours if we continue to walk in the light. Without sincerity of heart and purity of mind and fixedness of purpose that fellowship cannot endure. Without the consciousness that we are constantly endeavouring, however imperfectly, to carry out our covenant of consecration to Him and become a vehicle of His purposes, a tool in His hand, a vessel ready for His use, the communion is interrupted, the light fades from the sky and we commence to walk in darkness.

Perhaps John's greatest point here is that we must appraise the situation intelligently. We must not delude or deceive ourselves. Unless we continue in the right attitude of heart toward our Father in heaven and our brethren on earth we cannot possibly remain in fellowship with God. Unless we hold the right understanding of sin, the basis of our cleansing from sin, and the nature of the standing we have before God, we cannot remain in fellowship with Him. Unless we come into harmony with His ways and to the utmost of our powers, obey His commandments, that fellowship cannot exist. In this long appeal of warning that comes to us with all the urgency that the "beloved disciple" can infuse into his words, we are reminded solemnly and intensely of the great fundamentals of our acceptance with God. Observe the orderly fashion in which they are set out, as if to command our closest attention; the four stages of the Christian life, briefly outlined in these few verses.

First: Admission of sin – *repentance* (1.8-10).

Second: Cleansing in Christ – *justification* (2.1-2).

Third: Acceptance of His commandments – *consecration* (2.3-5).

Fourth: Abiding in Him – *sanctification* (2.6-9).

The man who hates his brother has lost all this and is back where he started – in the darkness, stumbling and staggering uncertainly, not knowing whither he is going, and at every step straying farther and farther from the true path. John is not really saying that his readers are like that. In his next exhortation he will express his confidence in their right standing before the Father. Here, in this early chapter of the epistle, he draws aside the curtain, as it were, and shows them - and us through them - the tragic end of those who, because of lack of love and zeal and sincerity, take the path into what Bunyan called "By-path Meadow" and never find the way back.

(To be continued)

AOH

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

A Study

Belief in the ministry of "guardian angels" was unchallenged in past generations. Today, it is for the most part quietly ignored or considered a survival from more credulous ages. Like most Scriptural theses, it cannot be so summarily dismissed.

To what extent do the Scriptures, logically interpreted, sustain the idea? There is at least one passage of which the wording appears to offer solid foundation for the belief. Jesus called a small child to Himself to illustrate the necessity of childlikeness in innocence and sincerity as a prerequisite for entry into his Kingdom. He then went on to say *"see that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 18.10 RSV). It has been thought that our Lord meant every child has an especially appointed guardian angel having constant access to the presence of God. That is not absolutely demanded by the construction of the sentence. Grammatically, it would be equally satisfied by considering that a body of angels was entrusted with the watch-care over all children generally. The sequel to our Lord's words here would appear to bear that out. He went on to speak of the man who lost one sheep out of a hundred and rested not until he had found it, commenting *"Even so it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish"* (v.14). If there are angelic guardians, there would seem to be a direct connection with the ultimate object of the Divine purpose, the recovery of humankind from present evil and its consequence in death, and the reconciliation to God of those who will receive it.

Perhaps a word as to the reality of the angelic hosts will not be amiss before enquiring further into this subject. Like anything that is not discernible by one or another of the five physical senses, that reality is questioned or denied by many. In our Lord's day there was a powerful body of opinion, represented by

the Sadducees, which repudiated belief in the existence of the supernatural, of angelic or spirit beings (Acts 23.8). Modern secular thought moves increasingly towards the same position. But the Bible is written against a background of an unseen world, peopled by unseen beings. Christians, at least, realise that our five physical senses, adapted to the sphere in which we live, cannot possibly discern all that there is in God's entire creation. An integral part of the Christian faith is the understanding that there is an order of life beyond, and superior to, the human, and that on occasion citizens of that sphere have made sensory contact with humans. The Old Testament and the New both afford examples. The fact that there are celestial beings, popularly and scripturally called angels, carrying out the purposes of God in just the same way as men will one day, has to be accepted as beyond question.

The fact that such beings must be always actively participating in the affairs of, and contributing something to the progress of, Divine creation follows from the very fact of their existence, for this is the whole purpose of God in creating intelligent life. An eloquent word in Psa. 103.20-21 confirms this. "*Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his will*" (RSV). Here is a picture of a community engaged in the discharge of duties laid upon them by God. There is nothing illogical or even improbable in expecting that some of those duties may have connection with the affairs of men upon earth. There is certainly definite assurance of the live interest in the affairs of earth displayed by the celestials. From the days of the formation of this planet, in which "*all the sons of God (angels) shouted for joy*", (Job 38.7) to the time of the First Advent when the angels desired to understand more of the things being preached by the Apostles (1 Pet. 1.12), there is this interest. Sympathy with the distresses of humanity is revealed by our Lord's assurance that "*there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents*" (Luke 15.10).

From the realisation of this evident sympathy with and interest in humanity, it is only a step to discern a very literal meaning to such texts as Psa. 34.7 "*The angel of the Lord encamps round those who fear him, and delivers them*" or Psa. 91.11. "*He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*". It might be argued that these and similar phrases are poetry framed to express the all-embracing power of God protecting His people. This may well be true; nevertheless the power of God is exerted through instruments, agents, and just as on occasion men are used as such agents so, and probably in considerably greater measure, we can expect angels so to be used. It is significant that both the Hebrew *malak* and Greek *aggelos*, both translated "angel", really mean 'messenger' and in fact are rendered messenger upon occasion, referring sometimes to human and, more often, to celestial messengers.

Perhaps the clearest view of the subject is gained by considering some of the actual examples of celestial missions to earth related in the Scriptures. Hagar the bondmaid, fleeing from the unjust oppression of her mistress, unknowingly destined for an important role in the outworking purpose of God, was met by an angel in the wilderness and sent back to her mistress with an assurance of future blessing. Her reverential words following the encounter, leave no doubt that she knew the identity of her informant and that he was from the celestial world (Gcn. 21.17-19). Joshua, meditating the conquest of Canaan, encountered a heavenly visitant in the trappings of a soldier, with a drawn sword in his hand, and from him received the instruction necessary to the salvation of Israel (Josh. 5.13-15; 6.2-5). Elisha's servant, fearful at the threat posed by the Syrian invaders, had his eyes miraculously opened and he saw the hosts of heaven surrounding his master and himself. In the New Testament, Joseph was visited by an angel warning him to take the young child Jesus and his mother and escape into Egypt from the evil designs of King Herod. Peter, in prison, was released by an angel sent for the purpose. These and other similar examples record definite historical events which actually happened, in each case illustrating the intervention of Heaven upon this physical earthly plane by the instrumentality of a celestial messenger to produce a tangible physical effect leading to the protection or deliverance of one of God's children. So many other such examples there must have been in history, unrecorded and unrealised because the heavenly agent was unseen. It might well be said therefore that the doctrine of guardian angels is well founded in Scripture. It is not necessary that each individual upon earth has a special angel assigned him as personal protector, but more likely that all the hosts of Heaven are instantly available for service in the guardianship of those on earth who have put their trust in God. It has to be accepted that this does not necessarily imply a kind of blanket protection against all conceivable human ills and accidents. The Divine scheme for man does not work in just that way. What it does imply is that the powers of Heaven are instantly and continuously available so as to modify and divert circumstances having a direct bearing upon our Christian life. *"All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom. 8.28). The whole point and end of angelic guardianship is that those whose hearts and lives are given in complete dedication to God may be so guided and strengthened that they will eventually "finish their course with joy" and attain the Divine ideal. We do not fight the battle alone. On the other side of the Vail, unseen by our natural eyes but close by our sides nevertheless, stand the mighty hosts of Heaven. Each of those glorious ones is commissioned to carry out some operation of Divine power which is to have a definite influence upon the Christian life of one or another of the Lord's disciples here on earth. It must have been some such thought which was in the great Apostle's

mind when he penned the stirring words *"Greater is he that is for us than all they that can be against us"*. *"There stood by me this night"* said Paul to the sailors in the storm-wracked ship *"the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God has given you all that sail with you. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island"* (Acts 27.23-26). How did Paul know that their lives would be saved by shipwreck upon an island? And who guided the crippled ship through that fearful storm so that out of all the possible points in its westward drift across the six hundred miles line between Italy and Africa it should strike exactly on the hundred yards wide passage between the island of Malta and its outlying rock of Salmonetta, the only point in all that six hundred miles where Paul's words could come true, the ship's crew be saved, and Paul continue his journey to Rome, in accordance with the angel's prediction? Was it only the vagaries of wind and wave that sent the vessel on the last stage of its journey or was there a celestial hand steering it steadily to that sandbar which still exists, seven miles from Valetta, and brought the ship to rest less than fifty yards from shore so that, as the historian Luke so graphically describes, *"we escaped all safely to land"*?

There are so many examples like that in the Scriptures that it is hard not to see evidence of the interaction of celestial powers with human affairs in the interests of God's purposes and the highest welfare of those who are His.

AOH

THE SILVER LINING

There had just been a violent storm. Trees are still shaken from the fury of the wind. The grass is strewn with leaves and twigs. Tobacco plants and stock, fragrant but fragile bow their heads, weighted with splashing from the rain. The sky above is darkened by grey clouds of evening thunder. But out to the west the last rays of the setting sun are tingeing the distant sky line with fiery red and fringing the scudding rain clouds with a tender halo of gold.

Life is like that for us. Storms and tempests, with all their wrenching and partings are bound some time to drift across our path. But the sun is always shining, even though a storm cloud may for a while hide its face. And clouds will pass. And as we strive to look for the sun let us help others to find it too. For storms are often local, and a kind word, a friendly smile, and, above all things, a reminder that the Eternal God is our Refuge and that underneath are the everlasting arms, may tinge somebody else's storm cloud with the gold halo of human sympathy and quiet understanding.

THE JOURNEY HOME

Reminiscence is considered the privilege, if not the symptom, of old age. Few have leisure to sit down and take stock, to look around, during their working years. Most are so busy doing things or getting on, that they have little inclination to pause in their activities. Christian maturity might be considered the youth of eternity. The years are rich with the fruits of experience and ripe with memories of loving-kindness. One may look back across retreating years with profit. Evidences of loving-kindness lie so thick about the way that a recollection of mercies here, of help there, of strength supplied and comfort given, renews vigour and deepens confidence in Him who loves with an everlasting love.

A traveller to a foreign land watches the fading coastline of his native shore with that affection peculiar to familiar scenes. But as the journey proceeds new experiences begin to claim attention. When at last the journey nears its end there is a mounting excitement, a quickened interest in the new country, in the life to be lived there. All that imagination has long envisaged will soon become reality. As the new land appears on the horizon, steadily getting closer, assuming the solid proportions of a new world and a new life, the mind will flash back to the day of leaving the old home, to all that has befallen by the way, to find that realisation surpasses anticipation. Christian life is the greatest journey of all. From the analogies of an ocean voyage, an adventurous land journey, a hazardous mountain ascent, the Christian pilgrim has drawn inspiration. No one travels alone. They who leave the world to climb the heavenly steeps are always in good company, for as one of our freest pilgrims said out of the fullness of his own experience: *"Those who delight in the Lord's way have blessed communion and fellowship with him. They live on a higher plane, breathe a purer atmosphere and enjoy a holier, sweeter friendship than the world could ever offer"*.

During the long era set aside for the gathering together of God's family, they have been on the road together. Circumstances have differed, time and miles have divided them, but in experience, in aim, in love, they have been one band, on the march to the City of God. Now as the sun sets over the world and the evening star beckons the wayfarers up the last hard slope, it may be good to halt while we look back across the chequered experiences of the road. From it we may draw new courage for the final mile that will lodge us safely in the Father's house. All that has passed has brought us to this hour. None of it may be lived again. Time pushes us forward. We must go farther on. We will not go reluctantly nor with unseemly haste, but with firm and steady foot, watchful, meek and reverent as those commanded to appear before a royal presence. How long ago it seems since first we lifted eyes towards our Father's home, yet memories fresh as yesterday, bittersweet with pain and joy, come crowding

back, bright as shimmering dew drops and the eager, questioning eyes of youth. How remarkable has been the journey! There are those early days like basking in the summer meadows. In poem and picture lay the celestial mountain, distant, mysterious; strangely attractive with its wordless invitation so readily accepted. By what strange power are hearts drawn and feet wooed to take that road where they may sit with Christ! *"With loving kindness have I drawn thee"*. It was not the rod of force or fear driving us where we would not go, but love, wondrous love, yearning, drawing, winning as a parent wins a child to take its first steps. *"We love him because he first loved us"*; realising the power of His love at work in our mind and heart, we could not choose but to go.

It is never easy, for the world raises its voice in protest, the ties of flesh stretch out restraining hands, and the sceptic tongue lets fall its acid words of doubt and thinly veiled contempt. To the worldly-wise it seems a fool's errand. The abandoning of the certain and the seen for the ethereal uncertainties of the unseen, for a kingdom which cannot be entered upon by flesh and blood or without struggle of mind and sacrifice of self, appears to the natural mind an unreasonable throwing away of all that is best in life. But the Christian traveller is encouraged in the experiences of those who have gone before.

Abraham, the father of all faithful pilgrims, left the known and familiar, content to journey he knew not where, led, supported, and blessed by the loving kindness which drew him from pagan Ur to the promised land. Rebekah readily left home and kindred, drawn by love, to a new land made a wonderful destiny. Meditating upon that journey of his great ancestress, the Psalmist saw a greater Bride, setting out upon a longer, more hazardous journey and left his vision in words for our inspiration. *"Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people, and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty: since he is your lord: bow to him"*. (Psalm 45.10, 11 NRSV) Paul, counting his all an easy loss, that he might win Christ, his real treasure; counting the perils and pains of the way a light affliction, not worthy to be compared with the journey's end and the crown of life. We are in good company. The Lord of pilgrims Himself left the heavenly glory, was made flesh and for our sakes became poor, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.

So the journey begins without misgivings, without backward look, though not without sorrow. *"When love meets truth and truth must ride above"*, the heart knows a widening gulf which may never be crossed again. It meets its first heroic test *"when love can leave love though the heart may bleed"*. The gulf was crossed at that Jordan of baptismal waters and separation from the old ways. Feet were firmly set upon the narrow, holy ground that leads to heavenly life. Confidence lent vigour to the energetic striding, to the heart eager to be active, to be off, to mount the paths of grace and knowledge. But consternation puts many a damper on the ardent traveller, expecting to see round every bend the

golden land of promise. With what dismay we read on each signpost "a little farther on" and view the next hill with a lesser sense of conquest, realising by now that beyond that lies another and yet another.

Looking back we can but smile over those fond hopes that the kingdom of heaven lay around every corner. That with brash certitude we could, in a few swift mountings, stand boldly before its gates, take it by storm, as it were, the privileged, knowledgeable, favoured few, for whom all heaven waited, before there could begin a work of blessing the multitudes of men upon this little planet Earth. Only as the road lengthened, as Time took its toll of hasty conclusions did we look from many a vantage point and see as God sees. Time is no mean element. It took time to frame the world and it takes time to make a saint. God is in no hurry. With patience and certainty the Lord of Eternity works out His sovereign will, taking hold of human material, shaping and moulding it to His own heart's desire. This is one of the hard lessons of the pilgrim way. The great Forerunner had to learn obedience, quiescence, by the things that He suffered. The servant, lower than the Master, learns the same lessons in the same way, shares the same school and the same suffering. *"As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth"*. It is more than a wordless acceptance of reproach and more than a silent resignation to the hand of God. It is love in unquestioning repose. Meditating on that last rise before the heavenly portals reveals that this is the real meaning and purpose of life. Factions, parties, creeds and dogmas fade away into nothingness before the one abiding, eternal grace. We ponder the steps by which we have risen, the road on which we have travelled, the books by which we have learned, even the very conflicts in which we have engaged. What we took to be truth and error, right and wrong, fall away like autumn leaves before the certainty that nothing but Godlike, benevolent love will gain admittance to the glorious courts of the Most High. The pilgrim must stand alone at the last step, stripped of all earthly trappings, deprived of all human support, freed from all natural pretensions. If the earthen vessel has at last become the container of the spikenard, refined and scaled of all its dross and roughness into the lustrous beauty of the spirit, then the labour and the journey have not been in vain.

At journey's end there will be nothing left but that. The old faraway beginning will be lost to sight; the flower strewn pastures far behind. All the hazards and storms of the journey will be over. Only the quiet resting-places will remain in memory to refresh the last lap of the road. Even the very road itself, zigzagging up and around the Mount of God will be lost in the mist of the years that are gone. Now the eye must be constant to the peak, the step firmly forward. With staff in hand and robe tightly girdled, the wayfarer must go as Moses went to meet his God, to put himself finally and forever into His keeping.

David saw his Lord leaving the ivory palaces, his garments fragrant with healing essences as he passed among men. The Revelator saw the Bride of Christ, the new Jerusalem, descending from heaven adorned in all the glory and beauty of life-giving power. And a great voice proclaimed the event as the time for the wiping away of all human miseries, the drying of tears, and the water of life flowing freely to every thirsty soul. It is the grand culmination of the pilgrim way, the event for which heaven and earth have waited long. The light afflictions of earth will not begin to compare with that weight of glory allotted to those who hold on in faith through thick and thin, through rough weather and awesome solitudes, to the very throne of God. There at last the load, the cross and the trophies will all be laid down, replaced by the crown of life and victory, to the accompaniment of the heavenly choirs chanting their glory songs to the Most High.

("Herald of Christ's Kingdom")

HOLINESS

Holiness is a word usually associated with religious life and experience. We have an equivalent in the word 'saintliness'. Our modern English word 'Holy' comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, '*Hal*'. Holiness comes from a kindred word - '*Halig*'. In the less-developed language of our forefathers' day these words did not have the almost exclusively religious meaning which the modern word has, but were applied to various physical and mundane things too. We have several kindred words today which spring from the same roots. One such is '*hel*' - a word denoting good sound health. Another such is '*heal*' - to make sound or well. Still another is '*whole*' (or '*wholly*') meaning 'entire,' 'complete,' 'nothing lacking'.

Our modern word 'Saint' comes from the Latin '*Sanctus*' and means 'one set apart' - one wholly devoted to a purpose, usually a religious purpose. The words 'holy,' 'holiness' and 'hallow' (used instead of holy) and 'saintly', 'sanctification' and 'sanctify' are synonyms for each other respectively and stand, almost without exception, in our English Bible as equivalents of one Hebrew word (*Qadash* or *Qodesh*) in the Old Testament and one Greek word (*Hagios*) in the New Testament. How accurately the Greek '*Hagios*' corresponds to the Hebrew '*Qadash*' may be seen by the fact that the Septuagint translation uses that word exclusively to pass over into the Greek tongue the old Hebrew thought on holiness. This helps to carry forward the Old Testament thought into New Testament days. It affords additional advantage also to have two sets of English words by which to define that ancient Hebrew thought.

MAN FROM MACEDONIA

A Story of Paul

It could hardly have been more than twelve months after the momentous Jerusalem conference, recorded in Acts 15, that Paul felt the old urge to be up and away again on a missionary expedition. Since returning from Jerusalem both he and Barnabas had resumed their normal places of ministry in the Antioch Church, fortified and assisted by the devotion of Silas, who had now apparently decided to sever his connection with Jerusalem and make Antioch his home town and church. Perhaps there was more activity there and greater openings for the service he wanted to render. Acts 15.35 makes it clear that the church continued in a spiritually healthy state; *"Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also"*. There must have been a considerable work of evangelical witness carried on in the surrounding territory, not recorded in Acts because not directly associated with the wider work of Paul himself. Nevertheless, this was work in which he must have collaborated with his fellow-elders. Now the time had come, he probably thought, when he could leave that work to the others and go again over the ground he and Barnabas had traversed some eight years before - Cyprus, Perga, Iconium and Lystra. They could satisfy themselves as to the spiritual condition of the converts they had made and the churches they had formed, and confirm them in the faith.

So Paul put the matter to his colleague and Barnabas was very willing evidently. He too felt the need and desirability of such an expedition. In all good faith, and not anticipating any demur, he proposed that John Mark should accompany them as general assistant. Probably to his complete surprise, Paul violently opposed the suggestion. Mark, he pointed out, had deserted them halfway through the previous journey and gone home to Jerusalem. He was not going to risk anything like that again. Regrettable though it may be to admit the fact, there is no doubt that this difference of opinion led to a violent quarrel between the two. *"The contention was so sharp between them ..."* is Luke's expression, where the word is *"paroxymos"*, indicating a short and sharp but very extreme outburst of feeling. There is certainly no indication that the guidance of the Holy Spirit was sought or obtained on the matter, no record that resource was had to prayer that the will of the Lord might be discerned. Just for the moment, saints though they were, the old nature came to the top and neither would give way. Barnabas was determined that Mark should go; Paul equally determined that he should not.

It is difficult at this end of the Age, with only the brief account in Acts before us, to arrive at any conclusion as to who was in the right. John Mark was now a mature man of about thirty-four. He was evidently in full fellowship and service

with the Antioch Church. The reason for his earlier defection is unknown. The fact that he returned to Jerusalem and not to Antioch, and that afterwards he is found again at Antioch, does point to the likelihood that his object was to be with his mother Mary at a time when the Jerusalem Christians were undergoing severe persecution. If that is so then it would seem that Paul was being a bit hard on the younger man on this occasion. In later years he did reconsider his attitude and expressed his appreciation and esteem for Mark, asking Timothy to bring him to Rome *'for he is profitable to me for the ministry'* (2 Tim. 4.11). At this moment, however, Paul would have none of him, and Barnabas proving obdurate, the friends parted, each to undertake a missionary journey on his own account.

Probably by agreement, Barnabas, accompanied by Mark, went to Cyprus, where the first missionary journey had commenced. The Book of Acts is silent as to their labours after this. From one or two scattered allusions in other New Testament books it seems possible that after visiting Cyprus they went on into Bithynia, Pontus and Cappadocia – provinces of Asia, and territory in which later on the Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to minister. Paul took the remainder of the territory they had covered eight years earlier.

Bereft of his erstwhile co-worker and travelling companion, Paul looked around for a successor. His choice fell upon Silas, a man who had by now proved himself at Antioch. Viewed in the light of later events, the entire episode perhaps was Divinely overruled, for Silas, like Paul himself but unlike Barnabas, was a Roman citizen. That was an advantage on this journey, for although at this moment Paul was unaware of the fact, he was destined this time to leave Asia and cross over into Greece, where the influence of Rome was stronger, and the fact of citizenship more important.

So Paul set out on his second missionary journey. He was now about fifty years of age; already two-thirds of his Christian life was over. He intended this expedition to cover more ground than the previous one. Perhaps he hoped one day to see Rome itself and to preach the Gospel in the capital city of the empire was already taking root in his mind. The two men struck out northward, visiting and confirming the companies of Christians scattered throughout Syria and Cilicia. All this was home territory. Here the Antioch church had sown the seed and was ministering continually. It was after Paul had passed through his own native city of Tarsus in Cilicia and crossed the high mountains behind the city that his journey began in earnest.

Approaching the Asiatic provinces from this direction he came upon the scenes of his former labours in reverse, arriving first at Derbe, the last call of his first journey, and next at Lystra. And here an occasion of great joy was experienced by the Apostle. Eight years previously he had left a few new converts in this place to form their own little assembly and continue as best they

could in the faith he had so little time to expound to them. Now he found a thriving Christian community and among them a young man named Timothy. He was to become one of the most devoted of Paul's fellow-labourers and as personally dear to him as though he was his own son. *"My son Timothy..."* How often the Apostle's pen lingered over the beloved name when he wrote his epistles to the churches. The last words we have, written in the shadow of death were to this young convert, expressive of his own faith and conviction after a lifetime of service. *"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand ... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded ..."* So Timothy, at the older man's earnest request, threw in his lot with Paul and set out with him and with Silas when they resumed their travels.

No one really knows the truth about the next stage of the journey. They must have passed through Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia and visited the believers who had been converted on the first journey. Then comes that rather obscure statement in Acts 16.6 *"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia; after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not"*. Here is a record of apparent frustration, of an attempt to preach that was prevented by the closing of the door of opportunity. No names of towns are given, no indication that in this long trek of at least seven hundred miles through the central districts of Rome's Asiatic empire the missionaries found any hearing ear or left behind them any converts. So far as the record in the Book of Acts is concerned, the trip through Phrygia and Galatia was unproductive of any good work. But there is one clue elsewhere. When Paul sat down one day in Corinth, some five or six years later, to write his Epistle to the Galatians he referred to the time he first came among them and to some sickness or malady with which he was then afflicted. *"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first, and my trial which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ ... I bear you record that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me"* (Gal. 4.13-15). Now this could only have taken place during this second missionary journey of St. Paul. Although unrecorded in Acts, it seems clear that Paul and Silas did meet with considerable success in Galatia, and that Paul was stricken with some kind of severe illness. The reference to the Galatians *"plucking out their own eyes"* seems to point to an acute attack of the glaucoma from which it is believed the Apostle suffered and that some very exceptional manifestations of love and care were displayed by the new converts whilst he was in their midst. The warmth of affection which Paul displayed for the Galatian brethren does seem to indicate that he cherished very happy recollections of his ministry among them.

But the Spirit was hasting him on. Great events were ahead; a new field of labour was to be opened up and the Apostle to the Gentiles must linger no longer in Asia. Travelling westwards through Mysia they tried to turn southward into the province known to the Romans as Asia proper, the district where very soon now were to be established the famous "seven churches of Asia" of the Book of Revelation. The Spirit restrained them; "were forbidden" is the expression, where "forbidden" is the word "*kolasin*", meaning a restraint as a horse is pulled up by his bridle. Baulked at this, the travellers turned northward toward Bithynia on the Black Sea coast; the Spirit "suffered them not", where the words have the meaning of "permitted them not". There was only one way left to go; they must continue in a westerly direction and that would bring them to the coast of the Aegean Sea and the seaport of Troas; and on the other side of that sea lay the land of Greece and the continent of Europe.

Perhaps they remained at Troas for a little while, waiting the leading of the Spirit. Certain it is that they found a number of hearing ears in this busy mercantile town, for when Paul came back to Troas some four years later he preached to a gathering of the believers. At this present time he also met the man who was to be his constant companion and friend, destined to become the historian of the Apostolic Church, the Greek physician Luke.

It has been surmised that Luke was a native of the city of Antioch, and that the two men had met before. This is not definitely known. What is certain is that at this time Luke made open profession of Christianity and attached himself to the little party of missionaries. He was not an evangelist and not a preacher; his talent lay in writing. The fruit of his flair for noticing events and eliciting facts, and his masterly style in putting them together, is with us in the Book of Acts and the Gospel according to St. Luke. The New Testament has been immeasurably enriched by the labours of this Gentile convert who so willingly sacrificed the honours and profits his undoubted talents could have won him in the world of men, and gave himself freely and spontaneously to the cause of Christ.

The party was now complete. Two zealous missionaries, one enthusiastic youth, and one middle aged professional man, consciously associated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ready for whatever work the Spirit might direct. Almost certainly there must have been much earnest discussion and prayer, and a conviction that very soon the obstacles and frustration of effort would be at an end and one clearly defined pathway revealed along which they must go.

In such circumstances it is not surprising that Paul saw a vision, or it might have been a dream; it matters not. It was during the night, perhaps after a day of discussion and prayer for guidance, he saw a man, a Greek, a man of Macedonia which is the district of Greece which lay immediately opposite Troas, two hundred miles or so across the sea. He heard the man speak. It was an appeal.

"Come over into Macedonia and help us." Paul came back to the waking world with the impact of that appeal still upon him. Was this the leading of the Spirit, the guidance for which they all had been waiting? It is evident that he must have lost no time in talking the thing over with Silas, Timothy and Luke, and equally obvious that none of them entertained any doubt about the matter. *"Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them"* (Acts 16.10).

The next few verses tell how, loosing from Troas, they sailed by the little island of Samothrace and a day later arrived at the Greek port of Neapolis. From thence it was only a few miles to Philippi and before long the four men were treading the streets of that important centre and doubtless wondering how best to commence their mission. There does not seem to have been a Jewish synagogue in the city. Adherents of the Jewish faith appear to have been few, so that it was not until the next Sabbath that Paul and his companions tracked down a few of like mind who were in the habit of meeting by the side of the river outside the city, for prayer. Even so a Gentile was the first notable convert. Lydia, a woman of Thyatira on the opposite mainland, apparently resident in Philippi for business reasons, one *"which worshipped God"* - a phrase normally indicating a non-Jewish believer - was probably Greek, perhaps Roman. Evidently a woman of decisive character and natural nobility she quickly accepted the faith, was baptised, and promptly offered the hospitality of her home to the missionaries. There they stayed whilst in Philippi and there the Christian community which was the first fruit of the Apostle's labours in Greece began to meet in fellowship.

It was at Philippi, probably after several weeks residence and ministry, that there occurred the incident of the demon obsessed slave girl, an affair which landed Paul and Silas in jail and led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer. This unfortunate girl was *"possessed with a spirit of Python"* (A.V. Margin *"pneuma pythonos"*). In the city of Delphi, not far from Athens, there stood the Temple of Apollo, within the precincts of which was a famous Oracle. The priestess of Apollo, known as the Pythia, presided over the Oracle. Upon being approached by an enquirer after the future, she would fall into a frenzy of demon obsession and with foaming at the mouth, shrieks and gesticulations give a cryptic reply within which was contained the alleged answer to the question. The reference to this slave girl being possessed by a Pythian spirit is evidence that she attracted attention by displaying a similar kind of behaviour in public and thereby gained notoriety by reason of her declarations. As a slave girl her earnings were the property of her owners and a very lucrative business they evidently found it to be, judging by their chagrin when Paul put a peremptory stop to the whole thing. *"These men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation."* That was the cry which

fell upon the ears of Paul and Silas every time they encountered this poor demented girl in the street. It was a witness to the cause of Christ, but from a source which Paul could not allow. The Christian Gospel was not to be associated with the frenzied ravings and distraught acts characteristic of pagan idolatry. Turning abruptly upon the girl and owners, and in full sight of the gaping crowd, Paul sternly commanded the obsessing spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. *"And he came out immediately."* Never again was this slave girl to mystify and entertain the thoughtless crowds of Philippi with her cryptic utterances. Whether or not she became a disciple after this experience is not known: suffice it that once again the saving and healing power of Jesus Christ was made manifest in a spectacular fashion to those who as yet knew Him not. The handful of believers in Philippi must have had their faith strengthened in consequence and rendered praise to God. But the owners of the slave did not. The source of their profit was gone. The value of their slave was destroyed in a moment by these interfering Jews. Determined to have their revenge, they laid hold on Paul and Silas and hurried them before the civil authorities. The episode of the Philippian jailer, in vividly dramatic style, was the result.

(To be continued)

AOH

A NOTE ON MATT. 6.27

"Which of you by taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" the word rendered *"stature"* has two meanings. It can refer to a person's height or to his age. In the case of Zacchaeus (Luke 19.3) it denoted his height. In those of Jesus *"increasing in wisdom and stature"* (Luke 2.52), and the healed cripple who was *"of age"* (John 9.21, 28) it denoted age. In the example in Matthew 6 it is more likely that Jesus intended age rather than physical height. The question at issue was taking thought for the future (v.25), rather than seeking first the kingdom of God, and trusting him to "add all these things" according to need. By no amount of taking thought for the future can one increase one's length of life; that is what Jesus was intimating. Had he intended physical stature he would hardly have used the word for cubit, which was eighteen inches, an absurdity; more likely he would have used *daktylos*, the smallest measure, equal to three quarters of an inch, or *palaste*, three inches. The Psalmist in Psa. 39.5 used a similar short measure, the *tepace* of a little over three inches, when he says *"thou hast made my days as an handbreadth"*. The length of our lives is in the hand of God and no amount of foresight on our part is going to make any difference to that.

GIANTS

Part 1 of a conference address

Reading: Numbers 13.1, 2 & 17-33

When we talk of giants, probably the first thing that comes to mind is the old fairy tale of the giant at the top of Jack's beanstalk. But to the Christian, giants are not men standing ten feet tall and wearing seven league boots, they are the great obstacles and difficulties that beset us, and giants are everywhere.

We all come across them at some time or other. They are in our families, in our churches, in our social life; they are in our own minds, and they must be overcome or, as the men of old said of the giants of Canaan at the end of Numbers 13 *"They will eat us up,"* but the men of faith said; *"They are bread for us, we will eat them up."* In other words, by facing up to them, and overcoming them with God's help, we will be stronger than if there had been no giants to overcome.

Let me remind you of a story that illustrates this. An old man sat on the ground, with his back to a rock, looking out over the lower slopes of Mount Horeb, the Mountain of God. For the last forty years he had been looking after the flocks of his father-in-law and now he was watching as the sheep wandered over the side of the mountain in their search for food.

He was a Hebrew and, as he had done so often during the eighty years of his life, he was brooding on the sufferings of his people in Egypt. He wondered how much longer they would have to wait for God to fulfil His promise to bring them safely out of the land where they were held in slavery.

Suddenly a nearby bush burst into flames (the story is in Exodus 3 & 4), but, after idly watching it for a few minutes, he realised that something strange was happening. Although the bush was on fire, it wasn't turning to ashes as it burned. He thought he had better go and have a closer look to see if he could find out why the bush wasn't burning away to nothing. As he got nearer a voice spoke to him from the flames *"You can be sure I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come to rescue them from the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own good and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey - the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live. The cries of the people of Israel have reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt"* (Exodus 3.7-10).

Now Moses does not seem to have been too happy about this idea, he was an old man and this job wasn't going to be easy: so he raised every objection he could think of. First he said that he was a nobody and that Pharaoh would not

take any notice of him. Then he said that in any case, even if Pharaoh did listen to him, the Israelites probably would not believe that he had been sent by God to help them. Then lastly, he said that he was not a good talker, was slow of speech and not quick witted. But God overruled every one of these objections, so as a last resort Moses said; *"Lord, please! Send someone else."* (Exodus 4.13)

It wasn't because he was afraid of going back into Egypt, even though he had had to leave there in rather a hurry because he had killed an overseer who was beating one of the Hebrews. That had been over forty years ago and was probably forgotten now, and no-one was going to recognise in an old shepherd a former member of the Egyptian court. It was just that he could see all the problems that were going to crop up and he just had not got enough confidence in himself, or enough faith in God, to trust that if God said; *"Go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt,"* (Exodus 3.10) then God would make sure that nothing, and no one, would stop that happening.

Anyway, like it or not, Moses went. We are not going through the whole history of how God, through Moses, brought the Israelites out of Egypt and up to the borders of the Promised Land. Nor how the spies were sent out to explore the land of Canaan, but we'll take up the story just after the spies had returned and given their report.

What these men reported gives us a perfect example of how men can allow their fears to get such a big hold on their minds that they no longer trust God's Word. God had caused Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, had protected them when they were pursued, fed them when they were hungry and led them to the borders of the land which He had promised Moses that He would give them for their own. It was a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. They had seen, with their own eyes, how God had protected them until now. The spies had actually brought them evidence of the abundant fruit of the land. Now, because the men who occupied this promised land were evidently well built and warlike, and the cities that they lived in were strong and well fortified, they were afraid to trust that God would lead them victoriously into it. This, in spite of all He had done for them on their journey.

The spies said, *"there are giants in the land, men so big that we look like grasshoppers beside them, we can't possibly defeat men like that"*. These were respected men, leaders of the twelve tribes, men whose opinions were accepted, and if these men said that their people could never capture that land, because of the giants they had seen, then the people would believe them, as they did, even though two of their number, Caleb and Joshua, said that with God's help they could possess the land.

Yes, they saw Giants: but Caleb and Joshua saw more - they saw God and they were quite convinced that nothing is impossible with God and that if He

said He would take the land from its present occupants and give it to them then all they had to do was follow His leading and it would be so.

Now the fact is, that unless we have an overcoming faith, we shall be eaten up, - we shall be consumed by the Giants which are the difficulties in our path. Those who doubt, as the ten leaders did, say "We're not able to go up; we can't do it." But those who believe, as Caleb and Joshua did, say, "Let's go up and possess it, - we can do it."

We need to have the same spirit of faith as these men of old. We need to see God in everything, and trust in Him; then He will take care of the difficulties. As James tells us *"Consider it you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man in all he does"* James 1.2-8.

It's when we are in the way of duty that we find giants in our path. They come in many disguises, and they will always be there, especially when we want to do the Lord's will. In fact there will probably be more of them when we set out to do His will. It was when Israel were going forward that the Giants appeared. When they turned back into the wilderness they found none. But this had been the crucial point in their lives. Within sight of the Promised Land they had turned back because they were afraid to trust God, except for two men, Caleb and Joshua, who would have gone into Canaan and who trusted that God would give them the victory. The opportunity to enter the Promised Land never returned. Instead, they wandered around in the wilderness for forty years, and those two men were the only ones, from more than 600,000 men over the age of about twenty, who lived to enter Canaan.

What the Israelites ignored, and we are still liable to ignore, is that; *"the battle is the Lord's"* (1 Samuel 17.47). Because we only see a small corner of the conflict, in which we're fighting, we tend to think that we're in charge of the battle. But if the battle is the Lord's, then the responsibility for planning everything connected with it, whether it's the line of attack or the method of defence, is also His. There is no need for us to worry about the enemy's strength or his subtlety because the Lord has a full view of all the enemy's movements, and a perfect knowledge of the enemy's defences. He has anticipated all His opponent's wiles and it is impossible for Him to be deceived or be taken unawares. It is His glory that is at stake; the honour of His name that's being assailed and He is well able to deal with the strongest of foes.

The battle is the Lord's, therefore the supplies will be more than sufficient. Ours is not the first battle the Lord has fought and no one knows better than a general who has directed many campaigns, just what is needed on the day of battle. We shall lack nothing that is needed to make us victorious. That we shall be victorious is beyond question, because He goes forth "Conquering and to Conquer" and He has never lost a battle. We should remember Paul's words in Ephesians 6.12, *"We are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms"*. The enemy may at some time during the fight appear to be gaining the advantage, but for Satan to gain the victory is simply impossible. However, the Lord does expect us to rest in His wisdom. In the thick of the fight, in the midst of the smoke and the noise of battle, we may fail to see the wisdom of the general's ways, but it is then, when we cannot see, that we must trust Him and rest in His wisdom. We must be confident of His power and be obedient to His command. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church; *"Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ"* (2 Corinthians 2.14).

We can find inspiration in the faith and trust of the young David. He had been able to kill a lion and, at another time a bear, when they had each tried to carry off one of his sheep. He said that it was *"The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear."* It was this faith in the Lord that later on, helped him to conquer the mighty Goliath. When the lion came to steal from his flock, it came as a marvellous opportunity for David. If he had faltered, or given in to his fears, he would have missed God's opportunity for him and probably would never have become God's chosen King of Israel. Now you would hardly think that facing a lion was a special blessing from God. But David's lion was God's opportunity, in disguise. The very trial that threatens to overcome us with discouragement and disaster, will become God's opportunity for the revelation of His grace and glory in our lives. As Paul wrote to the Philippians at the end of his letter; *"God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."*

Although we may not know what trials await any of us we can believe that every difficulty that presents itself to us, if we face up to it, is God's opportunity, and we shouldn't forget that our impossibilities are God's certainties, or that because *"Nothing is impossible for God"* if we trust in Him, and have faith that He is with us, then nothing will be impossible for us, through Christ. Trials and hard places are needed to press us forward. Even the difficulties that confront us are not intended to discourage us but to teach us new lessons in the life of faith and to test us to see if we will depend on Him and trust him to perform the impossible.

The Apostle John wrote at the beginning of the fifth chapter of his first letter; *"For every child of God defeats this evil world by trusting Christ to give the victory."* I wonder just how many opportunities we've lost during our lives because we gave in to our fears, just as the Israelites did, instead of trusting, like David, that the Lord would defeat the giants for us if only we would go on into the battle. But never forget the warning given in the last four verses of the third chapter of Hebrews; *"Today you must listen to his voice. Don't harden your hearts against him as Israel did when they rebelled. And who were those people who rebelled against God. Were they not the ones Moses led out of Egypt and who made God angry for forty years? Was it not the people who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he vowed that they would never enter his place of rest? He was speaking to those who disobeyed him. So we see that they were not allowed to enter his rest because of their unbelief."* (Hebrews 3.15-19).

One way many people try to solve their difficulties is to get round them. They come to a desert, and instead of showing confidence in the Lord with prayer and trust, then pressing on across it, believing that He will provide them with water, they go round the desert so that they can find water for themselves. But the water they find is just water, dirty, polluted and germ laden. As we are told in John 4.13, 14, Jesus told the woman of Samaria, when she came and talked with Him; *"People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water. But the water I give them takes away thirst altogether. It becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life."* (John 4.13-14)

If only they'd gone through their desert obstacle they would have been given the crystal clear water of life. They only had to ask, believing that it would be given, and they would have found that their desert had become an oasis. There are others who find mountains in their way and instead of climbing them and using the tops as stepping stones that will take them to the security of the Father's care, they try to find a way for themselves through the valleys. They find that the mountains get higher all the time while the valleys get narrower and twist and turn so much that there seems no way out. Yet there is a way, if we have faith. In Matthew 17.20 we are told that Jesus said; *"I assure you, even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."* (Matthew 17.20).

RJH

Take time to be holy! Speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word;
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

‘GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD’

A camel train moved slowly across the Jordan valley. It had come from Damascus and beyond and now was on its way southward. The merchants had stopped recently in Gilead to pick up gum and spices for which it was famous and these sold readily in Egypt. The trading caravans were a familiar sight as they crossed the great plain of Esdraelon and made for Gaza en route for Egypt. The ancient trade route passed close to Dothan and Shechem. The sheep farmers of Hebron knew how to contact them.

As the camels made their way towards the sea and then southwards, there was a human item for sale in Egypt. The young man who walked slowly with the traders must have thought much about his boyhood and upbringing at Haran on the great trade route between Assyria and northern Mesopotamia. The Biblical record gives the impression that his father's household was not as happy as it should have been. Two wives and two concubines had not led to domestic bliss and there were times of internal struggles and strife. Quarrelling among mothers leads to quarrelling among their children. The young men were a bit wild and adventurous, much like an older generation that had gone off to live in the wilderness. But this boy had been different, brought up more gently, perhaps closer to his father in many respects as well as being his favourite.

One might have thought that Jacob would have known better than to have a favourite son considering the strife and exile that he experienced as a result of parental favouritism. But those kind of relationships persist through the ages. Personal friendships are one thing, gifts and preferential treatment make for trouble. Jacob's older sons had inherited jealousy from their grandfather in Haran and uncle in Edom. They wanted fair shares for all - with their share being even fairer than the rest. But Jacob failed to learn the lesson and so had the older brothers.

Their envy had turned to hatred and had now led to virtual murder. There is a familiar ring in the words written nearly 2000 years later "*for where jealousy and selfish ambition exist there will be disorder and every vile practice*" (James 3.16). This aspect of evil, that has caused untold suffering through the ages, is highlighted in other Bible stories. Nothing can excuse the behaviour of Joseph's brothers. He may have appeared as a boastful young man who should have had more tact but there was also a lack of the spirit that was in their great grandfather, Abraham. Joseph had learned something of the promise to Abraham that his descendant would go into Egypt and four hundred years later would be redeemed. Joseph instructed his descendants to carry his remains back to Canaan. (Heb. 11.22). On that walk to Egypt he had plenty of time to ponder what he had learned, as he stumbled wearily behind the camels on the rough road through Gaza. Not so long before this Joseph had lost the comfort of his own mother. What had been her part in his upbringing in so mixed a family?

Interesting contrasts have been drawn between Leah and Rachel. Their children make a fascinating study. Rachel's son appears to have the spiritual advantage and grew into manhood showing great courage and devotion to God. Perhaps he had paid more heed to his father Jacob, or even Isaac, than his brothers had done.

The eldest of Jacob's family was Reuben who had stupidly hurt his father concerning his unchastity. He was never forgiven. Rules of behaviour were strict in their ancient culture and Jacob couldn't forgive him even as he approached death. Yet it was to Reuben that Joseph owed his life. The others would have killed him but the oldest brother not only suggested the pit but intended to rescue the lad later. He never had the opportunity, for Judah suggested the sale of kith and kin. Slavery could be a fate worse than death.

'God moves in a mysterious way'. Much of the Middle East was very vulnerable to food shortage. The Bedouin way of life could be very precarious without refrigeration and barn storage. What few crops they had could readily be burnt by enemies or eaten by locusts. Egypt alone had an apparently limitless supply through the ages except when prolonged draught affected the whole Great Rift valley.

It is apparent from Biblical records that Joseph was a strong, handsome and intelligent young man. Had he inherited his father's shrewdness and his mother's good looks? What were his thoughts as he walked with an iron collar and heavy chain? Older and more experienced servants of God sometimes find it hard to understand God's providence when apparent disasters fall upon them. But Joseph had been a 'dreamer' or visionary. He had been given a glimpse of the future and he never seems to have lost that vision. Perhaps he had experienced long hard winters that end in a burst of spring sunshine and rain with the consequent fruitful harvest.

At last the country lad, who recently had seen little of city life, found himself surrounded by large buildings and bustling people. He was in the market place and would-be purchasers were looking him over and sizing up his value. How much had he learned from older ones in the family about town life and commercial activity. To one accustomed to the sounds and scents of the natural world, city cries and smells are not usually attractive. He had left behind the security of the patriarchal home and now faced the insecurity of being 'a piece of furniture' or 'domestic chattel'. He heard foreign voices and now lived under laws that were alien to him and was surrounded by pagan religion. His father's word had been law and he had owned everything that was in sight of their tents. Here Joseph was owned and had nothing. The raw and blistered feet stood on foreign soil. Did those brothers ever give a thought to Joseph's fate? Their callous greed was a terrible crime among a people whose laws give freedom from slavery. How could a Hebrew sell his brother to uncircumcised pagans who knew no limits to their cruelty and immorality?

Perhaps Jacob suffered most. He had lost his favourite wife and now he had lost his favourite son. Could anything worse happen to him? Was his mourning self-pity? The brothers may have stifled their feelings but they never really forgot what they had done, nor the cries for help that were their last memories of the brother they had sold.

Joseph stood in the market place and appears to have been fairly quickly bought by a high-ranking army officer. In the home of an aristocrat Joseph was surrounded by luxury. He must have quickly learned the Egyptian language and customs. Potiphar judged his man well and Joseph was soon in charge of his household.

The young Hebrew was promoted to a very important position in which he evidently had other slaves under him and was given a free hand to run the soldier's home. His honest, upright manner was trusted which meant that his owner could give full attention to Pharaoh's service. Sadly, he had not chosen the best wife to help him. She did not want a trustworthy servant, she just wanted this intelligent handsome young man. Joseph kept clear of her when he could so that he was not tainted with her immorality. But the wicked woman manipulated events that landed Joseph in prison. He had been totally faithful to God but once more he was in trouble. How much did he realise that this was one further step to the realisation of his dreams.

Unjustly put in the prison, Joseph remained true to the faith of his fathers - true to the Eternal God of Heaven. Once again his good character and intelligence were recognised and he entered the service of the governor of the prison and enjoyed the freedom and authority of a responsible job. His high integrity meant that the 'blot' on his record was soon forgotten. He was devoted to the obedience of God's Word and he experienced the trial of his faith (Psalm 105.19).

Although he had prominence and responsibility within the prison it is clear this son of freedom found the confines of the cells very harsh. The strange customs of a foreign pagan land would not be pleasant to one who loved the God of Israel. But his faith in the God of the dreams kept him steadfast and helped him to retain sanity as he plodded through the miles of prison corridors as he had plodded the many miles to Egypt years before.

We who live in the freedom of Christian civilisation, however weak the morality has become, can hardly appreciate the intolerable conditions endured by Joseph. It is a lesson for us. If we bear long years of frustrating disappointment and nothing in our life bears the fruit we expected we must remember Joseph who never lost faith. We set out with high ambition to do great things for God but somehow our plans and hopes do not come to fruition. There are times when it is hard to understand what God is doing with us. But He knows the end from the beginning. He sees the various people that will serve His purpose in shaping the clay and producing the 'vessel of honour'.

The misdemeanours of butlers and bakers and their ultimate fate are all known to our Father. The God of dreams used them as yet a further step to the throne. So it was that Joseph was called into the presence of the greatest king of his day who readily saw Joseph's value to the Egyptian empire at a very critical time. Now Joseph was in a position to receive his brothers in the situation once revealed to him in a dream.

So Jacob's sons arrived in Egypt and were soon ushered into the presence of the governor of Pharaoh's household with all his authority and power. His challenge to his brothers was soon perceived as punishment for their crime against Joseph and they discussed it among themselves little knowing that their long lost brother was listening to every word they said. Simeon was kept in prison, money was returned and promise given that Benjamin would return with them. Jacob suffered again as his youngest son went with his brothers on the second visit to Egypt. This time there was feast, with Benjamin receiving better treatment than the rest; and they all sat in age rank order at table. Finally, there was the 'loss' of the gold cup and the pleading for Benjamin's life against the life of Judah.

Joseph could contain his human feelings no longer. He was a man of God- a man of compassion. He made himself known to his brothers and told them clearly that God had sent him ahead of them to save life. Even after the death of Jacob, Joseph had to reassure his brothers that while they had intended evil towards him "God had intended it for good". It helps us to understand a little more about why God permits evil and a little more about 'predestination'. God has His creation under His control and some day we shall be able to look back with Joseph and say 'God intended it all for good'. There will not have been a tear drop shed nor a drop of blood spilt, but that God knew that it would fit into His grand design - His great jigsaw - which will ultimately show that He is totally a God of love.

DN

The 'Talents' are given out by One who knows the character and abilities of His children: One who is too wise to err; too loving to give less than we can use. He has placed us where we can serve Him best, and given us all that He sees we can, with advantage, use.

Bishop F. J. Chavasse

The close study of the Word of God may require all our highest powers and tax all our energies but the consolation of that study no tongue of men or angels can fully tell. While we are so engaged light breaks around our path, hopes burn brighter and love waxes warmer.

Bishop Ellicott.

JOY – WHERE?

Some people expect our experience as Christians to be joy, joy and joy again. In hymns there is the picture of sunlight - "There is sunshine in my soul today more glorious and bright than glows in any earthly sky, for Jesus is my light" wrote F. E. Hewitt, and the hymn goes on to picture our experience as music, spring time, gladness, hope, praise and love. Or F. W. Faber in his verses which speak of the wideness of God's mercy comes to the thought that "if our love were but more simple ... our lives would be all sunshine in the sweetness of our Lord."

But many believers have found that life is not like that. Some have faced the distress of a terminal illness. Some have seen their loved ones tortured or killed on account of their faith. Some have struggled against a sense of depression, as for example J. B. Phillips in his later life, a sense of depression which existed despite his faith and trust and presenting God's word to others. Where in such experiences is the joy?

James, brother of our Lord, when he wrote to his brethren, recognised this as the first problem to be addressed. "Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy." What a paradox! The J. B. Phillips paraphrase reads *"When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and produce in you the quality of endurance."* Endurance, steadfastness, is produced when faith is put to the test. There is a positive process. When we give up, we halt the process, which needs to go on until our character is mature and we are people of integrity, complete Christians. If this seems something that is beyond us, we may look into the lives of others and see God at work.

James does not say that God sends temptations our way. He does say that the way to face trials is to take them as an opportunity for our faith and character to grow. Afterwards, there will be the *"crown of life that the Lord has promised to those that love him."*

The apostle Peter, writing with help from Silas a dozen years later, probably from Rome, has a similar viewpoint. At the beginning of his first letter he sets out our hope and destiny, by contrast with which 'various trials' are relatively insignificant. Later in his letter, some of these trials become apparent. Christians will be misunderstood and slandered as evil doers despite their good moral behaviour. If they are slaves, they could be punished unjustly. Any of them might suffer for living a good life in opposition to the lives lived by others around them. In the fiery ordeals facing them, to be a Christian would be cause for punishment as murderers and thieves are punished. They should take Christ as their model of patient endurance and look to the *"God of all grace who has*

called you to his eternal glory in Christ" to restore, support, strengthen and establish them.

Yet Peter dismisses all this hardship as 'various trials' suffered for 'a little while', little by comparison with the experience of a 'perfect inheritance beyond the reach of change and decay, reserved in Heaven for you' which represents a source of tremendous joy. Born again into a life full of hope ... (through Christ, who rose from the dead!) guarded by the power of God - which operates through your faith - till you enter fully into the salvation ready to be revealed at the last, praise and glory and honour in the day when Jesus Christ reveals himself ... Jesus, someone who is loved, trusted, who brings a joy that is beyond words. All the time the real you is being kept safe.

The trials, meanwhile, do serve a purpose. They are like the furnace that purifies precious metals. Precious as gold might be, it is ultimately perishable. Your real self is more precious, and you have a hope which is eternal.

Between the times of James' and Peter's letters, the apostle Paul was also writing letters which contained thoughts about suffering and trials. Writing to Christians in Corinth, he drew on his own experiences. Writing to Rome, he was concerned to understand suffering as part of God's great scheme of things.

In two passages in 2 Corinthians Paul does not seem to look on his trials as a means of building up strength, but rather as an occasion for seeing God's grace and help in his weakness. When speaking of his trials he concentrates on those relevant to his task of preaching the gospel. He has been stoned, imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked. He had to avoid bandits, beware of false Christians, experience danger in cities, deserts and on the high seas. He suffered drudgery, exhaustion, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure. Alongside these physical risks, he felt anxiety for all those who had become Christians through his agency, in their weaknesses, doubts and temptations. At one point he was completely overwhelmed, the burden was greater than he could bear, he felt the end had come. But afterwards he realised that this experience had made him trust completely in God when he had come to the end of his own strength. And God can raise the dead.

Because of all this, he was better able to help others. From God he had received a sense of mercy and comfort; to others he was able to give strong sympathy in their troubles. He knew God could comfort them (and can comfort us!) just as effectively.

There was another trial Paul experienced which was more personal. His "thorn in the flesh" - we do not know what it was, acute symptoms of malaria have been suggested among other things - was something he could not get rid of, for all his prayers. The stabbing pain was his personal experience of evil, but it also provoked God's reassurance. God's grace is sufficient whatever the trial. Our helplessness makes room for Christ's power to help. Paul could also see that

there had been a risk of his getting above himself because of his spiritual experiences, and this trial had brought him back to earth. And strangely, because his weakness made him aware of Christ's power, he could even be glad of insults, privations, persecutions and difficulties.

When writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul in chapter 5 brings together the two thoughts of helplessness in suffering and growth in character through suffering. The context is that we are forgiven people, through trust in Christ. *"Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand, in happy certainty of the glorious things he has for us in the future. This doesn't mean, of course, that we have only a hope of future joys - we can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character, and a character of this sort produces a steady hope, a hope that will never disappoint us. Already we have the love of God flooding through our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us. And we can see that it was at the very time that we were powerless to help ourselves that Christ died for sinful men ..."* Paul expresses thoughts similar to James and Peter - joy in the midst of troubles, development of endurance, maturity, hope for the future. Additionally Paul mentions the love of God flooding through our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.

Obedying the leading of the Spirit is an indication that one belongs to God's special family, but is not a guarantee of a pain free life. Paul identifies a state of painful tension. Having the Spirit is only a foretaste. Our bodies, like the rest of creation, are subject to the tyranny of change and decay. But like the rest of creation, we expect in God's plan ultimately to be rescued. We hope. But hope implies waiting, settling down to wait.

In our trials and weakness and limitations the Spirit helps us, especially in the matter of prayer. When we can't put our feelings into words, we need not worry for the Spirit 'speaks for us', interprets our longings. God understands. Our experience is all part of God's working for our personal good. More, it is all a part of His wider plan to bring the whole of creation into joy and freedom. Paul speaks of all this at the end of Romans 8, on which we do well to meditate, but here let us simply note that none of our trials, hardship, distress, persecution, whatever ... has power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What James, Peter and Paul wrote, was written for good reason. We all have troubles to deal with, little ones or terrible ones, and they point out that we need to look beyond the immediate trouble. If we are helpless, we look to God for His help, for His love to flood our hearts. Perhaps our prayer for relief, as Paul found, may not be granted: but we still trust. There may seem no end to the trouble: so

be steadfast, and hope for God's salvation still ahead of us. Trusting, enduring and hoping, we may even learn to find joy.

References: James 1.2-8, 12-13, 18. 1 Peter 1.3-9, 2.11-25 2 Corinthians 1.3-11, 11.23-12.10 Romans 5.1-6, 8.14-39. Use has been made of J. B. Phillips version and N-RSV.

GC

WHAT IS TRUTH?

"For this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." (John 18.17). Pilate is usually dismissed as one who didn't wait to hear the answer to his question, but we don't know that. The Gospels don't give us all the details of any one particular incident. If Pilate did not listen to Jesus he missed a wonderful opportunity but then he was not the only one who did that.

What does a dictionary or thesaurus tell us concerning the meaning of the word 'truth'? It is something that is not false and is linked to accuracy, correctness, sincerity, integrity, genuineness, and fact. Each of those terms could be a study in itself. Has the idea of truth changed in the last two thousand years? Has thinking changed with the advent of scientific investigation that implies exact measurement and records of detail? That was not unknown but less common in ancient times.

F. H. Palmer in the New Bible Dictionary says that 'truth' in the Old Testament is used in two senses, intellectual facts and more commonly, in the moral sense of dependability as when Joseph verified his brothers statements as to who they were (Gen. 42.16). Palmer goes on to say that the New Testament use of the word '*aletheia*' has something of the classical Greek meaning but also carrying something of the Hebrew meaning. He further says that it is sometimes difficult to know where to place the emphasis on the moral or the factual aspects. That should make us cautious in our thinking. During the last few hundred years there have been many who dissented from the established churches and then claimed a personal possession of 'the Truth'.

What does truth do? That is not a strange question in Hebrew philosophy which tends to be more practical than the intellectual exercises and semantics as in ancient Greek culture or modern English philosophy. In Psalm 40.11, normally attributed to David, the psalmist says *"May your love and your truth always protect me."* That in the RSV is a little different but gives a clue to the meaning of truth; *"Let thy steadfast love and faithfulness preserve me"*. Psalm 25.5 speaks of being led *"in thy truth and teach me"* so we have protection and guidance by knowing 'the truth'. Truth speaks of faithfulness - reliability - dependability - and that is how the nature and character of God are revealed throughout the Scriptures. In fact Psalm 25 uses the word '*chesed*' which in the

RSV is almost always translated into English as '*steadfast love*' - the love which binds Israel to its God - Yahweh. The outstanding quality of that love is its faithfulness. Israel's God was unlike any of the false pagan gods - He was not fickle - He did not change with the passing seasons. He could be depended upon - unswerving -unchanging because He was not the figment of human imagination but the eternal Creator from before human time began.

What does Truth do? Jesus said "*you will know the truth and the truth will make you free*" (John 8.32). That kind of statement stung the religious leaders of Jesus' day because they believed that as descendants of Abraham they were free already, unlike their Gentile neighbours. They little realised how enslaved they had become to the very Law which once had liberated God's people at Sinai. Truth liberates us in the same way - we can become bound by sin and human tradition and human decadence. In our day and age philosophies based on wrong interpretation of scientific findings and the desire to be free from what is perceived to be religious morality is leading the human race to ethical standards worse than that of paganism. We are moving towards a lawless culture or as the book of Judges has it "*every man did what was right in his own eyes*". Truth embodies the idea of law.

The Truth of God sanctifies. This is the process whereby the child of God, having been redeemed in Christ is taught to walk with God - and in walking with Him, becomes like Him. This is where it is so important to distinguish between intellectual knowledge, which is easy to absorb (at least by some) and Truth which removes the works of darkness and shows us the path of light. Truth reveals us for what we are as sinful children of Adam and shows us what God wants us to be as His children in Christ. God will not catechize us as we enter His Kingdom. He will be looking for His image in our character.

That does not allow us to become lazy in our thoughtful study of God's Word. If we love Him we will love His Word and we will want to know, as well as we are able, what it teaches us. By His Word He does the pruning work as the Master gardener. The word used in John 15.2 *kathairo* and translated '*prunes*' the branches in the vine is related to the word Paul uses in Ephesians 5.26 *katharizo* when writing about Christ's loving and cleansing the Church through the Word.

Jesus told a woman by a well that God is a spirit and those who worship His Father must do so in the spirit and in truth. We do not need a specially venerated shrine nor do we need outward adornment in our worship. Our faith is in Christ not in outward or external things. God requires purity of heart and simplicity of mind so that He can be worshipped in the prayers of our hearts in any surroundings.

That which provoked Pilate's well known question was Jesus own words "*for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth*". So to discover truth

we need to take a long, hard look at our Saviour and try to be utterly honest in our assessment of Him as we can. We shall not discover the whole truth by emphasizing one aspect of His work and teaching, more than any other. Above everything else Jesus came into the world to provide the perfect revelation of God (Heb. 1.1-4). The Pharisees of Jesus' day did not recognise God's revelation in Christ because they already had a definition of 'truth' that did not match up in any way with what Jesus said and did. Jesus condemned the sins of hypocrisy and arrogance. The Pharisees were arrogant in their conceit about the perfection of their knowledge. They were hypocritical in their demands for others to be outwardly holy like themselves but inwardly they were far from holy.

Truth is not a collection of static ideas. What we see as Truth now may need considerable amendment when we no longer see through a glass darkly - when we no longer look *"at puzzling reflections in a mirror"* as J. B. Phillips translated 1 Cor. 13.12. The revelation of God that is being given to us is continually unfolding, showing new boundaries and definitions. Yet as we examine carefully the relationship of God with Abraham and Moses we see that they had already begun to appreciate something of the wonder of His 'glory' that was to be revealed by the prophets about the Almighty. God is God and His pronouncements are right yet both Abraham and Moses felt able to question what He says.

We know relatively little about this tiny planet and as we ponder the Universe that is so far understood are we not filled with awe and left speechless? Sadly men have become more arrogant and unbelieving with the *'increase of knowledge'*. But do we, children of God, make arrogant assertions? We are right to be sure of what we believe and to state those beliefs in the spirit of the One in whom we believe. If God has revealed Himself and His purpose to us, that should make us genuinely humble. If 'truth' doesn't make us like its Divine Author, either we are abusing a privilege or we just don't possess Truth. Truth is a reflection of God - bound up in His Word. It gives us a veiled glimpse of God, His work in creation and re-creation through His Son. Our knowledge of God, His work and His ways in Creation are confined to this planet - but a speck in a vast universe. What of the mysteries and energy about which we know virtually nothing? Yet we have seen enough of the beauty and wonder of our great God to give us a simple faith to which we must be obedient. In Jesus He has shown us that He wants to draw us to Himself. It is not that God is holding back - it is we limited human beings, which place boundaries on the infinite loveliness of our Creator.

To quote again from Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13 through Phillips' pen *"At present all I know is a little fraction of the truth but the time will come when I shall know it as fully as God now knows me"*.

"Fear not to enter His courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as thine
Truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness;
These are the offerings to lay on His shrine."

- W.H. Cooke

DN

GODS OF EGYPT

"Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (Ex. 32.1 RSV).

Man has ever been prone to make God in his own image and likeness. There are few who realise with Solomon that heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain God; and much less any house that man can build. The average Israelites of Moses' day believed that God dwelt literally inside the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle, and that Aaron went in to speak with Him face to face. Moses and the leaders of the nation knew better, but they could not impart that knowledge to the people, for the people would have none of it. A visible leader, a mighty man of valour to go before them and smite their enemies, they could follow. A popular figure, arousing their feelings and enthusiasm to discover a land flowing with milk and honey, they could heed. This mystic who remained alone on the mountain, to no apparent purpose for days on end, coming down only to define and order their communal life together for a purpose still not fully understood, had ceased to fire their imagination. They did not understand what he was doing and they looked about for more tangible things upon which to fix their interest. So it was that they tired of the high mission to which they had been called; shrank from the hardships of the journey that lay before them, and magnified the obstacles that lay in the way. The fair vision of a land in which their children could grow up and the family of Israel live as a free people disappeared. In their hearts the vivid colours of Egypt, its gaudy temples, its green fields and its blue river, exercised an appeal the more potent because in spirit they had never really left Egypt. The cruel slavery was forgotten, the distress and sore labour faded from their minds, and they said to one another *"let us return to Egypt, for the former days were better than these"*. While Moses wrestled with God on the mountain, the people in the plain sat down to eat and drink and *"rose up to play"*. The tremendous significance of their deliverance from Egypt no longer meant anything to them. The enthusiasm that led them to shout exultantly *"All that the Lord has spoken we will do"* had spent itself and they were left only with an awareness of those things that appealed to the gross materialism of their natures. That expression *"to play"* indicates a free indulgence in unholy rites and practices that were expressly condemned in the law Moses had so recently given them. For a short time they had caught a vision

of heaven, and in the wonder of that vision had given themselves wholeheartedly to God for His service. But the vision had faded and they had turned once again to the more tangible if less exalted things of this world.

We must, nevertheless, impute to these unfortunate Israelites a certain measure of sincerity. They did not turn back to the gods of Egypt solely because the worship of those gods pandered to depraved desires which could not be satisfied in the purer worship of the Most High. Their reversion to the religion of Egypt was largely because that religion was expressed in terms they could understand. They had been brought up in its atmosphere, under the shadow of its temples, indoctrinated in all its lore and traditions. Those marvellous manifestations of Divine power, the ten plagues, the Red Sea crossing, and the waters of Marah, had for a time turned their thoughts and devotions to the hitherto unknown God whom Moses preached. The rosy promises of a land in which they might live free from Egyptian bondage spurred them on to a new zeal and service fired by that expectation. With the magnetism of Moses' personal presence withdrawn and his own prolonged absence on the mountain top, the old arguments and ideas began to reassert themselves. Feeling themselves to be in need of leadership and guidance, and fearing that both Moses and the God whom he represented had forgotten and deserted them, the people stretched out longing hands to the gods that they had previously served. Dreading to be left without a shepherd, they were willing to accept as shepherds even those that would lead them back into the intolerable bondage from which they had so recently escaped.

This is the test that comes upon each one who hears and accepts the Divine call to a complete dedication of life. Sometimes it comes to communities of believers, sometimes to individuals, but to each at some time in life, comes the insistent question "*Do you love me more than these?*" Are you prepared to maintain your high ideals, your continual seeking the things of the Spirit, the things which are above, even although Moses has disappeared into the mists of the mountain top and the magic of his voice, the thrill of his presence, is yours no more? Can you finish your journey to the Kingdom under the guidance and in the strength of an invisible leader now that the visible one who led you in the early days has passed out of sight? Will you turn to things of earth to give your allegiance? The gods of Egypt will appeal more readily to the senses and give you a feeling of earthly satisfaction. There is music, dancing, rich foods, exhilarating drink and good company, for those who espouse the gods of Egypt. For a while these things will seem to be more worthwhile than the selfless devotion to a cause that seems on the surface to be a lost cause. But you are not really in tune with these things, and in your heart of hearts you know it. The turning away from the high spiritual standards of your calling may give temporary relief to eyes, tired with "straining ... for the tarrying day" and cause

them to rest more easily upon the pleasant things of this world. But they will bring leanness into your soul, and your heart will become sick for the days when *"we walked to the house of God in company"*. No one, having once sincerely and intelligently appreciated the conditions of our calling and caught a glimpse of the creation that shall be, can ever really be satisfied with earthly arrangements, institutions and interests again. *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; all things have become new."* And *"Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour"*.

We do not necessarily formally reject the faith that is in us when we turn to follow 'gods of Egypt'. We can set them up in our own midst and worship them thinking that we are worshipping the Most High more acceptably. We, no less than others, can make God after our own image and likeness. And it is so fatally easy because, like Israel of old, we want to see results. This waiting period is a time of severe strain. There is so much to be done in the execution of the Divine purpose, and we want to play our part in it. Israel was anxious to inherit and build the Promised Land and could not understand the wilderness experiences that had to come first. We are like that. We want to see our Father's Name vindicated and His praise and worship established throughout the earth. We know that we are called to witness to His truth and His Plan through all our days on earth, to be witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. We know that this witness is a necessary part of our spiritual development and training for the future work. It can be made to produce results of a more visible and tangible nature than the fruits of the Holy Spirit's work in our own hearts and lives. So we tend to be like those Israelites in the wilderness, to give the greater attention to that which is the means to the end, and to forget the end itself. The world will not be converted through our preaching now. That is a basic principle. We are called and commissioned nevertheless to preach the Gospel at all times, in all places, in every manner that we can, as a witness to all nations, fight up to the end of the Age, until the end comes. Unless we are so guided in all our ways and activities by the power of the Holy Spirit and transformed into the likeness of our Lord, then we shall not be counted worthy to be entrusted with the task of reconciling men to God in the next Age. So *"be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 1.10,11). There follows the graces of the Christian character, fruits of the Spirit that must grow in us if we are to be well-pleasing to our God.

We must learn to look, then, not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen, and in the power of that vision lay our hands to the opportunities of outward service that come our way. Our witness must be as a people, a compact body of believers, a family in Christ, witnessing not only by word of mouth or publicly, but by demonstration our faith in our own fellowship

and revealed in our meetings. The one that hears our message must be able to look at us in our assemblies and see what this faith has done for us, and seeing, *"falling on his face, he will worship God, and declare that God is really among us."* (1 Cor. 14.25 RSV). No witness is really effective unless it eventually leads to this.

We go forward, then, not behind the panoply of gods of Egypt, borne each upon their bearers' shoulders, as Isaiah so caustically remarked *"because they cannot go"*, but behind the guiding cloud which rises aloft and goes always in front of the host. It leads onward, away from Egypt and all its materialism, away from the standards and methods of this world; on, ever on, towards the Promised Land and the realisation of all the golden promises made to our fathers and inherited by us. We can transform our fellowship into a compact family, held together, not by creeds and regulations, but by the power of the Holy Spirit operating in each heart and mind. This will lead to spontaneous cooperation together in every good work and our witness will be so effective that others will know that we have *"been with Jesus."*

AOH

A NOTE ON LUKE 17.20-21

"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, the Kingdom of God comes not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here or, lo there, for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

Several attempts to avoid the plain meaning of this text have been made. In the first place the word "observation" and the A.V. margin alternative "outward show" are inadequate. The Greek word, used only in this instance, means simply and solely an event happening of such a character that it can be viewed or seen literally with the naked eye. Jesus makes clear in this text that the Kingdom which He was preaching was not one the coming of which would be an outward literal spectacle, whatever the after effects of its establishment may be. *"The Kingdom of God"* He said, *"is within you."* It commences as a spiritual rulership in the hearts of those who give themselves to the Lord. The Diaglott diverts the issue by rendering this part of the text *"God's Royal Majesty is among you"*, meaning Jesus Himself, but this will not do. *"Entos"* means within or inside and Jesus meant that the coming of the Kingdom starts first in the hearts of men. Likewise is the establishment of what must eventually be the world-wide Kingdom of our Lord upon earth during the Millennium. The coming of that Kingdom as involved in the beginning of the Second Advent is not itself an occurrence witnessed by human eye-sight. The rest of the chapter makes that clear. The Advent is likened to the *"astrape"*, (a dazzling radiance), the heavenly radiance of the sun (translated "lightning" in this particular verse) which rises in

the east and progressively suffuses the earth with light as it reaches the zenith and then to the west, (see Matt. 24-27), a gradual increase of perception and realisation amongst men that the Age is drawing near its end and the time of the Messianic Kingdom is imminent. As in the days of Noah and of Lot, the world goes on its way without any outward sign of the approaching crisis but the powers of heaven are already there bringing the factors of that crisis together until, at the ordained moment, it comes upon the world. Those in whose hearts the Kingdom of God had taken root in the sense intended by Jesus' words here will be out of the world associated with Christ bringing about the transfer of earthly rule from the "kingdoms of this world" to that of the Lord Christ.

AOH

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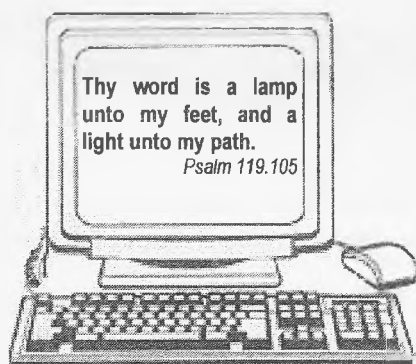
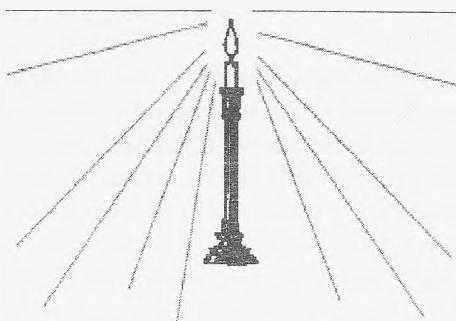
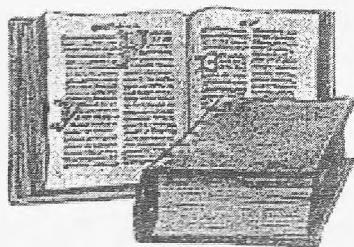
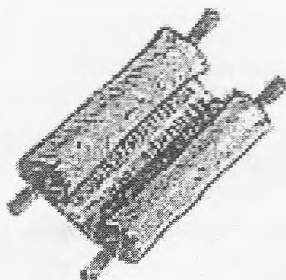
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4.15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.) It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1.28). The words 'subdue' and 'dominion' have been strangely misunderstood and wrongly interpreted. Does that mean that we can use the natural world of living and non-living things just as we please – extravagantly – cruelly. Subdue is used by almost every translation and the thought contained in 'dominion' is fairly consistent. Cultivation of the soil and what grows in it, is subduing it. Harnessing natural resources, animal, plant and mineral for the well being of everyone and everything is having dominion over them but not selfishly. Animals and birds, plants and minerals are God's gifts and their use is part of our moral and spiritual development. The Earth is beautiful but we need to avoid mismanaged husbandry that upsets nature's balance.

One of the wonderful provisions that the Creator made against entry of sin and rebellion into the world is the way living organisms cope with infection and injury. The restorative powers of nature overcome human dereliction. Many are now rediscovering the thrill of the wonders of this tiny planet.

The beloved carpenter of Nazareth said "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" and the hands that made yokes also handled an unbroken colt. He spoke of the flowers of the field and birds of the air – that don't fall to the ground without the Heavenly Father.

"When I look at the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has established... Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands, thou hast put all things under his feet." (Psalm 8.3, 6)

DN

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

A story of Paul

No one really knew what had happened. The two Jews were being dragged through the streets toward the *Agora*, the place where the *Duumviri*, dispensers of justice and custodians of law and order, administered the duties of their office. Alert for any opportunity of creating a tumult, especially against the hated Jews, all the riff-raff of Philippi followed hard behind. Something to do with a slave girl, someone had said. By means of magical arts these Jews had deprived her of her gift of prophecy and now her masters were laying a complaint at court. Should be worth seeing, this affair! Philippi was a Roman military centre; much of the population was descended from Roman soldiers settled here after a disastrous battle fought near by between Imperial and Republican forces during the civil war half a century earlier. The *duumviri* themselves were ex-military men who had assumed without any authority the Roman military title Praetor. This is why Luke used the equivalent Greek term *strategos*, rendered in the AV "*magistrates*" - and they could be relied on to see that these interfering Jews were taught a good sharp lesson for their pains. So the yelling mob surged on, crowding round the aggrieved complainants and their prisoners, as the *aediles*, in the forecourt of the buildings, listened impassively to the story.

Paul and Silas were probably taken by surprise at this sudden outburst of animosity. Paul may have performed this act of healing in a sudden inspiration of pity for the unfortunate girl who for so many days past had been calling after him as he moved about the city. "*These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show to us the way of salvation.*" He had so far experienced no opposition to his message. The citizens of Philippi either listened to him or ignored him but they did not oppose him. The few Jews who were resident in the city appeared to appreciate his ministry and there had been no opposition from that direction either. It seemed almost as if here, at last, he had found a place where he could preach Christ undisturbed. His healing of the lame man at Lystra had evoked the unrestrained admiration of the people there so that he even had to restrain them from worshipping him as a god. He probably expected now that his dispossessing of the demoniac spirit from this girl would at the very least create increased interest in his message and the Lord by whose power he had performed this act. He under-estimated the measure of the forces against him. It was almost as if the evil spirit, having been cast out of the slave girl, had entered into her owners and turned them into furious, raving beasts. Almost before they realised what was happening, the two apostles found themselves arraigned before the bar of Roman justice. The *aediles* - rendered 'rulers' in Acts 16.19 were a kind of civil police, responsible for the maintenance of order in temples, public buildings, streets and open spaces, and for the apprehension of

offenders against the law. The *duumviri* – "magistrates" of 16.20 – always two in number, corresponded roughly to our own Justices of the Peace with rather more authority than Britain's local magistrates usually enjoy, more like that of a Criminal Court Judge at the County Assizes. In accordance with Roman custom, the proceedings were held in public, probably in the open air, with the unruly crowd pressing close on all sides and only with difficulty held back by the attendant guards. In the normal case a Roman trial was conducted with dignity and some semblance of justice; the presiding judge would enquire the nature of the charge and the complainant was then free to state his case. The impression one gets here is that the aggrieved slave owners poured out their story before the usual opening formalities could be gone through, and it is significant that the charge they brought bore no relation whatever to the incident which inspired it. The reason is not difficult to discern. It was no crime under Roman law to exorcise a demon or to heal a mentally sick person. The accused men had not deprived the owners of possession of the slave ; they had committed no violent act nor disturbed public law and order. They had, in fact, done nothing of which they could justly be accused before the court. The complainants, however, felt that they would have the sympathy of their rulers, for Philippi did not like Jews; with malevolent insolence they trumped up a charge which, if sustained, would bring the accused within the reach of the law. The charge was that of preaching and making converts to an illegal religion. *"These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to observe, neither to receive, being Romans"*. It should be noticed that Judaism was a tolerated religion, not illegal, and Christianity at this early time was considered by Rome as the same thing as Judaism; no difference was recognised and it was not the alleged teaching of either Christ or Moses which was the charge. Illegal religions were mainly certain Eastern philosophies which Rome refused to tolerate and the Apostles certainly had not been preaching those. The charge was false. Had Paul and Silas been given any opportunity of defending themselves they could easily have refuted the accusation – but they were not given the opportunity. The words had hardly been spoken before the mob was yelling itself hoarse and the magistrates, with callous disregard for justice, were conscious only that here was an opportunity to show their contempt and hatred for anything Jewish. To satisfy the citizens there was an exhibition of sadistic cruelty, and they commanded that the prisoners be summarily flogged.

Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. A law known as the Lex Porcia, dating from 247 BC, exempted all Romans citizens from the punishment of scourging, and in at least one notable case in Roman history a judge who flouted that law was himself very severely dealt with. It is obvious that in the tumult and haste of the proceedings and their inability to make any defence, the Apostles had no opportunity to state their claim to citizenship, or if they did, their plea was

ignored. With all the brutality invariably associated with such occasions, the lictors stripped them of their clothes. They were tied to the public whipping posts and beaten unmercifully with rods, until the gloating crowd was somewhat appeased and the half-fainting victims were dragged away to the city prison. They were handed over to the jailer, evidently to be incarcerated for an unspecified period and not improbably with the intention that in the secrecy of the prison they would be put to death and their bodies flung into the river.

The jailer, charged to keep his prisoners safely, put them in the stocks – *xylon*, a structure similar to the mediaeval British stocks, having holes for head, hands and feet. In this case they seem to have been secured by the feet only and left for the night in a cramped and painful position on the hard and probably foul floor of the prison, bleeding and in agony from the flogging to which they had been subjected.

And they sang! They sang psalms and hymns of praise to God! They praised God and they prayed! In all that searing pain, in stress of body cruelly bruised and torn by the rods, and the aching agony of cramped and fettered limbs, their spirits soared above their circumstances and surroundings. Their voices rose upon the night air in that prison, *"and the prisoners heard them"*. Other men, perhaps women too, were incarcerated in that evil place, in just as much physical torment perhaps, possessed by terrors and fears for the future, and they heard the singing of those two men whose spirits were so much greater than their suffering bodies. The prisoners listened.

What did they sing? It must have been something from the psalms of David, words from that glorious treasury of faith and confidence. *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid what man can do unto me"*. Strange words, the other prisoners must have thought, to be heard in a prison like this. Closely secured, injured and helpless, probably appointed to death; what God was He that could possibly deliver these men from this prison and from the power of Rome? Now listen to them! *"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle"*. Who is this Lord of whom they sing and to whom they pray? How can He possibly break down this prison and command these gates and doors to open? *"In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried unto my God; He heard my voice out of his temple and my cry came before him. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills moved and were shaken ..."* The triumphant voices reached a pinnacle of strength. It was as if the very walls themselves were vibrating in unison with those heaven-ascending tones, as if the very doors were rattling against their bolts and bars in the endeavour to open before that God to whom these men were offering worship. But what was this?

These walls **were** vibrating; these doors **were** shaking loose. The other prisoners must have strained at their bonds in terror as the grim walls shuddered and cracked, as the floor heaved and the doors groaned open, the iron staples securing their chains came out of the walls and first one and then another found himself free. The earthquake which was shaking Philippi made of no avail all the restraints of that prison, and its occupants huddled together in one group, terrified, but free.

The jailer, asleep in his own apartment, wakened suddenly as the room rocked about him. Governor of a fairly important city prison, he was probably an old army man of wide experience and recognised the happening for what it was. An earthquake was no new thing to him. But when his professional look took in the fact that all the dungeon doors stood open his attitude underwent a quick change. Open doors meant escaped prisoners; by now they were probably well away making good use of this sudden turn of fortune. Rome had only one treatment for jailers who lost their prisoners – death. The reason for the escape was of no interest to the superior powers. This jailer knew better than to expect mercy and he determined to anticipate the inevitable. He drew his sword with the intention of ending his life by his own hand. Paul must have seen the impulsive action and cried out at once to save the man. *"Do yourself no harm; for we are all here"*. Why the other prisoners had not made good their escape does not readily appear. It may have been fear of the earthquake; it may have been the impression produced by the singing of the Apostles and some superstitious idea that perhaps they would be safer in the company of these who evidently had the gods on their side. There is not much doubt that the jailer quickly connected the inexplicable releasing of the prisoners' bonds and the earthquake which had effected that release with some greater power than that of Nature. This was no ordinary earthquake, he must have reasoned. In a swift revulsion of feeling he abandoned the whole of his Roman arrogance and prostrated himself before Paul and Silas with the trenchant question which has been asked – and answered – so many times in the world's history; *"What must I do to be saved?"*

To that question there was – and is – only one possible answer. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved"*. But let no one think that merely academic assent to the truth of Christ's coming, the rightness of His message, and the fact of His death on behalf of fallen man, is all that is intended. Salvation is a word that is often used very loosely, as though it merely indicates the receipt of a ticket entitling one to entrance into Heaven when life on earth shall end. Or perhaps offers the bestowal of an abiding peace and confidence during this life which removes all worry and apprehension because Christ has become Master and Leader. There is much more to salvation than this. Fallen man is deprived of life, the true life which is God-given and can only be the portion of those who

are in union with God; without that life man is out of tune with God's creation and must eventually lose his place in that creation. And the life God gives can only come to man through Christ, who is the channel of life. The jailer must needs be joined in living union with Christ before he can receive salvation, and this is what Paul meant by believing on him. So it came about that *"they spoke to him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house."* It says much for the sincerity and eagerness of this Philippian jailer that in the short space of a few hours (the earthquake was at midnight and by daylight the prison had official visitors) he was able to receive enough of the word of the Lord intelligently to make a complete consecration of himself to God and be baptised in symbol of his being thus *"dead with Christ"*. It is even more surprising to find that all his household shared with him in this new-found faith and in this baptism. The story reads as though everything happened on the spur of the moment, but such conversions are rarely like that. It is much more likely that this Philippian jailer – Roman or Greek, we know not – and his family had been disturbed in mind for a great while past, longing and searching for something better than they had. It has to be admitted that the treatment of Paul and Silas when admitted to the prison does not appear easily reconcilable with a man in whom such sentiments and yearnings for better things were struggling for expression. But in darkness he saw a great light (Isa. 9.2), and the earthquake and its strange consequences revealed in a flash to this unbelieving man the truth to which hitherto he had been completely blind. Even so great is the power of God in Christ's redeeming love when the one concerned is ready to respond.

The earthquake may have been responsible for another effect also. The magistrates who had so summarily condemned the Apostles on the previous day were now in somewhat chastened mood. They sent the lictors ('sergeants' in 16.35) to the prison with instructions for immediate release of the two prisoners. Whether they felt uneasy at their irregular handling of the matter or superstitiously connected the earthquake with their action and feared the wrath of the gods, does not appear, but they evidently hoped to wash their hands of the whole affair by permitting the Apostles to depart unhindered. The jailer, doubtless overjoyed, passed the news to Paul expecting him to accept the dismissal with alacrity. But not so Paul. He intended the illegality of the case to be openly admitted in the sight of all men. *"They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans (Roman citizens) and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out secretly? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out"*.

The lictors' message created considerable consternation when it was transmitted to the magistrates. The possibility that the two Jews they had treated so viciously might be entitled to the honour of Roman citizenship – a privilege not often accorded to Jews, had not occurred to them. And now *"they feared,*

when they heard that they were Romans". In the expressive jargon of today, they were scared stiff, and with good reason. Paul and Silas had only to lay a complaint before the Pro-Consul, the supreme Governor of the Senatorial Province of Macedonia, in which territory Philippi lay, and the two offending officials would find themselves in serious trouble with attached penalties too terrible to contemplate. It is an incidental fact that the Emperor Claudius, who was the ruler of the Roman Empire at the time of this incident, was a stickler for the proprieties in the administration of the law. Any Roman holding an official position of any kind had to be more than usually careful in discharging the duties of his office. All in all, the two would-be dictators of Philippi felt they had a problem that could be resolved in only one way. Most humiliating it would be, for without doubt the citizens of Philippi would learn of the circumstances and their pomp and dignity would inevitably suffer. Better that, they must certainly have reasoned, than an appearance before the Pro-Consul with no excuse for their conduct. So the two officials came to Paul and Silas and humbly begged them graciously to accept freedom, and depart as speedily as they would from Philippi.

They did not go at once. There was an assembly at the house of Lydia, the first convert, and there, doubtless, they counselled and exhorted the infant Church to steadfastness and Christian growth. Then they departed. At least Paul and Silas did. It seems that Luke remained at Philippi, and rejoined Paul only when the latter came again to Philippi several years later (between Acts 16.19 and 20.5 – the "we" gives place to "they" in the narrative indicating that the writer, Luke, was not with them). It might well be that much of the building up of this Philippian church, that afterwards came to mean so much to the Apostle of the Gentiles, was due to the quiet labours of the "*beloved physician*".

The name of the converted jailer is not given. Without much doubt he joined himself to the newly-formed church and was found in fellowship with Lydia and the other converts. What eventually happened to him we do not know but he could hardly have remained in the prison service. Perhaps he devoted his time to setting free prisoners from the greater bondage, leading men and women out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. Meanwhile the two stout-hearted fellow labourers, Paul and Silas, were stepping out steadily on the road which led southwards to Thessalonica.

AOH

"Never did the disciples prefer a more important request than when they said 'Lord teach us to pray' and no petition was more graciously answered." The church today needs to bring that petition first of all but she needs to do so remembering that she already has the answer in all spaciousness and clearness."

G. Campbell Morgan

THE BASIS OF SALVATION

"For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."

(Galatians 5.5)

Paul was incensed. No other of his letters was written with the urgency and vehemence that he displays when writing to the Galatians. What other company of new Christians does he describe to their faces as foolish and senseless, 'dear idiots' as the Phillips version has it. For he had spent time with them and been cared for by them in his time of physical weakness. He had seen the Gospel bear fruit among them as the Holy Spirit affected their lives. Then he had moved on, as he spread the message leaving 'Asia' (Turkey) and going into Europe. Later on, he came to hear that these trusting believers who had become his good friends, were being persuaded to let go of his teachings and to have doubts about his status as God's messenger.

Through all his career as missionary, Paul was pursued by 'the Jews'. Paul, brought up in the Jewish tradition, had learned that they were the one and only people God had chosen, who must be obedient to the Law, and were marked out by the sign of circumcision. When he was converted, he came to know, and teach, that God has chosen people for His kingdom from all nations and not one only. He taught that the Jewish Law is subsidiary to Christ's teaching of love, and that the sign of belonging to Him is an inner renewing, not any outward sign. Consequently, he was pursued by the Jews. There were the outright opponents who tried to kill him, and there were Jewish Christians who believed in Jesus the Christ, but tried to insert all the old Jewish requirements alongside Paul's teaching. It was these men who were active in the new churches in Galatia when Paul wrote his letter to them.

So we come to consider a verse near the end of Paul's letter. He has been urging the Galatians to stand fast in their Christian freedom, free from Jewish rules and regulations. In particular, Paul told them that if you rely on being circumcised it takes you out of the position where you are united to Christ, within range of His grace, and puts you in the position where you can not expect God to approve of you unless you keep every one of the regulations of the Jewish Law. By contrast, "we" – Paul and those who believed as he did – had different expectations.

These were not based on law-keeping but *"through the Spirit"*. All through this letter Paul keeps referring to the Holy Spirit as the ground of their life and hope. What had happened in their lives as they became believers? They had heard the good news that Paul first told them, of Jesus who loved them and gave Himself for them. Jesus had died and risen to life again, and His resurrection was something that they too would experience, because in Him their sin was forgiven. When they believed, the experience of the Spirit had come upon them. They were new people. Their life was now the life of the living Christ within

them (2.20). All that mattered (for them, and it is so for us) was the power of new birth (6.15). It was when they believed the message that they received the Spirit of Christ (3.2). It became a reality for them by faith, that is, by believing (3.14). God's intention in sending His Son into the world was to make them His sons, and because of this He was sending the Spirit of Christ into their hearts. So they responded to Him as Father (4.6). All this is what was happening in their lives.

It was an experience of freedom, of liberty. They were free in Christ. But Paul was well aware, that if you take away the structure of laws and rules, then there is the temptation to use freedom for just anything. That is why he told the Galatians that they must make a conscious decision to follow the leading of the Spirit. If they lived their life as in the Spirit, they would not live according to their lower nature. He spelt out to them such things as immorality, jealousy, drunkenness. On the other hand, the fruit in human life of the Spirit is love, and joy, and peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, tolerance, self-control. If our lives are centred in the Spirit, let us in fact be guided by the Spirit (5.16, 22, 25). It is the activity of the new nature that removes the need for laws. It is "*sowing to the Spirit*" that leads to the harvest of everlasting life. So do not get tired of doing good.

It is interesting to notice that while the text as we have quoted reads "*through the Spirit*" – other versions have 'by' the Spirit, or 'in' the Spirit (there is no preposition in the Greek). *Through* the work of the Spirit come the blessings which Paul describes. *By the Spirit* one is given power to live the life. *In the domain of the Spirit* (and not in the domain of Law) is to be found the experience of Life. The question can arise for modern Christians whether the glowing truths of the gospel have ossified into rules which we expect to obey. How much of our religion is a matter of "don't do this", "you must do that"? – for example, no gambling? no TV? keeping to traditional rituals in church? venerating one particular version of Scripture? —when as the real basis of our faith we should be seeking to love Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the happiness He gives us, present and future.

Next in the Greek text come the words translated "by faith", we "*wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*". Does faith here apply to the waiting, or to the hope, or does it apply to the righteousness? "Wait in faith" or "hope with faith" or "righteousness by faith"? One might answer, all.

Faith in this context is not so much a body of beliefs, a creed, 'the' faith, as it is an active principle of life, the life of trusting and believing and relying. Such a faith could in theory be misplaced, but Paul has reminded the Galatians of where their faith lies. Or, it could be merely nominal, for as James explains (2.14-26), an apparent faith which does not result in living the life has no real existence. Or, it may seem to us that our faith is weak and inadequate. However,

Jesus knew about faith as small 'as a grain of mustard seed' and is ready to 'help our unbelief'. The state of faith which Paul describes, as he himself lives the life of trusting and believing, is of passionate rather than passive waiting. Different translations give the thought as 'expectantly wait', as 'wait eagerly', as 'wait with longing hope'.

Hope for what? Looking in this particular verse, the expression is 'hope of righteousness'. This can be understood in various ways, as the translations show. It can mean 'the righteousness we hope to see', that is, the hope of being righteous ourselves in future. Another version has 'the rewards that righteousness hopes for', implying that we are righteous now and this present righteousness is the basis of hopes for the future. Yet another version puts it, 'the hope that comes from being right with God', which is similar – it emphasises the fact of hoping. Being righteous now makes us hope, and also is the ground of future blessings.

The meaning of 'righteous' has to be understood. Paul explained it to Christians in Rome a few years later (10.5, 9) 'Righteousness-by-the-law...' says that the man who perfectly obeys the law shall find life in it, righteousness-by-faith...says... "If you openly admit by your own lips that Jesus is the Lord, and if you believe in your own heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." It is not a case of thinking "I am a good Christian, I am righteous, God is pleased with me, everything will be fine." Rather, "I trust in Jesus and His mercy, which I do not deserve."

This sort of righteousness now is the grounds of hope for the future. One of the translations has in Galatians 5.5 the words, "*an acceptance with God which is to come through faith*". God accepts us now, in Christ. God will accept us at Christ's coming, because of faith. So faith is not only a state of trusting while we wait, it is the basis of being 'right with God' in the future. Vine in his dictionary puts it high: 'the believer's complete conformity to God's will at the coming of Christ'. At that stage God's work by His Spirit and through our faith will be complete. At that time the believer will no longer approach God as a hoping, trusting, believing sinner: God will have put you just where He wants you to be!

Just have faith.

GC

"... the Master's prayer consists of two parts, has two sides, a human and a Divine. The human is the asking, the Divine is the giving. Or, to look at both from the human side, there is the asking and the receiving – the two halves that make the whole. It is as if He would tell us that we are not to rest without an answer because it is the will of God, the rule in the Father's family; every childlike believing petition is granted."

F. B. Meyer

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 7 1 John 2.12-17

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.

I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.

I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." (John 2.12-14).

This is the commencement of the second part of John's letter. It really ought to have been the beginning of chapter two. At this point John passes from the realm of warning to that of exhortation, and although he will still have a great deal to say about the snares that beset the Christian's path, he will infuse into his words much that is pure encouragement and stimulation of hope. Even though Antichrist shall come and seduce any who are unstable, there is an anointing which remains upon those who are Christ's indeed. This is an anointing that guarantees the operation of saving power during this dark time of earth's history and imparts a confidence that will not desert those who look for their Lord's appearing. So he writes, addressing all who are of the Divine family, mature elders and babes in Christ alike, knowing that all have come under the same spirit of anointing and will one day be presented before the presence of the Father's glory with exceeding joy.

These three verses, twelve to fourteen, have caused the commentators some concern because of the evident repetition of thought. John says, first, that he *writes* to the little children, the fathers, the young men, and then again to the little children. Immediately thereafter he declares that he *has written* to the fathers and the young men. A possible explanation is that the apparent repetition was never intended by the beloved Apostle himself. It might well be that verse fourteen represents a slightly variant rendering, in some ancient manuscripts of John's epistle, to that which appears in other manuscripts as verses 12-13, and that at some time prior to the compilation of the version upon which our New Testament is based, both renderings were incorporated, the one after the other, by a copyist who was unable to decide which was the more correct, and so included both. It does seem that verse 14 adds nothing to what has already been said in verses 12-13, and it is certainly true that the exhortation of verse 15 "*Love not the world*" follows quite naturally after 13.

We must go back to the Greek if we are going to appreciate the full meaning of John's appeal. The "*little children*" of verse 12 does not mean the same as the "*little children*" of verse 13. In the first case the word is one that is very often used to describe disciples or pupils of a teacher, beloved followers of a master.

In the second case it is a word that does only indicate a young child. We have, therefore, John writing first to his beloved pupils, the brethren in general, next to the fathers in the faith, the mature believers who were the strength and stay of the churches. After that to the young men, the stalwart and active workers who prosecuted the missionary work of the community with unflagging zeal, and finally the "babes in Christ" who as yet were only just taking first steps in the way. John well knew that every member of the body, whether possessing abundant comeliness or not so abundant comeliness, whether eye, ear, or hand, whether in the "milk" or "strong meat" stage (Heb. 5.13-14) was equally the subject of God's loving care, and stood in need of his own devoted ministry. Therefore his writing was addressed to all of them and he called each class, as it were, by name.

The mission of 'the writer' occupies a very honoured place in the Word of God. John is by no means the first whose service in this direction has been blessed of God. Not so many years before, Luke the Evangelist, writing to his friend Theophilus, left a priceless legacy to all future generations in the two books accredited to him, the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. In Old Testament days the saintly Daniel was one who wrote down the visions he had seen and the revelation he had heard at the lips of angels, a wonderful guide to the onward progress of God's purpose through the ages. Habakkuk, whose tongue and hand alike were touched with fire, hasted to write down the vision and make it plain upon tablets that he might run who reads. John himself, an exile in the penal colony of the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, committed to parchment the vivid sights that passed before his eyes, and set the seal upon God's revelation of the ultimate triumph of all His faithful servants. It must have been with a sovereign sense of the vast potentiality for good contained in the closely written scroll that lay outspread before him that John penned those simple yet tremendously significant words *"I write unto you"*.

There is an appealing fitness in the several commendations which John addresses to each of these classes of brethren in the church. It is almost as if he is showing them how deeply and intimately he knows their hearts and their characteristics and their position in the race for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. His first word goes right to the basis of all that we enjoy and possess in the family of God. *"I write unto you, beloved pupils"* – for that is what this first "little children" means – *"because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake"*. Forgiveness of sin consequent upon repentance and faith in Christ is the foundation of our whole standing before God. Without that we cannot even enter the Narrow Way, cannot even make a start on the road that leads to the presence of God and the Kingdom. This is one standing that all the Lord's people, young and old, mature and babes, must possess in common and retain to life's end. It is this knowledge, that our sins are forgiven for His Name's sake,

that gives us fresh confidence after every stumbling and every giving way to some weakness of the flesh. That forgiveness stands, all the while that we are truly repentant, and in the power of that forgiveness we grow stronger after every fall, even though we may offend "*seventy times seven*".

From that general exhortation John turns to the fathers, the mature brothers and sisters of long service for the Lord, men and women with whom he had borne the heat and burden of many a strenuous day. With some of these whom he addresses as 'fathers' he could probably claim twenty, thirty, perhaps even forty years of service. Although we do not know just when John first took up his ministry at Ephesus, it might have very reasonably been after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when the armies of Titus captured the city. But others of the Jerusalem Christians may have come into Asia with him – most of them were scattered abroad after that great disaster to their native land. Some of these 'fathers' may have known the early days immediately after Pentecost, and be able to look back upon fifty or more years in the way of the Lord. Whatever the truth about this, John writes to them, saying: "*I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him from the beginning*". (The words "*that is*" have been supplied by the translators and are better omitted.) Of all the brethren gathered together in fellowship, one would have thought these mature and experienced old stalwarts to be least in need of such exhortation from the Apostle. But the very thing that did distinguish them from the others, the fact that they had known Christ "*from the beginning*" is the very reason John has for writing to them. The purpose of his writing is in verse 15 "*love not the world*", and this exhortation and warning is the same for all three classes of believers. Although these 'fathers in the faith' had known the Truth so long a time and were evidently so well advanced in the Christian way, there was still need to warn them "*love not the world*".

How true today! Those whose love waxes cold are not drawn solely from the immature, who have been but a short time in the way. It is not unheard-of to find one who has passed a long and busy life in the service of the Lord, to leave it all quite late in life. Such have given every evidence of sincere and whole-hearted consecration, go back to what Paul called the "*beggarly elements*" of this world. Increasing material prosperity, perhaps, or the opportunity of greater leisure after the close of working life, give opportunity for the indulging in material interests that would have been quickly rejected before. John knew how subtle are the snares of the Evil One and even although these 'fathers' had known their Lord from the beginning, John had the same word for them that he had for the newer and younger believers. "*I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.*" In what is perhaps the alternative version of this message, John says "*because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the wicked one*". It is impossible not to notice how

John stresses the very qualities in which the disciples might well take pride as being those by which they might easily fall. These young men were the zealous and active workers, missionaries of the community. Upon these the bulk of the labours of the Church had been borne and they were strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. That very strength could become a source of spiritual pride! In their strength they came in contact with the world, in their preaching and their evangelising, in the care of the poor, in the many ways by which a vigorous and active Christian community does come in contact with the world, even whilst remaining not *"of the world"*. In that intimacy of contact the injunction *"love not the world"* was very necessary. The garment must be kept unspotted. Christ has no concord with Belial. Their very consciousness that in the power of Christ they had overcome the wicked one could tend to make them less vigilant and less watchful, and they could be overtaken unawares by that same wicked one from whose power they had formerly escaped. We do well to remember that it is more often in our fancied strong points that the Adversary takes us than in our weak points. We usually watch our weak points closely; the strong ones may easily be ignored.

Finally John comes to those for whom he must have had a very special affection, the *"babes in Christ"*, the newly converted and young in years, just setting out on the journey that is to lead them to the promised land. *"I write to you, little children, because ye have known the Father."* That is all he can say to them at this early stage. That is all to which they have attained as yet, to *"know the Father"*. With the knowledge of that wonder still fresh in their minds they are being encouraged to follow out the implications of their knowledge without faltering. To know the Father is a progressive thing; we pass on from stage to stage of knowledge, entering into a deeper and even deeper intimacy with Him as the years follow one another. But only if we *"love not the world"*! This knowledge of the Father can come to us only in consequence of our consecration to Him that is ever fresh and living, ever zealous and sincere. That counts all things well lost if only Christ be won and life lived in Him. The warning *"love not the world"* was necessary to the old and the young, the fathers and the children, in John's day; it is no less necessary to us in ours.

So John comes at last to the exhortation toward which he has been leading all this time. He is so earnest about this, for it is so important a thing. *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (v 15). The meaning of these words ought to be very plain to us. They certainly do not imply that we are to turn away from all things material in disgust and disdain, and count the lovely things of this earth as things unclean. The mediaeval church made a sad mistake in that direction and their theologians and priests taught them that all that is fleshly, material, of human nature and of the earth, earthly, is inherently corrupt and evil

and that they would do well to dissociate themselves from it. That view is a blasphemy and a libel against God. He made the earth, beautiful and fruitful, capable of giving not only life and sustenance, but also pleasure and happiness, to the people whom He created. When God had finished His work, He looked upon it, and, behold, it was good! We also, as intelligent and loyal disciples of our Master and reverent worshippers of God, ought to take pleasure in this creation that gave God pleasure. We ought to esteem and appreciate all the beautiful things of the earth and all the lovely things of life. Even although some of them we ourselves have given up *"for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake"* we should not do else than look on them with pleasure, because God made or instituted them. In that sense, we *should* 'love the world'. But that is not what John meant.

What he did mean? We are not to love the world and the things of the world in the manner that would involve placing them before God and the higher interests of our consecration. We may use the world and its good things but only in such way as to bring glory to our God and in the interests of His purpose. We are at all times to *"seek first the Kingdom of God"*. We may accept and use our material gifts and possessions and joys and opportunities in the outworking of our Christian lives, and give God thanks for them, but we are not to love them in such a way that they take first place and God take second. If we do give way it is evident that our consecration is not sincere and whole-hearted. As John says, the love of the Father is not in us. And to point the danger of such a position he tells us just what is involved in the course of the man who does love the world and the things that are in the world more than he loves the Father and the things that are in the Kingdom of Heaven. He tells us that such become hopelessly entangled in the fate of a world that is passing away. He will eventually find himself bereft of those things in which he trusted and bereft also of the prize of the high calling from which he had allowed himself to be diverted. *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abides for ever"* (vv16-17).

"The proud glory of life" Moffatt calls it, and it is an expressive phrase that he has chosen. The desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the proud glory of life, these represent the inordinate use of things that are good within themselves but bad when carried to excess, or even to a degree which may be quite all right for men and women who have not given themselves in consecration to God but will assuredly militate against the highest interests of those who have. There are so many things in life, good and right in themselves, that can become subtle snares to the "sanctified in Christ Jesus" purely because those sanctified ones do not impose upon themselves the necessary degree of self-discipline in their

handling or use of those things. John does not mean in this verse that because these things are "*of the world*" they are necessarily bad things. The word "lust" has changed its meaning in the four centuries since the Authorised Version was translated and we do well to substitute the word "desire" which today much more nearly expresses the idea behind the Greek. There are many things that the flesh and the eyes may legitimately desire; and much in life that may give a justifiable ground for proud glory; but the important thing for us to remember is that no matter how good and right these things may be, so far as we are concerned they are of this world and will pass away with this world. Even although the good things and the right things and the beautiful things of this material earth will persist and come forth in renewed and more excellent glory in the next, they still are not for us, for God hath prepared even greater glories for those who in this Age love Him in sincerity and truth. *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him."*

Therefore, in the First Resurrection, nothing will remain save the building of one who has done the will of God. In the universal destruction of all the works of man it is he that doeth the will of God who will abide forever. God grant that we all may so take to heart the lesson of this verse that we shall not be attracted for one moment by the glitter and sparkle of the attractions of this world. We must soberly appraise them at their true value, and knowing that they are doomed. We must turn instead with the greater determination to have the will of God done in our mortal bodies that we may be that part of God's workmanship that will stand the fires of proving and so abide for ever.

(To be continued)

AOH

Dominion Abused

Born to die by man's appointed time
Beauteous creature condemned in cells of darkness
Sad eyes pleading to be free –
– subject to fate unkind by many torturous means
devised by human minds

Only a short life span – allotted time decreed by man –
– who walks uncaring by, with hardened heart –
– to plaintive 'low' or feeble cry of misery.

VMR

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory another; for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3.18 RSV). "And because there is no veil over the face, we all see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (REB) "We are transfigured in ever-increasing splendour into his own image" (Phillips).

2 Cor. 3 refers to Moses coming face to face with God's glory on Mount Sinai. It was when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Israel immediately broke the second commandment when they 'compelled' Aaron to make the golden calf. After condemning Israel's action, Moses returned to the top of the mountain to intercede with God on behalf of that sinful nation. This was at the time when the Law Covenant was being established and Moses requested that he should see the Lord. God said that no one could see Him and live but Moses was permitted to see something of 'glory of God.' The result was that his face permanently shone so that it was too painful for the people of Israel to look at him. From that time Moses wore a veil over his face when he spoke to the people and removed the veil when he met God in the 'tent of meeting'. Paul uses that record to illustrate what is happening to God's people now as they are changed from 'one degree of glory to another' until they are like Him and ready to stand in His presence. This is the process of 'sanctification' made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus through whom God reconciled us to Himself.

It is not easy to define 'the Glory of the Lord'? The Oxford Concise Dictionary has eight definitions of glory that include – renown, honour, praise, resplendent majesty, and exaltation.

The writer to the Hebrews opens his letter with these thoughts – *"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many ways by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son who he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being and he sustains all things by his powerful word."* (Heb. 1.1-3 NRSV). So Jesus has given us the best example of the glory of God in His life and death. Whatever He said or did conveyed to us something of God's glory. No one, before or since has been able to show us that glory as He did. In the Gospel records of those three and a half years of our Lord's life, there shines the glory of God that eclipses all else. What He said and what He did provide the conclusive revelation of God. The prophets, from Abraham to John the Baptist, had given humanity glimpses of God's light which somewhat relieved the gloom of sin but Jesus flooded the world and described Himself as the *"light of the world"* (John 8.12). Mankind are in darkness and did not recognise the light (John 1.7-10). To the extent that God's people reflect the life

of Jesus, in words and actions, attitudes and feelings, they too are the light of the world (Matt. 5.14-16).

It is worth examining the lives and characters of the great heroes of Old and New Testament. They discovered a little of God's character as they served Him. Their revelation of God and His purpose was limited but their lives were not primarily about intellectual knowledge. Of first importance to them was the defensive strength of their God who was so good and compassionate and forgiving. They discovered that the great Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was quite unlike the gods of human imagination. His life and teachings were also very different from the conception of God held by first century Jews.

Moses' experience on Mount Sinai was used by Paul in 2 Cor 3.18 to illustrate how a child of God is changed into the likeness of Christ. It is surprising that Moses was able to look at the Glory of God that made his face to shine but the people of Israel could not even look at the lasting imprint of that glory.

Paul's experience on the Damascus road has similarities with Moses' experience on Sinai. Paul's companions "*heard the voice but saw no one*" (Acts 9.7). Later in Acts Luke recorded that they "*saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking*" (Acts 22.9) and in Acts 26.13 we read "*I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun shining around me and my companions*". It would be interesting to know why Luke recorded differences each time he described the scene of Paul's conversion. It would be even more interesting to know why different people have different perceptions as to what was happening? Could it be that sin has some kind of preventative action against receiving God's glory because that glory is linked to the moral qualities of God's character?

There are a number of records in the Bible of God's people having close meetings with God but not all appear to have had the kind of experience of Moses and Paul. Abraham and Sarah entertained 'angels' and learned from them that they were to have a child, Isaac. Then Abraham went for a walk with His visitors, one of whom he addressed by the name of LORD (Yahweh) and learned something about God's mercy in judgment. Jacob saw angels on the stairway and later wrestled with one angel. This assured him that God was with him and was more than equal to every situation that Israel would experience. The people of Israel saw the cloud and fire that protected and led them through the desert to the Promised Land. Samuel, David, Elijah and Jeremiah appear to have had very close encounters with God. Daniel and John saw apocalyptic visions that indicated something that was to happen later in history. Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain and Peter's account of it (2 Pet. 1.16-19) makes an interesting comparison with the Gospel records in Matt.

17.1-8; Mk. 9.2-7; Lk. 9.28-36. They were key figures in the Church at Pentecost. The sight of the glorified Lord and the sound of the voice from heaven were indelibly etched into their minds and strengthened their faith. Stephen saw *"the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God"*, and this upheld him in the moment of martyrdom.

Jeremiah was able to reveal something of God's character in Jer. 9.23-26 when he wrote *"Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the might boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight says the Lord."* Paul referred to this text in his first letter to Corinth (1.31). To a wayward young king who was Josiah's grandson Jeremiah said *"He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord."*

The importance of all this to us is that God's glory is changing us into His likeness. The work of sanctification demands unyielding obedience, total consecration and the willingness to allow God to change us from sinful sons of Adam into His glorious likeness. It may seem that we are not making progress and we are very conscious of the flaws in our characters but it is God that is scrutinising our character, covered by the merit of Christ's cleansing blood (1 John 1.7-9). Our eyes must be fixed on Jesus and not on our own faulty lives – acknowledging our Saviour's life saving sacrifice for us (1 John 1.9). Above all, however privileged we are in knowing about what God is doing, the Scriptures teach us that knowing God Himself is what is really important in the process of becoming like Him.

DN

Retrospection

He was better to me than all my hopes,
He was better than all my fears;
He made a bridge of my broken words
And a rainbow of my tears.
The billows that guarded my sea-girt path
Carried my Lord on their crest;
When I dwell on the day of my wilderness march
I can lean on His love for the rest.

Poems of Dawn

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience, it looks for ways of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

1 Cor. 13.4 (Phillips)

SENNACHERIB IN PROPHECY

Recognition of the historical basis upon which most Old Testament prophecies of the "end of the Age" are framed is very necessary to their correct interpretation. It is a truism that history repeats itself; throughout the Bible similar causes produce similar effects; the principles and forces which will eventually lead the world into the final conflict have already, on a smaller scale and in a more limited area, resulted in similar conflicts in the past. Those events, recorded in Biblical history, have been used by the prophets as models on which to base their pen pictures of the things that shall be hereafter. *"That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God inquires into that which follows after"* said Solomon (Ecc. 3.15). In those words he enshrined this principle. The visions of the prophets are best interpreted by discerning the model, and realising that it is by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the prophet has used a particular historical event as background to his vision. On that basis similar aspects to those contained within that event, but on a greater scale, can be looked for in the fulfilment.

One of the most noteworthy examples of this principle in prophecy is the use made by Daniel and Zechariah of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in the days of Hezekiah. That invasion is famous in Old Testament history on account of its sequel; Hezekiah and his adviser, the statesman-prophet Isaiah, led the people of Jerusalem in reliance upon God for deliverance, and the Assyrian army was miraculously destroyed in the night and the threat lifted. This one prominent feature of the event is analogous to the Divine deliverance of the people of God in the end of this Age. It is when the details of Daniel's and Zechariah's visions are compared with the details of Sennacherib's invasion that the force of their correspondence becomes obvious and clues to the interpretation of the prophecies are offered.

"Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah" says Isaiah (36.1) *"that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them"*. This was the start of the campaign. Isa. 36 & 37, 2 Kings 18 and 2 Chron. 32 record the details. These narratives are confirmed and amplified by Sennacherib's own account, recorded on clay cylinders which have survived and now repose, one in the British Museum and one in America. Between the Biblical and the Assyrian records the story is fairly complete.

The real quarrel was between Assyria and Egypt, Judah at the time being allied with the latter. Sennacherib set out to subdue Egypt and Judah but first he had to secure his line of march by ensuring the loyalty of the Phoenician cities Tyre and Sidon on the seacoast, and the people of Syria. This he achieved by the simple expedient of siege and conquest. News of the ruthless invader spread rapidly through the land, and the kings of Edom, Moab and Ammon, in the

south-east, hastened to the conqueror's camp with protestations of loyalty, in consequence of which these three nations escaped the horrors of warfare.

The Assyrian king next proceeded along the Palestine coast, capturing the cities of the seaside plain, defeating the Egyptian army and laying siege to Lachish, the last important stronghold barring his road to Egypt. Whilst here he demanded tribute from Hezekiah as proof of allegiance, and Hezekiah complied. Sennacherib took a great deal of spoil – gold, silver, valuables of all kinds, and two hundred thousand captives, all of which he sent back to Assyria. Then news came to him of a fresh Egyptian attack and in his fury he sent one detachment against the Egyptians and with the other surrounded Jerusalem, calling upon Hezekiah to surrender the city. It was this second demand that Hezekiah laid before the Lord in the Temple and in consequence of which the Assyrian army investing Jerusalem was destroyed. Sennacherib called off his attack upon Egypt and with what was left of his forces in the country made his way back to Assyria, where his attention was urgently needed to deal with hostile action in Babylonia to the east and Armenia to the north. He came to a violent end, murdered by two of his sons.

Now the remarkable thing about this campaign is that it is almost completely mirrored by the prophetic vision of the latter part of Daniel's 11th chapter and certainly alluded to by Zechariah in his 14th chapter. It would seem as though the prophets were indicating that the events of the end of the Age are to bear a marked resemblance to the happenings of this memorable campaign. No attempt to suggest an interpretation is to be made here but the correspondence will be noted as an aid to the study and understanding of those chapters.

It is fairly obvious that Daniel 11 and 12 enshrines a synopsis of history, in rather veiled terms, from Daniel's own day to the introduction of the Messianic Kingdom. The latter event as the terminus is demanded by virtue of the fact that the resurrection of the dead is indicated in chapter 12.2. Ignoring differences of thought as to the precise application of much of chapter 11 it is generally agreed that verse 36 introduces the final conflict at the end of the Age under symbol of one usually known as the "wilful king". This part of the chapter, from verse 36 to the end very accurately reflects Sennacherib's campaign but puts the fulfilment of the words into the future. Daniel, of course, wrote some hundred and sixty years after that campaign but he must have been very familiar with its details.

The description in verse 36 *"the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods"* is well suited to Sennacherib, who was one of the most boastful and arrogant kings of antiquity. His commander-in-chief's scornful words to the defenders of Jerusalem *"Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria ... that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem"*

out of my hand?" (Isa. 36.18) well illustrate his character. "Let not your God in whom you trust, deceive you saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria" (Isa. 37.10) was his last arrogant ultimatum before disaster came upon him. "But in his place" says Daniel in verse 38 "shall he honour the god of fortresses". Says one historian of Sennacherib "Renowned over the earth in his days as the great destroyer, he knew no higher policy than force ... lust of power, cruelty, pride and arrogance were developed in excess in his case". Daniel goes on in verse 39 "He shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for gain". This is a true reflection of the Assyrian king's policy. Each country or city he conquered was placed under the control of a puppet ruler selected for his loyalty and under pledge of exacting and sending an annual tribute of goods and slaves to Nineveh. Sennacherib's destruction of Sidon at this time had the effect of diverting Phoenician commerce to Assyria; he controlled trade with Cyprus, and his victories in Media and Babylonia brought the commercial activity of the east and the south into his hands. This "god of fortresses" of verse 38 was truly "honoured with gold, and silver, and precious stones, and desirable things".

Verse 40 introduces action. *"At the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him".* The campaign which ended in disaster was undertaken in consequence of the Egyptian threat to Assyrian expansion, and Sennacherib marched south to render Egypt powerless. *"The king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and horsemen, and with many ships: and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over".* This well describes the Assyrian advance into Syria and Phoenicia; his progress was marked by complete and utter conquest and devastation. The one item not mentioned either in the Bible or the conqueror's own inscriptions is the use of ships. Assyria was an inland country and not accustomed to naval warfare. Sennacherib and his father Sargon, however, did make use of ships in their wars. Sargon had at his disposal sixty Phoenician galleys and eight thousand oarsmen for the siege of Tyre some twenty years earlier, and Sennacherib built a fleet for use in the Persian Gulf in his wars with the Elamites. It is quite likely therefore that part of his plan of attack upon Egypt involved the use of Phoenician ships.

"He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many shall be overthrown, but these shall escape out of his hand, Edom and Moab and ... Ammon" (verse 41). Here is well depicted the invader's onward progress into the land of Israel and Judah proper, and its neighbour state, the confederacy of Philistine cities on the coast, Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Joppa. Sennacherib himself says of this entry into Judah *"besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke and I captured forty-six of his fenced cities and innumerable villages. I drove into captivity two hundred thousand one hundred and fifty people, young and old, male and female, and horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and sheep,*

counted as spoil. Hezekiah himself, like a bird in a cage, I shut up in Jerusalem his royal city, and I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from the city ... He ... sent tribute and to make submission with ... gold ... silver, precious stones ... ivory couches, ivory chairs ... ebony wood, boxwood and all kinds of valuable treasures, together with his daughters, his wives and male and female musicians". He says nothing of his defeat and the destruction of his army; only of the spoil which by then was well on its way to Nineveh.

During these happenings and whilst Sennacherib was still dealing with the people of Sidon and Syria, three kings, Melech-ram of Edom, Chemosh-nadab of Moab, and Pedael of Ammon, hastened to him with tribute and protestations of loyalty, in consequence of which their lands were saved from invasion. This is a remarkable parallel to verse 41 in Daniel 11, for these were the only three to escape devastation and plunder.

This same boastful account of the spoil Sennacherib took just before his signal defeat seems to find an echo in the words of Zechariah. This prophet's 14th chapter commences by describing the gathering of all nations to besiege Jerusalem at the end of the Age, and says that the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, the women ravished, and half the city go into exile. The Lord does not deliver until these things have taken place. The likeness of this to Sennacherib's experience is significant. *"The city shall be taken"* says Zechariah. 'Taken' here does not mean 'captured' but rather 'surrounded'. It is a word meaning to enclose as in a net, derived from the snare or net used by fowlers. This is the very simile used by the Assyrian himself *"Like a bird in a cage"* he says *"I shut him up in Jerusalem his royal city"*. He never opened the cage. *"The houses rifled"*, goes on Zechariah. The list of spoil, largely consisting of treasures from the Temple, according to 2 Kings 32, and obviously also from the houses of the well-to-do citizens, is a clear parallel to that. *"The women ravished"*; Sennacherib declares gloatingly that he took the daughters and wives of Hezekiah and sent them to Nineveh, evidently, as was the custom, to become inmates of his own harem, and the female musicians to be his slaves. For the rest of their lives these unfortunates were at the mercy of the Assyrians. *"And half of the city shall go forth into captivity"*. This does not necessarily mean that exactly fifty per cent of the citizens are to suffer this fate; the word rendered 'half' means primarily a portion separated, from the root word meaning 'to divide'. Whereas in the main a division into two portions is implied, quite a few instances in the Old Testament require three, four or more portions; all that need be stressed here is that part of the city will thus go forth. Since the background of Zech. 13 and 14 is the faith of the people in God and salvation in consequence, it is a logical conclusion that those who *"go forth into captivity"* are destitute of that saving faith. This at any rate was the case in the days of Hezekiah. Although most of the people shared Hezekiah's and Isaiah's faith and obeyed the injunction to

ignore the Assyrian threats (Isa. 36.21), there was an element that did not have that faith. They endeavoured to escape from the besieged city and trust for mercy to the besiegers – a trust that was sadly misplaced. A terse sentence in Sennacherib's account of the siege is eloquent enough; *"all who came outside the great gate of the city were captured and led off."* They shared the fate of the other captives who had already been sent to Nineveh. Then Zechariah comes to the climax. *"The residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations"*. This is the climax which Sennacherib did not record in his account. The clay cylinders record Sennacherib's heavy defeat of Jerusalem, and how the Jewish king was shut up like a bird in a cage. They do not say anything about the outcome, which was an unusual thing for Sennacherib – but then defeat, utter and overwhelming defeat, was also an unusual thing for him.

Daniel 11 is not so concerned with the activities around Jerusalem as with those on the larger country scene. Verses 42-43 say of the 'King of the North' that he will prevail over the Egyptians, the Libyans and the Ethiopians and take great spoil of gold and silver and valuable treasures. This is true of Sennacherib. Egypt at the time was ruled by a powerful Ethiopian dynasty and the forces facing the Assyrian were from combined Egyptian and Ethiopian sources. (The Libyans were descended from the Egyptians and in active alliance which still exists for anyone to see). His own account lists the spoil he took after the capture and destruction of the city of Lachish, which left Egypt open and defenceless before him.

A strange and rather obscure word in verse 45 is illuminated by one of Sennacherib's boastful assertions. *"I shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain"* says Daniel. *"Palatial tents"* is the RSV rendering. The word means the king's royal pavilion erected in the midst of his camp. The *"glorious holy mountain"* is obviously in reference to the kingdom of Judah in the Promised Land and *"between the seas"* can only mean between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean. Now Sennacherib's own account says that he did set his pavilion at Lachish where his main army was gathered, and Lachish was geographically between the two seas. He did, in fact, boast that he would set that pavilion inside Jerusalem and profane its palace gardens but that boast was unfulfilled. He planted his pavilion at Lachish in the arrogant belief that Hezekiah would be brought before him there as captive, to be dealt with as he dealt with all his defeated enemies; *"yet"* says Daniel *"he shall come to his end, and none shall help him"*. His ornate pavilion was hurriedly taken down and packed for retreat; he himself, bereft of his army and perhaps with only a handful of personal attendants left to him, travelled the seven hundred miles back to Nineveh with the bitter knowledge of defeat in his heart, defeat at the hands of the God he had defied.

So far as Jerusalem and Judah was concerned, that was his end, for Sennacherib never returned. Whilst engaged on this campaign, tidings reached him of renewed rebellion in other parts of his far-flung empire, Babylon in the east and Armenia in the north. That is what Daniel said too. *"Tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go forth with great fury to destroy."* Immediately following his retreat from Jerusalem he fought a campaign in Babylonia which left the countryside devastated. For two years after that he warred in Armenia, reducing the hardy mountain tribes of that land to subjection, and then again another year against Babylon and Elam. Thirty thousand Babylonians and untold numbers of Armenian mountaineers were carried off into slavery, their towns burned and their lands devastated. Daniel's words fitly mirror what the Assyrian king had done.

Sennacherib lived nineteen years after his defeat at Jerusalem, of which ten were spent in unrelenting warfare against Babylon, Media, Elam, Armenia and Cilicia, but never again against Judah. In that time he more than earned his title of "the Destroyer". After his conquest of Cilicia he founded a city in that land which was to become famous in after years - Tarsus, the birthplace of the Apostle Paul. Then came the end; he was assassinated by two of his own sons, and a third son reigned in his stead. The might and the magnificence of Sennacherib, the fear and terror his name inspired amongst countless multitudes, vanished in an instant. Truly, as Daniel predicts of the greater oppressor whom he prefigured *"he shall come to his end, and none shall help him"*.

Whatever be the interpretation of Daniel 11 and Zechariah 14 it would seem that the remarkable correspondence between those prophecies and this historical record of the seventh century BC is intended to provide a guide to the detailed nature of the events which will terminate this Age and lead on to the time when *"Michael shall stand up"* to use Daniel's phrase, or Zechariah's *"then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations"*. Sennacherib's campaign in Judah and his crushing defeat at Jerusalem by Divine intervention is a preview, in miniature, of *"things which must shortly come to pass"*.

AOH

These many years! What lessons they unfold
Of grace and guidance through the wilderness,
From the same God that Israel of old
In the Shckinah glory did possess.
How faithful He, through all my grief and fears
And constant murmuring these many years!

Poems of Dawn

GIANTS

Part 2 of a conference address

Faith! Time and again throughout the Scriptures we are told that, if only we show trust and faith, anything is possible. There was the faith of Moses, when the Israelites reached the Red Sea, that God would protect them from the pursuing Egyptian army. Later on, in the time of Samuel, He said that if the people gave up their worship of idols and returned to the worship of God, He would protect them from the Philistines. These are just two examples of how the Father rewards complete trust and faith. And yet in a little over 500 years so many of the descendants of these people had turned away again from God that they had divided the Nation in two and, in spite of God's warnings through His prophets, one part had been taken into captivity, and so dispersed among the surrounding nations, that they became lost amongst the peoples of the World and never returned. While the other part were taken into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

The trouble is that, sometimes, our faith just isn't strong enough. Take Peter for example. Jesus had told the disciples to take a boat and row over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, but when they were about three miles out a storm had suddenly blown up. The disciples were worried in case it got worse, and then they saw their beloved Master walking towards them on the water.

Their first thought was *"It's a spirit"*. Then Peter said; *"Lord, if it's you tell me to come to you on the water."* So Jesus said; *"Come."* Peter quickly climbed out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus, – but he took his eyes off his Lord, and then he saw again how big the waves were; his fears returned and he immediately began to sink, so he shouted out; *"Lord, save me."* Jesus took his hand and said; *"You of little faith. Why did you doubt?"*

Throughout our lives, we often have storms, difficulties and doubts. There are often questions of what we should do, or how we're going to achieve something that seems impossible: and most of our Giants – our trials and tribulations, our obstacles and difficulties – are put in the way by the arch enemy, Satan.

The answer, is, as Peter tells us in verses 8-10 of chapter 5 of his first letter; *"Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are. In his kindness God called you to his eternal glory by means of Jesus Christ. After you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation."*

The devil is the author of all our doubts. He is the one who puts the idea into our head that the job's too much for us, or that the way's too steep. All the time

he's trying to get us to say, the going's too hard, we can't go on, we must turn back: and when we do, he wins a victory. We must never give him the chance to say that he was too much for us and that he made us give up. Remember the words of the Psalmist, when in Psalm 118, he tells us how much better it is to take refuge in the Lord, than to trust in men, when we are surrounded by difficulties. Then, in verses 12-14, he continues; *"They swarmed around me like bees; they blazed against me like a roaring flame. But I destroyed them all in the name of the LORD. You did your best to kill me, O my enemy, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my victory."*

We are regularly getting quite painful stings from some memory, remorse or regret, from a fear, a foreboding or a worry. We don't like them, we try to avoid them, but God is putting us through His school of faith and He lets us experience these stings to show us that, if we trust in Him, worrying is unnecessary and our doubts and fears can be destroyed.

God is never in a hurry. He spends years preparing those He expects to use. He never thinks the days of preparation too long or too dull, but this, taking of time, is what we don't like. A short sharp sting of suffering we can bear, but if it drags on over many weeks or even years our hearts begin to lose strength and without the support and grace of our Heavenly Father we would sink into the depths of despair.

There is a 'need to be' in every lesson, not just for God to teach us to trust and obey, but to strengthen us for our roles as a Kingdom of Priests: and when we are ready, all our trials will be brought to an end. We may not be able to see the outcome of God's purpose; it may be hidden from us for a long time, but faith tells us that He is calmly sitting on His throne waiting for the right moment. When we try to understand this, and trust in His wisdom, we will defeat any Giant that comes our way and they will never be able to harm us or worry us again.

Now there is something here that many Christians overlook. They gladly, and sincerely, give their hearts to the Lord, but they keep their heads to themselves. Paul says to us, *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* (2 Corinthians 10.5)

The only remedy for disturbing thoughts is to stop thinking our own thoughts, to be, so to speak, spiritually beheaded. In this way we are freed from our natural mind and transplanted with the mind of Christ. To do this God puts us through His school of experience to make us learn to stop thinking for ourselves. To learn just to be still and know that He is God. That He will sustain us and bring us safely through.

Now there seems to be an idea, amongst many Christians, that if we have given our life to the Lord then the pathway of faith will be smooth, and it will

be 'Roses, Roses, all the way'. Many seem to think that when God comes into the life of one of His people then His power will lift us above all trials and conflicts. As Peter again, in his letter tells us: *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad – because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world. Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his wonderful name!"* (1 Peter 4.12-16).

So we can expect trials but Paul was so sure that our anxieties would be calmed if only we would take our troubles, in faith and trust, to our heavenly Father that he wrote, *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again – rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4.4 -7)

If we can only share Paul's belief and trust in the love and power of Jesus – not half-heartedly, but to the point of being willing to lay our life on the line for our belief – then we can face anything, any Giant that comes along, because we know that, whatever is happening is for the Lord's sake, and He is always with us, to help us and support us, as we face up to the Giants.

When we lay our problems before the Lord, our very expectancy enables Him, through the Holy Spirit, to do what we have laid on Him. But there are some who will say, 'I can't see any results', but rest assured, He is working on the difficulty. We're looking to Jesus to do it and although our faith may be tested, He is working on it and His word is sure. We can't fail if only we dare to trust, to believe, to stand fast and refuse to be overcome

Conditions in the world today, make us tend to think that our Giants are much bigger than those that had to be faced in the past, we say that their Giants were mostly superstitious nonsense, but that, today, we've got real Giants like, drugs, violence and terrorism. But the Christians of the past had their real Giants. There were many who died for their faith, in the arena, during the persecutions of Nero and other Roman Emperors. A great many more lost their lives for possessing a Bible at a time when it was a capital offence to own one, because it was considered by the Church of Rome to be the sole right of the clergy to read from it.

However, neither the early Christians and Martyrs down through the years since our Lord died, or ourselves, have the copyright on Giants. Jesus had his Giants to face. During the time of His ministry our Lord endured all sorts of troubles and overcame all kinds of obstacles, from plain disbelief of who He was and in what He said, to attacks on His sanity and finally on His life. He dealt with all these difficulties by prayer to his Father in Heaven and by believing and trusting that, as long as He did the will of His Father, then His Father would protect Him and guide Him.

It is when we consider the greatest obstacle of all that He had to face, the knowledge that one of His followers was going to betray Him and that, as a result of that betrayal, He must face the agony of the cross, that we realise just how small our troubles are in comparison with His.

I think that most people, knowing just how horrific a death it is, would find it hard to voluntarily allow themselves to be crucified. To be shot – yes! To be hanged – possibly! These are said to be relatively painless ways to die. But crucified – NO! And yet Jesus knowing that He would be crucified, and being well aware of just how terrible a death it would be, allowed Himself to be arrested and given a completely illegal trial, by the leaders of the Jewish people who took Him before Pilate and falsely accused Him of plotting rebellion against Rome, without one word of protest, because He knew that only by His death could His Father's plan, of salvation for all men, be fulfilled.

It has been asked, if Jesus had to die to fulfil God's plan, why did it have to be in such a slow and agonising way? But, if we think about it for a few moments we realise that if all Jesus had to do was die, quickly and painlessly, then it wasn't so much of a test. Most of us could, probably quite willingly, give our lives to save someone we love, as long as it was going to be quick and painless: but a slow, lingering, and extremely painful death would be another matter altogether. That is why Jesus had to endure crucifixion. It had to be something bad enough to cause a man to turn back rather than go through with it. But His love for us, and His overwhelming wish to do the will of His Father, together with His trust in God's promise that, on the third day, He would be resurrected, made this Giant of all Giants into a grasshopper.

In his book, Jeremiah wrote; *"But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit."* (Jeremiah 17.7-8)

The Lord is our stream of Living Water, towards whom we send our roots. There's no need to worry in times of spiritual darkness: no need to worry about spiritual supplies, or, for that matter, about physical supplies of food and clothing. As Luke writes, our Lord said; *"Can all your worries add a single*

moment to your life? Of course not! And if worry can't do little things like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?" (Luke 12.25-26)

Whenever we come up against Giants, whether they are mountainous obstacles or just plain everyday problems, we have a whole host of comforts that we can find in God's word. But the most important comfort of all is that we can go to our Heavenly Father, through Jesus, in prayer and in faith, knowing that He hears us and will answer us.

Perhaps we should keep our minds on what Paul wrote to the Ephesians (3.14-20) *"When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from His glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God."*

"Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. May he be given glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever through endless ages. " Amen.

RJH

THE PASSING OF DANIEL

Daniel was old, too old to take in any more, too old to do any more writing. He began to realise that now. He had to accept the fact that his life's work was finished and he must lay down the responsibility and wait for the call. Now he was ready to yield himself to the care of God whom he had served so faithfully. He prepared himself for the rest of death, knowing of a surety that at the end of the days he would stand in the resurrection of the just and see with his own eyes the reality of the visions he had just now recorded. With that he was content.

So the old man closed his eyes in complete confidence that it would surely come. He knew and had proved throughout a long life the faithfulness of God. Perhaps his mind went back to the early days of boyhood, when he first learned of God and his plans for eventual world deliverance, at the feet of his mentor, Jeremiah the prophet. Maybe he recalled dimly, because it was a long time ago, the journey to Babylon as a youth of eighteen or so with his companions Azariah, Hananiah and Mishaël. Together with him they had refused the rich foods of the palace and because of their abstemiousness had eventually found the king's favour and attained high office in the State. That would have brought

before his failing eyes the picture of the arrogant king whom he had been able to serve so faithfully. There was the king's family that he had known so well, the gentle Queen Amytis, and Nitocris the king's daughter who had remained so staunch a friend through all the phases of a lifetime and into old age. They were all dead now and only he was left. He remembered the king's dream of the image, and how God had given him the interpretation and the understanding that four great empires were to rule on earth and then the kingdom of God come. The leaping flames of the fiery furnace flickered before his eyes, and again he heard the awed voice of the king "*I see four men, loose, and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods.*" The thin hands moved restlessly; again he was in spirit endeavouring with Queen Amytis to restrain the mad king as he sought to emulate the beasts of the earth. Once more he knew the thrill of hearing the voice of Nebuchadnezzar, restored to sanity, professing allegiance to the God of heaven. The days of dreams and visions passed across his mind, the visits of the revealing angel, the years of study and reflection when he lived as a private citizen waiting in patience for the revelation of God from heaven. The shadows in the room gathered and he entered again into the darkness of Babylon's last night, when the Persians besieged the city. He saw the blaze of light at the palace banquet, the writing on the wall, the end of the empire. He saw too his brief time of service under the Median King Darius and his deliverance from the lion's den. Rapidly the pictures passed before his mental vision and at the end of them all, in a golden glory in the background, he saw the fair beauty of the world that is yet to be, the world for which he had waited all his life, the world in which he himself was to stand, in his lot, at the end of the days.

He could see them more plainly now, those friends and companions of days so long ago. They had all gone in front of him; he had not seen them for a long time. They were there, waiting for him. In the land yet to be, in the end of the days, he would take up his task with renewed strength and ability, would once more serve God to whom he had been faithful, and who had been so faithful to him. He would serve him in that transcendent glory that will never pass away.

The room was getting very dark now, and it was quiet, quieter than Daniel had ever known it. The golden visions flickered on, beckoning him ... He was going to rest now, as the angel had promised ... but he would stand in his lot ... at the end of the days.

AOH

One of the most important things that the Lord has said to me is "Let it be," clearly, unmistakably saying it would be best for that which is swirling in my mind not to be said. My mother said much the same thing - "a still tongue makes a wise head" - it's hard sometimes.

MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

The opening of Exodus 3 marks the end of the forty years in Midian. Moses was now eighty years old, virile and active in his work of supervising the stock-rearing interests of his father-in-law Jethro, who was probably not far off a hundred and twenty years of age. To all intents and purposes Moses would seem to have settled for life in Midian with no likelihood of return to Egypt although he may not have been altogether cut off from his own family. The allusion, in chapter 4.14, to Aaron coming to meet him seems to indicate that his elder brother knew where to find him. There was a constant coming and going of Egyptian officials and others between Egypt and the Midian copper mines. This renders it by no means unreasonable to think that despite his long residence in the wilderness Moses had been kept in touch with the condition of things back home.

Chapter 3.1 tells how Moses led his flocks *"to the back side of the desert and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb"*. This is the first of many geographical allusions in the Book of Exodus which, when understood, prove how intimately the writer of Exodus knew his territory. These indications form one of the strongest links in the chain of evidences demonstrating the Mosaic authorship of Exodus. The Midianites inhabited the southern part, particularly the south eastern portion of the Sinai peninsula. Mount Sinai, in the centre of the southern half, lay in their territory, and the famous copper mines of Serabit al Khadim, from which the Egyptians obtained much of their copper and precious stones about forty miles north of Sinai. The word rendered "desert" is *midbar*. Of each of the twenty-two different Hebrew words descriptive of the earth's surface in its various aspects, *midbar*, usually translated wilderness, denotes the wild open spaces, grass grown and bush covered, the type of land normally wandered over by nomadic tribes as distinct from the settled lands of agricultural people. The word therefore accurately describes the enclosed acacia covered valleys of southern Sinai. The word "backside" which in Hebrew idiom means the west, points unerringly to that part of Midianite territory which lay around "Horeb the mountain of God". This is part of the Sinai range only three miles away from Mount Sinai itself, and overlooking a long curved plain, some ten miles long by one mile wide, where ample pasturage for Moses' flocks could be found.

Here it was, one day, that Moses, busy about his duties with the flocks of sheep and goats that were his care, saw the Burning Bush. *"The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed"* (3.2). Moses turned aside to examine this wonder at closer quarters – and heard the voice of God speaking to him out of the midst of the bush.

The Old Testament story of the Burning Bush is often regarded as a miracle, but there is no statement to that effect in Exodus. We have just the plain

unvarnished statement that Moses' attention was attracted by a flaming bush that appeared to continue burning without being consumed. Upon staying to view the strange sight he became conscious of the voice of God commissioning him to return to Egypt and deliver the people of Israel. The Hebrew word here rendered 'bush' is the one for acacia. In ancient times – and until the middle of the nineteenth century – the peninsula of Sinai was thickly covered with acacias, so that this part of the story rings true. As to the nature of the phenomenon, the account is silent, but an incident witnessed by the modern author, Louis Golding, and related in his book *"In the steps of Moses the Lawgiver"* might very well explain what happened to Moses. Golding was in this very district, in one of the wadis or dry water-courses on the slopes of Mount Sinai. It was the evening of a hot day... But let Golding relate the story in his own words

"I am at this point compelled to quote the apparition of a Burning Bush which was so exact a rendering of the strange and lovely marvel described in the Bible, that I quite literally was afraid to trust my eyes. The apparition lasted several seconds, and though I was aware of its exact rationale while it endured. I still said to myself it was mirage or inward fancy. The thing happened "in the back of the wilderness" in one of the wadis under the flank of Sinai. It was in the evening a hot and windy day. As we approached the arena where two or three wadis debouched, the winds met, and, joining forces, became a cyclone, a tall pillar of air violently rotating on its axis, its whole length defined by the sand it sucked up from the dry wadi bed. In the centre of this arena was a large thorny acacia, the only tree which grows in these regions. The sun had for some minutes been hidden, behind a long bank of cloud. It remained hidden until the cyclone reached the acacia. Then in the moment the cyclone possessed itself of the tree, the sun hurled its rays obliquely upon their embrace. The whole tree went up in flames. The smoke of it soared in gusts. Every thorn was a spit of fire.

It continued so for several seconds. It seemed as if the cyclone was impaled on the sharp spikes of the branches. It thrust and thrust and thrust again. The bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. Then at last the cyclone freed itself, and went hurtling along one of the wadis. The tree was no more than a thorny acacia again, arid and lonely in the centre of the hills."

Perhaps for a short time Golding and his companions witnessed something which might easily have been the same thing that was seen and recorded by their illustrious forerunner more than three thousand years previously.

It is more than likely that what Moses saw was some natural phenomenon of this kind; nothing in the account contradicts such a conclusion. What is of greater importance is the fact that very evidently Moses heard the voice of God speaking to him at this time. Whether it was in fact an audible voice on the air appearing to emanate from the burning bush, or an impression produced upon

the mind of Moses in so clear-cut a manner that to him it was a voice speaking, is of no real consequence. The point to stress is that this was no psychological experience or hallucination, in which Moses might interpret a subconscious urge to go back to Egypt and deliver Israel as the voice of God speaking. This was definite Divine intervention. As the account says, it was the angel of the Lord speaking to Moses. The whole tenor of chapter 3.1-5 shows that. Moses did not want to go to Egypt; he neither believed he was the man to deliver Israel, nor did he believe that if he went Israel would take any notice of him. The fire and zeal of earlier years had burned low; forty years a nomad shepherd in Midian had taught him many things but it had also blunted the edge of his perception of Israel's parlous condition. His desire for Israel's deliverance was probably as keen as ever but he now believed that God must do the work by another man. His life was two thirds gone, he was more a Midianite man than a Hebrew, more a nomad shepherd than a city dweller, and the leadership of so great a project, attractive as it may have been in earlier years was now a prospect from which he shrank. *"Who am I" he said to God "that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"* (3.11).

Perhaps Moses had to be brought to this point where he must set his hand to the plough, if he set it at all, solely in the power of God. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was to be entirely and altogether the work of God, and Moses was to be only the instrument. Perhaps Moses had to be convinced that whereas he had no confidence in his own adequacy he could have complete confidence in the power of God. It is noteworthy in chapter 3 that God tells Moses of His intentions in terms which leave no room for any power save His own. *"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I have seen the affliction of my people. I am come down to deliver them, and to bring them into a good land. I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppressed them. I will send thee unto Pharaoh"*. (3.6-10). It was the last declaration which jolted Moses and called forth his expostulation of unworthiness, and God abruptly cast his words aside with *"Since I will be with thee"* (v. 12 - not "certainly" as in the A.V.). Since God will be with him why will he either doubt or dissent? Since God will be with him what possible weakness or failure could there be? This was the first hurdle Moses had to cross, his own lack of self-confidence, the consciousness of his own weakness and insufficiency. So far from that being a drawback, said God, it is really an advantage. *My strength will be made perfect in your weakness. Moses' objection fell to the ground.*

He was ready with another. If he was not to go to Israel in his own name and claim leadership in his own strength, in whose name should he go. *"When I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them?"* (3.13). That question throws a flood of light upon the

condition of Israel as to their conception of God. National tradition must have preserved the knowledge of God who called their forefather Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, preserved their fathers in their generations and brought Jacob and his sons into Egypt. But all that was a long time ago and the gods of Egypt were probably much more real to them now – and these gods were all known by name. Which of the many gods was He that would deliver them from Egypt? How would they know Him and how could they picture Him? Was He after all some strange god of the desert who they had not known heretofore? What guarantee could there be, if they trusted themselves to Him at the word of Moses, that He could indeed prove greater in power than all the gods of Egypt and lead them assuredly into the Land of Promise? Moses foresaw a sceptical reception if he turned up in Egypt with this story of a God who had spoken to him in the wilderness and commanded him to go back to Egypt and bring the people of Israel out from under the hand of Pharaoh.

The Divine reply to Moses gives us one of the most sublime passages in the whole Bible. *"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM Say to the children Israel, I AM has sent me unto you"*. In those words, rightly understood, God asserts His own eternity and in fact removes Himself from association with any question of designating names. The word used there is *hay ah*, which is the present tense of the substantive verb "to be" in the first person. The substitution of the third person for the first gives *yahweh* which has become transliterated, clumsily, into the English word Jehovah and used in some circles as a proper name for God. It is in fact nothing of the kind. The word should always be rendered as in fact Dr. Moffatt usually renders it, *"the Eternal"*. That is the only possible manner of referring to, or describing, God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, having no beginning and no ending, who is, and was, and shall be, the Almighty. That is the only way of differentiating God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, from all the false gods of the nations, all of whom had their own names and characteristics and none of whom are eternal. To give God a name, as men and false gods have a name, is to bring Him down to the level of those false gods and make Him one among them. A little thought will usually be sufficient to show how meaningless must be a proper name applied to God, who is Himself the maker and sustainer and container of all things. The idea frequently encountered that God intended Moses to understand this term as a proper name, the "name" of God, probably comes from the Lord's word in 3.15 *"This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations"* but the word for "name" here – *Shem* – is based on the idea of renown or fame, as when we say "he made himself a name", and "memorial" – *zeker* – is remembrance or memory. "For ever" – *leolam* – extends the name and the memorial, the fame and the memory, into the illimitable future, into a continuance without a stipulated or visible ending. In what clearer terms could there be conveyed to

mortal man. the realisation that in all his endeavours to know or visualise or define God, the Creator, the Almighty, the Heavenly Father, call him what we will, the one simple expression "the Eternal" includes all and sets him for ever apart from every other object of veneration and every other form of authority that has existed or can arise amongst man.

So Moses received his answer, to go to Israel and tell them that the Eternal, who in ages past had led Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, was moving now to lead them, and because He is the Eternal, all that He decrees must surely come to pass and all that stands against his Will must surely in the fulness of time be broken. That is a truth we may do well to take to ourselves today when so much that is in the world of men seems to be destructive of the things of God with little outward sign that matters will ever change.

Moses was to go into Egypt, to gather the elders of Israel, to tell them of his experience and conversation with God, and with them to go before Pharaoh and demand the liberty of the people. And Moses listened and his heart failed him and he replied dejectedly *"they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee"* (4.1). And the gracious Lord gave him two signs, two miracles, to strengthen his wavering faith. It is at this point we enter the realm of the miraculous in the Book of Exodus. It is of little use attempting to whittle away the apparently incredibility of these things by finding natural explanations. There are many wonderful happenings or unusual happenings recorded in the Scriptures and popularly believed to be miracles which are nothing of the sort and not claimed by Scripture to be anything of the sort. Sooner or later an understanding of the true nature of the apparently incredible story is attained. But equally there are accounts of happenings which must rightly be classed as examples of Divine manipulation of natural forces, not necessarily because no other explanation meets the case, but because there existed a need for manifest Divine intervention in the matter in hand. So it was here. Moses stood in need of some definite outward evidence of the reality of the Divine power in which he believed but which he had never seen in operation. The demonstration must of necessity be allied with an act of faith in order to make it a vital factor in the developing resolution of Moses. God told him to cast his shepherd's staff on the ground. He did so, and it became a living serpent, from which Moses backed in alarm. That was the miracle. Now came the act of faith. He was told to pick it up by the tail. That is the wrong way to pick up a poisonous serpent and invites trouble. Moses knew the only way to capture or kill a serpent without risk of being bitten was to grasp it immediately behind the head. But faith was developing. He picked it up by the tail, and it became a staff again. The other sign followed quickly. Obedient to the command, Moses thrust his hand into his clothes. When he withdrew it the flesh

was covered with leprosy. Again as instructed, he replaced his hand and upon again withdrawing it leprosy was gone.

These were the evidences Moses was to offer to a primitive and untutored people to prove his commission from God. Such signs today would not convince sophisticated man – but they are not offered today. They were designed for an age when they could be of use. And as to the likelihood of such things having actually happened, Moses is the narrator and he was alone when the occurrences were said to have taken place. The power which manipulated natural elements to turn water into wine at Cana of Galilee, and to restore whole flesh to the decaying body of Lazarus after he had been dead for four days, could be just as effective in transforming the carbohydrates of a wooden staff into those comprising an animal body and infusing it with temporary life, or first corrupting and then restoring the healthy flesh of Moses' hand in a few moments of time. One hypothesis explaining the narrative of chapter 4 is that Moses, in the ecstasy of spirit evoked by the apparition of the burning bush, imagined it all and really believed it when he told the story afterwards. That does not explain how his brother Aaron was able to repeat the wonder in the sight of Pharaoh and his court later on. It is a much more likely conclusion that the wonder actually happened just as Moses recorded it and that it was a manifestation of the power of God, for it then takes its place in the whole procession of Divine interventions by means of which Pharaoh was at last induced to let the people go and they reached, at length, their Promised land.

Moses was not yet convinced. He thought up a new objection. He was not eloquent; he was slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. How could he be expected to persuade either the people or Pharaoh? The answer reads short and abrupt – a human touch, almost as if the Lord was losing patience with his reluctant ambassador. *"Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Eternal? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shall say".* (4.12). Those few words incidentally place the commission of Moses on the same miraculous basis as the signs he had just witnessed. The same Divine power could just as easily take a tongue that by nature could not speak, and make it speak. Just as miraculously because just as much a manipulation of Nature.

Moses capitulated, but with, it is to be feared, somewhat of bad grace. The expression in 4.13 *"Send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send"* can only mean a somewhat reluctant admission that if God will not send anybody else, well then, Moses is his servant and must accept the commission but really God would be much better advised to find somebody else. And at that God lost patience with him – at least that is how it seemed to Moses and how he put it in his narrative although in fact we know that God never loses patience – and told him that he would be taken at his word and the commission to deliver

Israel would be shared with his brother Aaron. God would speak to Moses but Aaron should be the spokesman to the people and to Pharaoh.

That was the end of the interview. The voice from heaven spoke no more; the radiance of the burning bush died away; Moses stood alone beside that solitary acacia with the beetling crags of Mount Horeb towering above him and no sound in his ears but the cries of the goats as they straggled across the green plain. He must have realised, as he looked upon the peaceful scene, that the quiet and settled life he had led for forty years was ended, that now he had received the call to action. Henceforth life was to be filled with labour and sacrifice and suffering, but at the end of it all the realisation that the dreams of his early life had been fulfilled and the Lord by his hand had delivered Israel. Like the young maid Mary, at a time then still far distant in futurity, he might have breathed to the heavens beyond those high peaks of Sinai *"Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word"*.

AOH

My God, the way is difficult, the road is lone and drear,
I find things so uncertain; temptations find their mark;
The evil shadows cling to me; I would that they did not;
I long to live as Jesus did, e'en though a cross my lot.
I've counted up the cost, dear Father, and I take the cross.
The natural to the spiritual seems nothing more than dross
And yet as I'm away from home, my friends, my brethren's love
The natural makes it hard for me, to keep my thoughts above.
O Thou who understandest me; Thou wondrous all-wise Lord;
Enlighten Thou my eyes, I pray, Thy tender grace afford.
That I may see the path to tread, the way that leads to Thee.
And give me grace to help Thy flock and those who cannot see;
I can do nothing by myself, but if I have Thine aid
Then nothing can o'ercome me and that is why I've made
My mind up to accept Thy call; yet humbly I must pray
That Thou wilt guide and strengthen me, yes, love me day by day
And what a thought! Thy wondrous love, Thine awe-inspiring grace.
Are shown to even me, at that – I shall behold Thy face!
With reverence deep I prayed to Thee to ask Thee if I may
And so I ask for suffering Lord; ironic though it seems
That I should ask and then complain about Thine all-wise means
Please help me keep my mind on Thee; my heart filled with Thy love,
And lift my thoughts that I may think and see from up above.
V. R. C. 1944

NOTICES

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Let everything you do, be done in love.

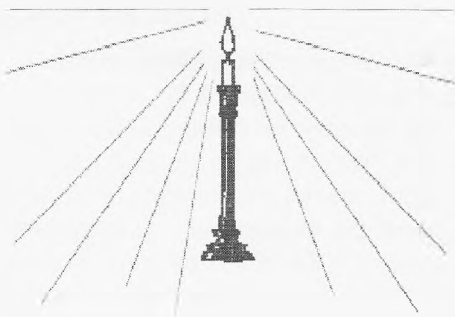
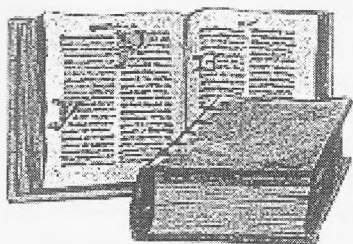
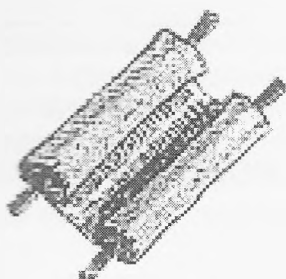
1 Cor. 16.13, 14 (Phillips)

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

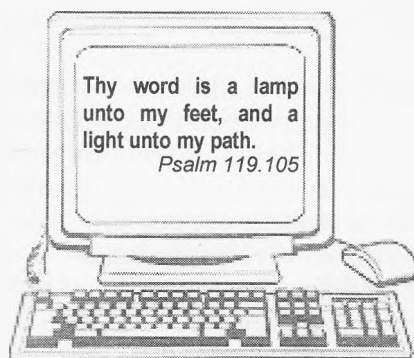
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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The Bible Study Monthly is published to promote knowledge of the Bible. It sees the Scriptures as a true record of God's dealings with the human race, needing to be understood in our generation. It looks for the advent of our Lord, and His reign of peace and justice on the earth.

"...speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request. (Please renew your request annually.)
It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers which are sincerely appreciated.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls" (Rom. 14:4).

It is so easy to value another brother's or sister's service by one's own measure. We all desire earnestly to serve our Lord and the interests of his Kingdom. We delight in telling others about Him. We all have our own ideas of how best the Gospel may be preached. Is it the very intensity of our own earnestness in this direction that makes us want every other bond slave of Jesus Christ to serve in just the same manner that seems good to us. Is it the measure of our own personal talent and success in one particular field of ministry that blinds us to the possibility of effective service being rendered in another manner?

"There are diversities of gifts ... there are differences of administrations ... but it is the same God that works" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). When will we learn that in all God's handiwork there is variety, and that He has ordained the accomplishment of His service in such a fashion that *"every joint supplies"* a contribution fitted to its place in the body?

Says one, loftily, secure in his ability and privilege to address the assemblies as befits the office of an elder in the Church, "there is no doubt that the preaching of the Word is the greatest means the Lord has ordained for the spiritual growth of His people." All very well – but what discouragement to the brother who is temperamentally quite unable to stand before an audience and deliver a prepared discourse, but in his own quiet way can lead a study circle in leisureed discussion of the Scriptures to the very real benefit of his fellows?

It was teacher's birthday. For weeks beforehand her pupils had been busy making pretty aprons and tending little plants in pots to give her on the day, for this teacher was greatly beloved. At length lesson time was over and they crowded round with their offerings, stepping back with gratified smiles as the teacher expressed her surprise and delight at each successive gift. Last of all

came the "black sheep" of the class, grubby and untidy, half hesitating and half defiant, avoiding the amused looks of his classmates as he extended a tightly clenched fist and deposited into teacher's hand – a hot and sticky piece of butterscotch and three marbles.

But that teacher was wise – wiser than many who have attained eldership in the assemblies. "Oh, how lovely" she cried, smiling down at the anxious little face below her. "It's *years* since anybody gave me marbles for my birthday; and I just adore butterscotch."

The grubby one made his way back to his desk, head held high and face radiant. He loved his teacher, and he had so feared his gift would be rejected, but she had understood. He had done what he could.

Let us be very careful how we disparage the service another is trying to render, just because we "cannot see what good it will do". We may be the means of dashing the enthusiasm of one who will never be able to serve in the big things, as we are privileged to serve, but is nevertheless trying to contribute some small mite to the work of the Master Whom we all love.

"Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones."

AOH 1988

NOTICES

RENEWAL TIME – we would urge every reader who has not contacted us in the last six months to do so now – preferably using the pull-out supplement found at the middle pages. You can save us time and money by writing to say whether you wish to continue receiving the Bible Study Monthly or not. Please renew now.

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The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge to all who genuinely wish to receive it and depends solely on gifts – as it has done since 1955.

Generous and anonymous donations in dollar notes have been sent to us during the past several years. We wish to thank the one who by the Lord's grace, has so kindly sent them. The money has been used as we have felt led by Him.

Gone From Us

Sister Phyllis James (West Wickham)

Sister Connie Nadal (Milborne Port)

"Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away"

JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

Tantalising in its brevity is that which the Gospels have to say about Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus. Responsible for the care and nurture of our Lord from birth to manhood, practically nothing concerning him has survived on record. The little that is said is confined to Jesus' infancy and boyhood, and the later life and the death of Joseph are veiled in obscurity. It is almost as if the writers of the four Gospels realised that the human family into which Jesus was born was nothing more than a means to an end, the avenue by which, coming from God, He entered the world of men. That purpose achieved, the affairs of the family were of no relevance to the object of the Gospel story and were allowed to lapse into oblivion. Just a few brief glimpses of Joseph's character are vouchsafed, almost like asides in the narrative, and it is worthwhile putting these together to form some kind of picture of the man to whose paternal care Jesus must have owed a great deal. He appears as a man of quiet faith and implicit trust in God and there is not much doubt that he was a chosen vessel just as much as was Mary for the great purpose which so soon overspread their young lives.

Popular impression, aided by religious art, usually has it that Joseph was a very old man at the time of his marriage to Mary but this impression is almost certainly wrong. It had its origin in certain apocryphal Christian books of the Fourth Century, notably the *"Gospel of pseudo-Matthew"*, the *"Gospel of the Nativity of Mary"* and the *"History of Joseph the Carpenter"*. These works, examples of the "Christian fiction" of the period, were written to support a growing spirit of asceticism in the Church by which Mary was presented as eternally virgin and unconnected with man. To this end these and similar legends asserted that Mary had lived in the Temple under the care of the priests until twelve or fourteen years of age, and the priests then secured a Divine indication that this very old man Joseph, a widower of ninety, should marry and care for Mary and her child Jesus in complete celibacy. The four brothers and two sisters of Jesus mentioned in the Gospels were held to have been the children of Joseph by a former and now deceased wife. These books are of no historical value and it is not difficult when reading them to detect various errors which reveal that the writers were not so accurately informed on the history of the First Century as we are today, and certainly not thoroughly familiar with the Gospels. All that is definitely known about Joseph is drawn from the Gospels.

Mary must have been very young at the time, probably no more than eighteen. This is implied by the fact that she seems to have died at Ephesus in the care of John after A.D.65 or so, by which time she would be between eighty and ninety. Joseph might have been as much as thirty, but hardly any older; his betrothal to Mary seems to have been a perfectly ordinary affair and no reason exists for thinking they were other than a normal young couple pledging

themselves and their lives to each other. Despite all that the apocryphal books above-mentioned say to the contrary, the New Testament is quite explicit that, after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had four sons and at least two daughters. This is another evidence that their father was relatively young at marriage, as is also the story of the flight into Egypt. A senile old man would hardly be physically capable of a successful two hundred-mile flight from the wrath of King Herod; neither is it feasible that he could still work at his trade as the Gospels make plain he did. That he was a poor man is evident from the fact that when Mary presented herself at the Temple, as required by the ceremonial law, to be pronounced ritually clean after the birth of her firstborn, the offering she brought was not the usual lamb, but two young pigeons, the concession made to the poor (Luke 2.24, Lev. 12.8).

Despite his poverty, Joseph, like Mary his wife, was of royal lineage, descended from David the famous king of Israel. Their pedigrees merged together in Zerubbabel, the representative of the kingly line at the Return from Babylon, but Zerubbabel was the son of a "Levirate marriage" and although legally he was counted as the grandson of Jehoiachin the king, his blood descent was not from the kings of Judah through Solomon, but from Nathan, another son of David. Legally and officially, though, Joseph was of the royal line through Solomon and Jehoiachin on this account, and this is the genealogy of Joseph given by Matthew; literally both were of David through Nathan and Neri, and this is the genealogy of Mary given by Luke. It would appear that Joseph's line was senior to that of Mary from the time of Zerubbabel's grandsons, so that the royal rights of Jesus came to him through Joseph. This is why the angel addressed Joseph in Matt. 1.20 as "*thou son of David*" and Luke referred to him as "*Joseph, of the house of David*" (Luke 1.27).

The first sidelight on Joseph's character is revealed when he discovers that his affianced wife is to become a mother. Jewish custom of the time required an espousal period of twelve months preceding the actual marriage, but the espousal was an equally binding contract. Matt. 1.18 shows that it was during this period that Joseph made the discovery. His first impulse was to have the contract of marriage annulled on the ground of unfaithfulness, but quietly and privately to avoid public scandal out of consideration for his intended wife. Mary must have told him the truth of the matter as it is related by Luke (1.26-36), that an angel had visited her and told her that she was to become the mother of the Messiah by an act of God without human aid or intervention. Whether Joseph believed her is another matter. Many Jewish women hoped they would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah but no one ever expected Him to be born in any other than the customary manner; the Divine promise that He would be the lawful heir of David's throne demanded that in some valid way He must derive his descent from David. It is stated that Joseph was a righteous man;

he was evidently devout and well grounded in the Faith and he was not going to take a decision until he had given the matter careful thought (Matt. 1.20). He might not have been altogether surprised therefore when the angel of the Lord appeared to him also and confirmed Mary's story, telling him to name the coming child Jesus (Saviour or deliverer) "*for he shall save his people from their sins*". Joseph hesitated no longer; the decisiveness which seems to have been an element of his character came to the top, and apparently without further delay he completed the marriage formalities – which included the wedding feast – and with his newly-married wife settled down to await the coming event.

All this of course pre-supposes the truth of what is called by theologians "the doctrine of the Virgin birth". All kinds of objections to this are raised nowadays, and there is increasing disbelief that Jesus of Nazareth entered this world in any other than the usual manner. The only authority on the subject of Jesus' birth, however, is the New Testament and that is perfectly clear on the matter. And so was Joseph; much more so than many in later times who take leave to know better than those who were there. Joseph is presented in the narrative as knowing that the coming child was not his; he accepted the heavenly assurance that no human father was involved and that here was an instance of the operation of the Holy Spirit. He knew that such things could be so, because God was all-powerful and he was content as well as believing. It is noteworthy that in the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus on only three occasions is Joseph referred to as the father of Jesus. Of these, twice by the villagers and once by Mary (John 6.42; Luke 4.22; Luke 2.48) where the apparent earthly relationship would make it the natural thing to say. Jesus never acknowledged Joseph as his father; He did use the expression "*my Father*" in reference to God some hundred times. Mary is described as the mother of Jesus some twenty-three times. The phrase "Joseph and his mother" occurs twice. This quite evident exclusion of Joseph from the intrinsic fatherhood of Jesus is all the more noteworthy when it is realised that Jesus' legal right to the throne of David, a fundamental factor in his Messiahship, came to him through Joseph. Had these narratives been fictional or in any way "dressed up" to prove Jesus was Messiah the writers would surely have made Joseph his natural father.

There was probably very little time for philosophical reflections, however, for Joseph had his living to earn and the responsibilities of married life. Whether he was a carpenter in timber or a metal worker or blacksmith – the Greek *tekton* means any of these although it is most often used for a carpenter in timber – is immaterial; he probably did all such work for the village and his living, although modest, was secure. Within a few weeks of settling down he was uprooted; by reason of a decree of Augustus Caesar, the current Emperor. There was to be a general census of the people, and the effect of this upon Joseph and his wife was that they must appear before the enrolment officials in the recognised family

district of their fathers. That district was Bethlehem, the birthplace of David their ancestor and of his fathers, back to Boaz and Salmon of the time Israel settled the land. So Joseph and Mary set out on the eighty mile journey and almost immediately upon their arrival Jesus was born.

The details of that event are well known. The first visitors to the child were the shepherds from nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night just as David his illustrious ancestor had done a thousand years previously. Joseph was there but in the background; he is mentioned, but only just mentioned. This was true humility; he, as the surviving member of David's line, could surely expect some acknowledgement of seniority, at least until the child should have attained its majority. But no; Joseph knew that here he was standing face to face with the workings of God, that the child thus placed in his paternal care was not only David's son but also David's Lord (Matt. 22.42-46). He was content to play the part allotted to him and discharge the duty assigned to him. In him resided the spirit of true consecration; *"I come ... to do thy will, O God"*.

The shepherds went their way and a month later the child was taken to the Temple and formally dedicated to the service of God. Again Joseph played a passive part. He was there, but that is all we know about it. He, together with Mary, *"wondered"* at the glowing words of Simeon the aged prophet foretelling the future glories to come by means of the child; *"light to lighten the nations, and the glory of thy people Israel"* (Luke 2.32). A great honour for a humble village carpenter, Joseph must have thought as they made their way out of the Temple courts and home to Nazareth (Luke 2.39). But he was not even then to be left in peace to ply his craft. Before long King Herod had heard of the wondrous event and was sending his soldiers to find and slay this one who in his ignorance he feared as a threat to his own position. The child was a year old by now; the family's presence at Bethlehem shows that the time was one of the periodic feasts at which pious folk like Joseph and Mary would "go up to Jerusalem" for the occasion, and since their ancestral home was Bethlehem it is understandable that there they would lodge. Instructed by the angel, Joseph took his wife and child out of the town and made his way two hundred miles to Egypt where they would be beyond the King's jurisdiction; *"and was there until the death of Herod"* (Matt. 2.15). Herod died early in the following year so the stay in Egypt was less than six months, during which time no doubt Joseph supported the family by his trade. Then the voice of the angel came again, telling of the king's death and instructing him to return to the land of Israel. It seems that his intention was to settle in Bethlehem. He probably felt that the future mission of Jesus would demand close proximity to the capital city Jerusalem. He was prepared to subordinate his own life's plans and wishes to what appeared to be the Divine will, but he found that Herod's son Archelaus was now reigning and he was nearly as much a menace as the old king. Again, it seems, he sought

Divine guidance, and, following the response he sought, went on into Galilee and settled in his old home town of Nazareth, outside Archelaus' jurisdiction. So, for a few years at least, he found peace and quietness in which to nurture his wife's firstborn son.

Only one recorded incident breaks the silence of the next thirty years. Every year Joseph and Mary travelled to Jerusalem - in common with many others - to observe the Feast of the Passover. In Jesus' twelfth year, as they set out to return to Nazareth, somehow they lost him. A day out on the journey they discovered that He was not with the company and they returned to Jerusalem to find him. After three days search He was discovered in the Temple courts, listening to and questioning the venerable Doctors of the Law, the theologians of the day. Said Mary to him, probably reproachfully, *"your father and I have sought you sorrowing"* but already the active mind of the lad was reaching out towards his life's mission. *"Do you not understand"* He told them gently *"that I must be in my Father's courts?"* But they did not understand; *"they understood not the saying which he spoke to them"* (Luke 2.50). They were already beginning to lose him, as was ordained. He remained a dutiful son; *"he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart"*. It is not said that Joseph did likewise. It might well be that from this point Joseph became increasingly unable to realise the nature of Jesus' mission and destiny. His mother did. Joseph was called to be a physical protector and provider for the period Jesus needed material protection and provision, and when the lad attained man's estate, Joseph's work was done. Quietly and unobtrusively he served as he was bidden while the need existed, and when the service was finished and no longer any need he slips silently out of the picture and is seen no more. But in the records of Heaven the consecrated life and selfless devotion of Joseph, the village carpenter of Nazareth, is surely inscribed in letters of gold for ever.

We hear no more of Joseph. We know from the Gospels that he and Mary had four sons, James, Joses, Jude and Simon, and at least two daughters, all younger than Jesus, so that they must have had a reasonably long married life together. His death is not recorded. From the fact that Jesus commended his mother to the care of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, at the Crucifixion, it would appear that he died before that event. The casual remarks of the villagers in Luke 4.22 and John 6.42 *"Is not this Joseph's son?"* and *"Is not this the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?"* would seem to infer that he was alive at those times. This was approximately the summer of AD30 and spring of AD31 respectively. Matt. 13.55 might imply the same conclusion as to the autumn of AD30. There are some indications that Mary and the family at least made their home in Capernaum during the early part of our Lord's ministry. He himself never went back to Nazareth after the villagers' rejection of him at the

beginning – and Jesus did visit Capernaum some ten times during the first two years, but never after the summer of AD31. Soon after that time comes his first recorded visit to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary at Bethany, which seems to have been the nearest approach to a home He possessed towards the end. From all of this it might be inferred that Joseph died, perhaps at Capernaum, about the middle of AD31, nearly two years before the Crucifixion, at which time he might well have been sixty years of age, a not uncommon life span in those days. The rest of the family would have been young men and women, some already married, but from John 7.5 it is known that none of them were in sympathy with Jesus. So after Joseph's death Mary might have attached herself to the other women, her sister Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary of Magdala, Salome and Joanna, who were disciples of Jesus, instead of making her home with any of her own children. That would explain why Jesus, on the Cross, placed her in John's care although she had children living. Later on, after the Resurrection, James and Jude became converts; possibly one or more of the others did also. At any rate Acts 1.14 makes it clear that at the first complete assembly of believers after the Ascension both Mary and either some or else all of his brothers were present. Among the arguments for the truth of the Resurrection that are advanced, it is not often remarked that Jesus' brothers, who had formerly disbelieved, became believers in the light of the things that had happened. Where they had failed to be convinced by his life they were convinced by his death and resurrection.

Joseph, his life's work done, passed quietly and silently from the scene. It may seem a hard and somewhat callous way in which to treat a faithful servant of God who had discharged his commission faithfully throughout life but it is not really so, and Joseph was not the only one. Moses, the greatest man in Israel's history, died alone and unseen amid the fastnesses of Mount Nebo *"and no man knows of his sepulchre unto this day"*. Samuel, whose wise administration and sterling worth converted an undisciplined rabble of warring tribes into a God-fearing nation, died an old man, bereft of power and authority, in a country village surrounded only by a few student lads. Elijah, who challenged and overthrew idolatry in Israel, went out alone into the wilderness beyond Jordan and was caught away by a whirlwind and never seen again. Daniel, who for more than seventy years held up the banner of the faith in idolatrous Babylon and kept alive the national hope of eventual deliverance, saw the fulfilment of the promise and the triumphant departure of the people of Judah. But he was too old to share in the deliverance himself, and he died unrecorded in Babylon. God attaches no importance to the earthly body and the earthly life once his purpose with the individual is achieved. The body goes to the dust; that which is preserved in the strong hands of God comes forth to a new life in a new environment, resplendent in a glory which is enhanced by the merit of the former life's work well done.

So, among that noble company of old time stalwarts of faith who are to take a leading part in the conversion of all the world in the Age yet to come, not the least in high honour will be that gentle and courageous man of faith who, more than any other man, had to do with the nurture and care of the Son of God come to earth. That man was called, in his own village and by his own neighbours, just simply, Joseph the carpenter.

AOH

WALKING WITH GOD

It is probably true to say that Adam and Eve were the first to walk 'with God'. Genesis 3.8 records that the Lord God was walking among the trees in the cool of the day. The reference is brief but it conjures up a picture of the first human pair enjoying the company of their Creator before they placed a barrier between Him and them - the barrier of sin. We really don't know how Adam and Eve lived or how long they enjoyed the bliss of living in the presence of God with a real awareness of His personal fellowship. What we do know is that some of His closest friends have left a record of their friendship with God and their walks with Him.

The first record of anyone 'walking with God' is the brief reference in Genesis 5.24. It is probably a metaphorical use of the verb 'to walk' that really refers to 'living' with God. This use of the word walking as a metaphor for 'living' occurs, for example, in Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus (chapter 5).

Three angels arrived at Abraham and Sarah's homestead to tell them that they were about to have a son (Gen. 19). It was the occasion when Sarah laughed at such a possibility. After devouring a good meal of calf and bread, the visitors then walked with Abraham to the escarpment overlooking the Jordan valley. Two of the three 'men' went on to the 'cities of the plain', while the third talked with Abraham. He interceded with the Lord for the wicked cities, that He would not destroy them if some righteous people could be found in them. Abraham was addressing 'Yahweh' yet he was in the presence of a messenger from Him. That the patriarch was actually seeing the Eternal God is impossible according to Moses, Jesus and Paul (Ex. 33.20; John 1.18; 1 Tim. 6.16) for they said no man can see God. May we conclude that a direct representative of God who has come from His presence, should be addressed as if God Himself was being addressed. In this walk Abraham will have learned something of God's mercy. It would be interesting to know what Abraham learned about God in his walk with Him from Ur to Hebron and how that affected his own character.

The life of Moses makes this clearer. Just when the man who became Israel's leader began to live consciously in the presence of God is not easy to pin point. It appears to have been when he was at the burning bush, and stood in the presence of the One who revealed Himself as 'I am who I am' or 'I will be who

I will be'. It was an extraordinary one hundred and twenty years by any standard and like Abraham's life it was pivotal in the purpose of God. No one in historical record until Messiah came, had greater contact with God and learned so much about the character of God. Moses was transformed by his wonderful experiences on the mountain and Paul referred to them in 2 Cor. 3. Moses had several walks up the mountains of Sinai – to collect the tablets of stone bearing the Ten Commandments, to plead with God for Israel after they worshipped the golden calf and to see the glory of the Lord. It was on the last of these excursions that Moses discovered that God's glory was in His wonderful character of compassion. He learned, what so many Christians have failed to discover – and still fail to appreciate – that before anything else, to be God-like is to be forgiving – forbearing – merciful in character. This is evident when Miriam rebelled against Moses and he interceded for her (Num. 12). God's love was reflected most in Jesus' life. What a difference to world history it would have been if God's people both before and after Christ came could have learned the lesson.

The Old Testament records other men and women who walked with God. Elijah had a remarkable walk in which the presence of God was very evident. He walked to the River Cherith and there God provided food at the 'hands' of bird's claws. He walked on to Zarephath and that was extraordinary because he was then in the land from which so much trouble had come to Israel and had infected God's people with Baal worship. But God was with Elijah and Jesus referred to the story in His comments to the people of Nazareth in their synagogue (Luke 4). Elijah seems to have enjoyed an exciting life and challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest on Carmel and God saw to it that he won. Yet when his life was threatened there was an extraordinary reaction and he made a run for it. With a respite on the way he ran to Horeb. There he discovered that God was not always in the exciting adventures in nature – wind, earthquake and fire – but in the 'still small voice'. And then he walked with God to find Elisha and on until he found a chariot that took him in triumph into the clouds.

A few centuries later, Jeremiah had a long walk from the land of Israel to the River Euphrates (Jer. 13.1-7). God first told him to buy a waistcloth and wear it. Later he was told to take waistcloth and hide in a cleft of a rock beside the great river. He must have gone home to Israel but later was told to go again and dig up the hidden waistcloth. Jeremiah went again to the river to find his piece of clothing and take it back to the land of Israel. He saw that the garment was no longer fit to wear. So, said God, will Israel be ruined because of her unfaithfulness to me. It was a remarkable acted parable and must have been very painful to Jeremiah who so loved God and His people. But the prophet learned that God loved His people too and would bring them back again after 70 years,

a promise that Daniel and his fellow exiles watched for most carefully. Jeremiah walked all through his life with his God and discovered more than most others about Him. He recognised the godly characteristics of good King Josiah recorded in Jer. 22.15,16 – that taking care of the needy was to be like God. World leaders give lip service to that concept but do little about it. But then they do not have the wisdom of God as Jeremiah revealed in Jer. 9.23, 24 and which Paul quoted in 1 Cor. 1. *"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories, glory in this that he understands and knows me, that I the Lord practice steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight says the Lord."* Few have reached the heights of character that matured in sufferings and perhaps in his final walk to Egypt. But some people recognised something of this man because when Jesus came showing his Godlike compassion he was confused with Jeremiah (Matt. 16.14).

Ezra was one of those who followed Jeremiah's route from Babylon to Israel and discovered that through faithful prayer, God would protect him better than the army of an Empire. (Ezra 8.22, 23). Ezra had a remarkable part to play in restoring Judah's faith in God after their return to their own land but failed to progress with restoration. He read and taught the Word of God to the people and may have had a part in establishing the canon of Old Testament Scripture. Like others before Him, He walked with the God of Israel and learned to trust Him and was thereby able to explain God's revelation of Himself to His people.

Men and women of God walked with Him and became like Him. Their knowledge of God and His purposes was very limited – like ours – but their obedience and faithfulness yielded a rich harvest in the understanding of the Creator Himself. Much could be written of those who walked the highways and byways of Galilee and Judah, Sidon and the Decapolis with the Son of God. How they had to learn compassion rather than judgment on the Samaritan village, humility instead of wanting to be the most important among the disciples. The men seemed to have learned more slowly than the women folk that the Messiah's route to glory was by way of suffering and denial. But the Acts of Apostles reveals how the lesson was learned and that it is 'who you know' rather than 'what you know' that really counts, in the long run.

DN

Benaiah was a man who thrived on adversity and was satisfied with nothing less than fighting a real lion. It gave him the opportunity he wanted to prove his faith in the living God. Many would have wanted a better place to fight but there was no escape from a pit. He had to see it through. It was a snowy day; a good reason for putting it off. Benaiah did not look for excuses. He could not wait for fair weather. The difficulties acted as spurs to faith and he found victory by facing difficulties and triumphing over adversities. (2 Samuel 23)

ON MARS' HILL

Paul stood in the middle of the market place, watching the busy crowds milling around him. There was evidently something very special going on, he thought to himself; judging by the garlands and flowers decorating the many statues of gods and goddesses surrounding him, it must be connected with their idolatrous religion. He turned and looked up towards the summit of the Acropolis, where the forty-foot gold and bronze figure of Pallas Athene, the virgin goddess of Athens, gleamed and flashed in the sunlight. His gaze took in the breath-taking loveliness of the Parthenon behind the statue. Jew that he was, he shunned the beauty of buildings and images and despised the Athenians for their idolatry and their worship of the creations of men's hands. His spirit was stirred within him; a paroxysm of revulsion shook his inner being. The silver trumpets sounded on the still air and the shouting concourse formed itself into an orderly procession, climbing the ascent to the Parthenon where they would pay their respects to Athene the beautiful goddess of wisdom and of war, protector of the city which bore her name and which it was said she had made her own.

He looked round the now deserted marketplace, averting his eyes quickly from the exquisite flower-crowned figure of Irene, nymph of springtime. He rested them for a moment with distaste upon the grim visage of Pluto, god of death and the underworld; turning then to meet the cold austere stare of the bearded and venerable Zeus, father of the gods and goddesses, ruler of the Universe. And his soul within him rebelled at the idolatry of Athens. The hardships of the past few weeks were forgotten and again the zeal of his God burned in his heart, that he might turn these people from the darkness of their ignorance and bring them into sonship with the living God.

Paul had been in Athens, alone, for about a week. He was waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him so that they might resume their missionary work. It was only about five weeks previously that the little party had left Philippi, following the events of the earthquake and the conversion of the Philippian jailer. From Philippi they had travelled, with brief stops at Amphipolis and Apollonia, a hundred miles to Thessalonica, the capital city of Macedonia. Three weeks in this city had been productive of good results; a number of responsible Jews and a considerable company of Gentiles accepted the faith, including at least three men, Aristarchus, Secundus and Jason, who later on were to figure in evangelical work far removed from Thessalonica. Aristarchus, in fact, ultimately became a fellow-prisoner with Paul at Rome (Col. 4.10). But the unbelieving Jews had raised a riot and brought Paul's activities to the notice of the civil authorities under the false accusation of sedition, that Paul was preaching another king, other than Caesar, *"one Jesus"*.

Although the city magistrates here manifested a more justly imperial attitude

than had their counterparts at Philippi, the brethren judged it expedient to smuggle Paul out of the city before harm befell him. So the little party had trudged fifty miles to the small out-of-the-way town of Berea where they had found a band of earnest Jews and pagans manifesting so exceptional a degree of readiness to listen, and care to verify Paul's message by the written word of God, that their name has been proverbial for true Bible study ever since. They *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so"* (Acts 17.11). One of those converted at this time in this little town was Sopater, who later on served with Paul in the wider field. But again the relentless animosity of Paul's enemies followed him; the Jews of Thessalonica tracked him down to Berea and so leaving Silas and Timothy to care for the newly formed community there, Paul was hurried to the sea coast and put on board ship for Athens.

Standing now in the *agora*, the market square or central place or concourse of the city, he was in the very midst of the "wisdom of this age". Rome was the political capital of the world, but Athens was its cultural centre. Here foregathered the wise men, the philosophers, the scientists, all who had something to contribute to the sum of human knowledge. This was the city, of all cities, where Paul might expect to use his education and his gifts of logic and argument to the best advantage in debate with the most intellectual men he was ever likely to meet. He had already had some discussions with the Jews in the synagogue and with others in the market place. Every day of that short week had been spent in some such activity but so far little or nothing had been gained. Now he turned his attention to the upper crust of Athenian society, those who, living upon the labours of their slaves, *"spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing"*. So he found himself entangled with *"certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics"* (Acts 17.18-21).

Of the many schools of thought claiming adherents in Greece perhaps these two were the most prominent. They were something of the nature of religious sects but they were more like modern rationalist societies than believers in a form of religious faith. The Epicureans were the adherents of Epicurus, a materialistic philosopher who lived in Athens in the early part of the fourth century B.C. Whilst not actually denying the existence of the gods, he claimed that no god existed who was concerned with the welfare or happiness of mankind. The universe, he taught, had come into existence by chance and subsisted without any controlling hand. Pleasure was the chief good and pain the chief evil; men should do good for the sake of good and not because there was any Divine purpose at work in their lives. It is easy to perceive how Paul resisted this hopeless creed. He would be no more tolerant of the Stoics. Stoicism was founded in the fourth century BC by a Greek thinker, Zeno, who established a school in Athens where the tenets of his system were inculcated.

The philosophy he propounded represented God as an impersonal driving force pervading the universe and keeping it in operation. The soul of man at death is absorbed into a kind of universal mind that is really the mind of God so that there is no personal future life. The duty of man is to live as righteous and upright a life as possible but he has to do this in his own strength for there is no Supreme Being working to help him. Here again the message Paul had to proclaim brought him into violent conflict with the surmising of such philosophies.

The result was that the Epicureans and Stoics brought Paul to the court of the Areopagites to have an orderly presentation of his doctrines put forward for their consideration, and this was the highlight of the Apostle's experience in Athens. *"You bring some strange things to our ears"*, they said. *"We wish to know therefore what these things mean"* (Acts 17.20 RSV) This was not just a question of finding a suitable rostrum from which Paul could deliver his discourse. The Areopagites were the supreme judges in Athens of all matters affecting public order and moral issues, with especial emphasis upon religious matters and any open blasphemy against the gods of Greece. The judges had power to order very severe punishments should those arraigned before them be adjudged offenders against the moral or religious code. It is very possible therefore that Paul was, at least in part, on trial for his preaching and if what he had to say was ruled offensive to the Athenian code the least he could expect was summary expulsion from the city.

The nine judges, the wisest and most venerable men in Athens, took their seats, prepared to give close and serious attention to the discourse about to be given. The philosophers who had invited Paul to court, for nothing was of compulsion, all was done in a courteous and dignified manner, gathered together near the speaker. Behind them, and surrounding the central group, a number of curious professors, students, priests and priestesses, a few soldiers, and a crowd of Greek and Jewish city-dwellers, all ready to give quiet attention to what the stranger had to say. Nothing less like the tumultuous riots and prejudiced magistrates Paul had experienced in the provincial towns of Greece could be imagined. This was an orderly concourse and the speaker was to get a fair hearing.

The Court of the Areopagites was held in the open air, on the summit of a rocky eminence known as the Areopagus, or "Mars' Hill". As Paul stood up to commence his exposition, he found that his position afforded a superb view of almost the entire city of Athens. In front of him, across a shallow valley, rose the commanding height of the Acropolis with the gigantic statue of Pallas Athene in the forefront as though challenging him.

Paul was about to deny the reality of the goddess. A little to the left rose the magnificent Temple of Zeus the supreme god of Greece. Paul was to say that Zeus was no god at all. Just below him, on the lower slopes of the Acropolis, he

looked upon the marble walls and cedar roof of the Odeon, the theatre of Athens. There five thousand spectators at a time could watch the actors presenting the plays of the great dramatists and tragedians of the past, plays which survive and are still presented in our own day. Paul was going to demonstrate something far nearer to truth than the themes of many of those plays. Away in the distance, far to the right, he could just discern the bare rock face which in modern times has become known as the 'prison of Socrates'. Well-read man that he was, Paul could hardly have failed at that moment to reflect that in this same place, five centuries previously, Socrates, the greatest of the Greek philosophers, was condemned to death by the judges. That was for preaching strange gods and a new moral code, and allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens with his teachings. Now Paul himself was going to preach a 'strange God' and a new moral code, and brand all the gods of Greece as the imaginations and creations of men's minds and hands. Would he too be condemned and rejected? He must have wondered for a moment.

"Men of Athens" the clear voice rang out over the heads of the attentive multitude. *"I perceive that in every way you are very religious"*. The AV *"too superstitious"* is a wildly inaccurate translation. The word means much given to piety or religious observance. That opening statement was a courteous acknowledgment of an evident fact, the devotion of the Greeks to their gods. In Paul's day most Romans were cynical about their religion in the extreme and the worship of the gods in Rome was perfunctory and a mere formality. In Greece it was different; Paul found an attitude here much more closely resembling the devotion to religious worship with which he was familiar among his own people and he gave his hearers full credit for that.

"For as I passed along, and observed the objects of worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god'". The Greek text does not have the definite article here although in many such cases the article is to be understood. It is rather uncertain therefore whether the inscription was *"to the unknown God"* or *"to an unknown god"*. No such altar has been discovered among the antiquities of ancient Athens but several plaques inscribed "To unknown gods", in the plural, have been found. The precise inscription matters little; it is the use Paul made of it which is significant. *"What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."* In that masterly statement Paul absolved himself from the possible charge of preaching strange gods in Athens by showing that they themselves already admitted the existence of a God unknown to them. That same God was now to be declared to them. One can imagine the grave judges leaning forward, their attention caught and held by this unexpected approach. *"The God that made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath, and everything"*. This is basic Christian doctrine, the supremacy

of God from whom life and all things proceed. The universe did not just happen by chance; neither was it always in existence. Scientists today tell us that it had a beginning; there was a time when the universe did not exist. God made it, said Paul, and because He began to create at a time when not one particle of the universe had come into existence, He Himself is of necessity outside that creation. He does not dwell in any place men can reach or observe. The Greeks believed that the gods dwelt on the top of Mount Olympus, just across the bay from Thessalonica. In later ages men have pictured God as dwelling somewhere in the starry heavens or in a golden land far away in the recesses of outer space. We know now that God cannot be thought of as dwelling anywhere within this material order of things. The world in which the angels stand in the Divine Presence and carry out their duties and activities, is on another plane of being, another 'wavelength', as it were. Paul must have known that, when he told the Corinthians that they could attain that world and that resurrection only by means of a 'change', an instantaneous transition from one world to another; flesh and blood, the animal man, he wrote, can never as such enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

"He made from one" (not *"of one blood"* as AV) *"every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation"*. This was strong meat indeed for the cultured Greeks. They prided themselves on being a superior race to the rest of mankind; the gods had especially favoured them and they stood on a higher plane than the barbarians of other nations around them. Not so, says Paul, all men are from one source. It is impossible not to realise that he was referring to the Biblical story of the first human pair. Paul believed in the story of Eden and the Fall with all his heart, and his whole understanding of the Divine purpose for man was based upon that story. God made all men out of one, from one, and He has fixed both the time span of history and the limits beyond which man cannot go in his constant seeking for fresh fields to explore. It is commonly considered that Paul intended here to indicate that God is responsible for the territorial boundaries of nations. It is questionable whether the expression really does mean that, for those boundaries are by no means "fixed limits" in the sense demanded by this verse. Perhaps Paul rather meant that man, by his nature, is confined within a particular part of God's whole creation, that part which we know as, and have called, the material universe. No matter how far man may yet range in his spacecraft and rocket ships he will never, as man, get outside this material universe. The Greeks believed they could under certain conditions pass into the presence of the gods in their fleshly bodies. Paul makes it plain in his letter to Corinth that only by the clothing of the identity, the real person, with a new and spiritual body, a *"house from heaven"*, may we cross the boundary and enter into the presence of God. Such are adapted to the conditions of that other world.

"That they should seek God yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'". This was a new thought to his hearers. They had never thought of God as being near and accessible to them. Zeus was a remote and unapproachable deity; when he did deign to visit the earth there was usually trouble rather than blessing. Not that the Greeks were alone in this conception of God. In much later times too many Christians have looked upon the Most High as a God of wrath and vengeance, one to be feared and propitiated rather than loved and served. Paul saw deeper than that. He knew God as one seeking by all means possible to recover His erring children to Himself, even to the extent of giving *"his only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life"*. The believing is necessary if the everlasting life is to be given, for life comes only from God and it is in Him that we live and have our being. Paul explained that also. All life is of God and all life depends upon God. Therefore, says Paul, we are the children, the offspring of God, and with another of his strokes of genius he quoted them their own poets to support his point. The two Greek writers to whom Paul referred at this time are Aratus and Cleanthes. Aratus was a native of Cilicia, Paul's own country. Cleanthes was a leading member of the Stoics in Athens. Both lived three centuries earlier. It is true that they referred to men as being the offspring of Zeus their own god, but Paul was able to use their writings to demonstrate that the idea of men looking to God as to a Father was not unknown even among themselves. *"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Deity is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."* The word translated Godhead in the A. V. was used in Greek to denote the Divine nature generally and is better rendered Deity or Divinity. Because we are living, intelligent beings, and God, being our father, is greater than we are, it is absurd to liken him to images made by the hands of man. *"And the times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent; because he has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, whereof he has given assurance unto all men in that he has raised him from the dead."*

This was the climax of Paul's discourse. In the execution of His purpose God had in ages past suffered men to go their own ways and make to themselves gods in their own image and likeness as they chose. Now there was to be a change. With the appearance of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, there opened a new phase of the Divine purpose. The way to reconciliation with God was manifest through faith in Christ. A 'people for God's name' was to be called and chosen from among the nations and prepared for use as the Divine instrument in the conversion of men in the final age of human history, the age of the Second Advent. So, said Paul, in appointing that day in which He will judge the world

in righteousness, He has also appointed its ruler. It is He who lived, and died, and whom God raised from the dead, thus giving assurance to all who believe that His promise will be fulfilled. *"Repent and be converted; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."* That was the point to which Paul was working; whether he ever got thus far is perhaps problematical for at the mention of a resurrection from the dead the spell was broken. The wise men of Greece could listen thoughtfully whilst Paul debated the nature of God but when it came to future life by a resurrection from the dead, most of them dismissed the whole thing as fantastic nonsense. Some mocked; but some, more serious perhaps, offered somewhat half-heartedly to have another session on the matter. But for the present the audition was at an end. The Aeropagites, the nine judges, evidently ruled that there was nothing in the new doctrine to which Athenians could reasonably take offence, and Paul was free to go where he liked and prosecute his mission as he pleased.

The Apostle must have been bitterly disappointed. Of all the apostles he was the one best fitted by education and natural talent for this opportunity of preaching Christ to the wise men of this world in the intellectual centre of world learning. He had been fully equal to the occasion, speaking to them in the manner to which they were accustomed and showing himself their equal in learning and in eloquence. He had demonstrated to them how they themselves, unknowingly, had been feeling towards some such understanding of God as he now expounded. Whilst he kept to the well-tried paths of human reasoning and logical argument they listened. When he introduced the realm of faith they turned away. *"For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone."* Small wonder that Paul left Athens for Corinth determined, as he told the Corinthians later on, *"to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"*. *"We preach Christ crucified"* he said, *"unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God"*.

The effort was not altogether in vain. One of the judges, Dionysius the Areopagite, was sufficiently impressed with Paul's preaching to accept his message and become a believer. There was a woman named Damaris – who she was and what position she held in public life is not stated, but she believed – and a few others. What happened to them afterwards is not known, for they are not mentioned again in the New Testament. No local church was formed, or if it was, no mention was made of that either. Paul never went back to Athens. He revisited, in after years, the other scenes of his ministry in Greece but never Athens. How strange that the very city where no open opposition to his work and message was aroused, where the highest levels of local society were prepared to give him serious consideration, where by all the rules of human reasoning he should have experienced notable success, proved to be the place which appears to have yielded least.

So, without waiting any longer for Silas and Timothy, Paul left Athens and took his journey to Corinth.

(To be continued)

AOH

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Part 8 1 John 2.18-19

"Little children it is the last time; and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2.18).

This consciousness, that the last day is at hand, seems to overshadow all John's thoughts in his epistle and colour his words. But it is not a dark shadow, a gloomy foreshadowing of doom such as is so often indulged in by fanatics who want to see all things on Earth destroyed by fire. It is, rather, a bright cloud of promise illumining the strong words with the sunlight of the Divine Presence. John sees Heaven coming to the rescue of Earth. It is not God rising up in storm, earthquake and fire, advancing in terror and wrath across the face of the land bringing tumult and destruction in His train. Rather it is the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, a beneficent and radiant effulgence that sweeps over the sky and embraces all the Earth, with healing in its wings. John knows full well, of course, that the day of the Lord is to bring trouble and distress and that the evil institutions of man will not go down without a struggle. However, in the sight of his brethren the Last Day is to be a day of rejoicing rather than of terror, of assured peace rather than anxious apprehension, a day when the oncoming King shall be welcomed rather than shunned. *"When you see these things begin to come to pass, look up, lift up your heads, for your deliverance draws nigh"* (Luke 21.28). That is the spirit in which John uses this expression *"the last time"*.

It would come as a very familiar thought to his readers. They, for at least one complete generation, had been accustomed to the thought that the day spoken of by Isaiah and Joel and other prophets, when God should set His hand to make an end of iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness, had dawned. The early Christians did not make the rigid distinction between this Age and the Age to come, with a time of trouble between. How could they? In their day the vision of the future was still very vague and shadowy. They had only just come to realise, by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, that God was not going to complete this marvellous work in their own generation. The old idea had been that Messiah would come but once, and would, at that coming, set up His Kingdom on Earth and fulfil the entire Divine purpose. They now knew that there was more to it than that. They knew that a period of time, perhaps short, perhaps long, was to elapse and that only at its end would their Lord return and commence His reign. Dimly they perceived an epoch characterised by wars,

famines, pestilences and persecutions, ending in another Time of Trouble such as they were then experiencing, only more intense. Nevertheless they looked upon it all as one Age, the Age which, beginning at Pentecost, marked the turning of God to reconcile men to Himself through Jesus Christ. Peter saw God's purpose more clearly and did differentiate between the time before the Second Advent and the *"times of restitution of all things"* (Acts 3.21) which must wait for that Advent. Even so Peter, like John, insisted that he and his were even then living in the *"last time"*. They looked back over the ages of Old Testament history, telling one long story of the continued descent of men into hopelessness. They looked forward into one grand age of Jesus Christ. First the Church, the devoted and dedicated disciples of Jesus, would be selected and trained for their future work. Only after that would the world as a whole be brought into the purposes of God and receive a full opportunity of everlasting life.

Now John turns to the darker subject of antichrist. His readers already know something about it. *"You have heard that antichrist shall come."* One wonders where or how they heard. Perhaps something of Paul's teaching (2 Thess. 2) had reached them, and they already had some idea of the part yet to be played by the *"mystery of iniquity"* when it should come into the world. Behind any such knowledge, including Paul's own words, probably lay the older belief, derived from the book of Daniel. It was that before the Kingdom could come there would be an *"abomination of desolation"* that would defile all that is sacred and holy upon earth, and relentlessly persecute God's true people. The Jews looked upon that as having been fulfilled when the heathen king Antiochus Epiphanes, nearly two centuries before Christ, profaned the Temple and inflicted savage atrocities upon the faithful of Jewry. Paul and John now knew that the real fulfilment still lay in the future, and they never ceased to warn their brethren night and day that they might be strong to stand when the day of trial should come.

"Even now is it in the world" said Paul. *"Even now there are many antichrists"* says John. The great persecuting power which was to emerge and be consumed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and destroyed by the radiance of His presence was not in their day in existence but the forces which were to give rise to it were already in operation. *"The mystery of iniquity doth already work."* It is necessary for us as for Christians in the First Century, to be very clear in our minds as to the form that this Antichrist will appear to us, so shall we not be taken unawares and ensnared, and so be unable to play our part in the great battle between right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil, with which this age is to close.

The essence of Antichrist is that it is a *denial* of Christ, and that it supports that denial by means of brute force. It is not content to deny the truth of Christ

and the power of His life and message, but it also denies the right to honour and serve Christ, and restrains Christians in the exercise of their faith. In John's day this was only the beginning, as he says here. There were Judaizing brethren who sought to bring Christians into bondage to the Mosaic Law, and Gnostics who sought to impose upon them the mysticism and philosophies of the East. There were others who brought in specious heresies pandering to the vices and desires of the flesh under plea that Christians enjoyed a law of liberty and could do as they pleased, provided they retained purity of mind. Behind them all the ever present Roman pagan power insisting on the worship of Caesar as a god. All these were the "*many antichrists*" of whom John spoke and all these became snares and tests to the infant Church, against which they had to strive with might and main if they were to be accounted faithful. Later in the Age, although the "*many antichrists*" still persisted in a local sense, the mystery of iniquity became consolidated in the form of a mighty ecclesiastical, pseudo-religious system. It arrogated to itself all the rights and privileges belonging to the Christian church and the Christian ministry and claimed to be the only channel of salvation. It is a mistake to suppose that the Antichrist was a purely ecclesiastical institution. It was a temporal power as well. Men were ruled, in secular affairs as well as in religious matters, by an iron hand that demanded absolute and unconditional obedience. Only those who were absolute in their loyalty to God and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ resisted the demand, and many such suffered persecution or martyrdom in consequence of the stand they took. Here was a power that did indeed "*wear out the saints of the Most High*", a combination of rulers, temporal and spiritual alike, who both denied the name and power of Christ for themselves and endeavoured by all means within their reach to destroy the true worship of God from the earth.

The power of that system has waned, but the spirit of Antichrist lives still. The rulers of the earth are still of a mind to "*take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying 'Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us'.*" The people of the world are, in the main unbelievers and no longer amenable to religious authority. The progress of education and general diffusion of knowledge leave few terrified by ecclesiastical threats of judgment to come. The modern manifestation of Antichrist is, and will be, of a much more secular nature than it has been in the past, but it will still be determined to deny Christ and all for which He stands, as it was in past days. That is shown in the visions of Revelation. There the last of all the anti-Christian powers to rise in the world, the "*two-horned beast*", leads men back to a worship and obedience identical with that which they previously accorded the "*seven-headed beast*". This causes all men to receive a mark in the right hand or in the forehead and only those who are determined in their faithfulness to Christ fail to receive the mark. We must conclude therefore that

in the end of the Age there will be a more potent manifestation of the Antichrist than ever there has been before. This will be an alliance of great civil ruling powers into a world system based fully and frankly on materialism. It will have no place or use for religion except as an aid and adjunct to its own plans and schemes, and demanding all independent thinking Christians something very much akin to the Caesar worship of the First Century. If we in our day should see such a thing come to maturity, we may take courage from the reflection that it is just such a power that is to be consumed by the Lord Jesus when He is revealed in the flaming fire of His judgment. Then the Rider on the white horse and his attendant armies, descend to do battle with the beasts of the earth and their armies and the forces of evil are overthrown for ever.

Now for a while John restricts his thoughts and his words to the brethren and the church affairs of his own day. Thinking still of those local antichrists, the Judaisers, the Gnostics and the false teachers of one kind and another, who had joined the church and attempted to lead away disciples after them rather than enter into a true and fruitful ministry for Christ, he writes *"they went out from us but they were not of us; for had they been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not of us"*.

Christians at all periods in the history of the Church have been familiar with this sad feature of Church life, the coming into their midst of men whose motive is not the building up of the flock and the giving of honour and glory to Jesus Christ. On the contrary, their motive is their own aggrandisement and self-glory, the receiving honour and power in the Church that they might be counted great in their own eyes.

As if the Lord of all the heavens could be deceived for a moment by such paltry hypocrisy – for these men are not, for the most part, unbelievers. They believe in God, but conceive of Him in their own image and likeness, and even while they deceive the flock about their true standing, they deceive themselves. *"deceiving and being deceived"*. What an apt expression it is! Knowing nothing of the true principles of Christianity, they ply their miserable policies and devise their contemptible schemes that they may win a few followers whom they may call their own. Sooner or later they are shown up before the Church in their true light, and they "go out". But what sorrow and heartache might have been avoided had the members of the "flock" been more adept in spiritual discernment and more uncompromising with all that gives evidence of not being of the spirit of Christ. We do well to apply these words to ourselves and realise that *"even now there are many antichrists"* and that everyone who by his actions and teaching is denying the true spirit of the message of Christ is, even if the sentence seems a harsh, an antichrist.

(To be continued) AOH

GOD IS WITH US

"God is with us."

The statement fills us with awe. As scientists discover more of how wide and complex the universe is, so the greater becomes our conception of the *"God who made the world and everything in it"* (Acts 17.24); of the Word about whom it is stated *"All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being"* (John 1.3). In the material world in which we live, God is present. He is *"not far from each one of us"*, *"in him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17.27,28). His intention is that we should *"search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him"* (Acts 17.27). These are facts that anybody may take on board as a personal belief. Through history there have been many believers who have discovered, or been told, or proclaimed, that 'God is with us'.

Sometimes the presence of God comes as a surprise, as in the case of Jacob. Opinions differ about Jacob. Was he grasping and selfish? Or was he an enthusiast for the family faith and traditions whose zeal, inspired by his mother, led him to overstep the mark in unfair dealing? However it was, he found himself exiled from his family and running for his life. When he slept he had a vision of the Lord, who stood beside him making a promise. The promise was of the land of Canaan, of a great family, of descendants who would be a blessing to all the families of the earth and, *"Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you"* (Genesis 28.13-15). Jacob's waking reaction was *"Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."* He took steps to celebrate the place - and he vowed that if all this mind-blowing promise was real, the Lord would be his God. Jacob had found an unexpected Holy Place where God was present to him. But God is not limited to holy places. 'If we lead a life of prayer, God is present everywhere' - not only present, but there to be found, as has been the experience of people through the centuries. Jacob discovered that God would guide and protect him.

Samuel found that He gave confidence in speaking out. *"As Samuel grew up the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground"* (1 Samuel 3.19). *"And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord"* This did not mean that Samuel's words were always well received, or acted on. It did not save him from frustrations and disappointments, particularly in the case of King Saul. And there could have been difficulties for the leaders of the people to accept that Samuel was always right! Wherever Samuel went, in the holy place at Shiloh or on journeys throughout the country, the Lord was with him.

The phrase "you are with me" appears in the psalm which revels in the thought of the Lord as our shepherd. The shepherd is present with his flock to

find grazing and water, even through dark and fearsome paths at which they might balk. *"I fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me"* (Psalm 23.4). The purpose of the rod and staff? To protect from predators, doubtless. To control the flock, also. Sheep are not always docile or obedient, or submissive to wise guidance. And we, like sheep, realise that when the 'Shepherd' is with us, we cannot go our own way, though Jesus in his parable of the lost sheep does tell of the shepherd rescuing us from the consequences of our wayward actions. God with us brings both blessing and restraint.

Jeremiah was another who received the promise *"I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord"* (Jeremiah 1.8). The context is this young prophet being appointed God's messenger, and venturing into the sphere of politics and warfare, in which the very life of a nation can be destroyed. In such a world, life is cheap, and a message may be not only unacceptable to the authorities but dangerous to the messenger. *"Do not be afraid of them"* the Lord said. But in chapter 20, after Jeremiah has been put in the stocks, we find him saying, *"You pushed me into this, God, and I let you do it. You were too much for me. And now I'm a public joke. They all poke fun at me ... all I get for my warnings are insults and contempt.... But if I say 'Forget it! No more God-Messages from me', the words are fire in my belly ... and I'm worn out trying to hold it in"* (Jeremiah 20.7, 9 The Message). All the same, Jeremiah still went on to say *"The Lord is with me... like a dread warrior"* (v.11). The Lord would protect the message and the messenger from those who commit evil, but Jeremiah's experience of God is not entirely comfortable.

A hundred years before Jeremiah, Syria and the northern 10-tribe kingdom of Israel had made an alliance against Syrian invaders. They tried to compel Ahaz, King of Judah in Jerusalem, to join them, or else be deposed by force. Ahaz and the people of Judah were in panic. Isaiah the prophet tried to reassure them, told them to trust in God. *"Hold God in doubt, you'll not hold out!"* When Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign that he could trust in, Isaiah gave him one. He said a girl would have a child, and call him *"God with us"*. Before the child knew good from bad, their enemies would be out of the picture. It was the way of prophets to give names which had significance, so this name pointed to God being actually with his people, the results of which would appear in the immediately foreseeable future. So much was for Ahaz. But 800 years later the gospel writer picks up the name Immanuel with greater significance. Now, the girl with child is a virgin, and God is 'with us' in a startling new way.

Christian writers have never ceased to marvel that the Word of God should appear on earth as an ordinary child. No fanfares, except for a localised appearance of angels; no recognition, apart from a handful of students of the stars, some working shepherds and a group of elderly Jews in the temple. As far as China or India or Rome was concerned, nothing had happened. When Jesus

began the serious work He had come to do, he compared the Kingdom of God to a tiny seed, insignificant. We all know how that seed grew, and how He completed that phase of His work with a death valid to save humanity from their sins. It was His resurrection that got people talking, that news spread. Even so, only 500 or so out of all the world's millions had actually seen Him alive from the dead.

Yet during those few years of His lifetime, God had been with us in a special way. *"He that has seen me has seen the Father."* His miracles had been of a piece with the whole work of creation, His teaching embodied a pattern for all human life, and His death had been planned by the sacrificial love of the heavenly Father. When He said goodbye to His disciples He told them, with authority, to make disciples of all nations... *"and remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28.18-20). Through the period of His ministry, Jesus had been with them in person. His Spirit had been with them: now it would be in them (John 14.17). And before them lay a vision for the future: a new heaven and a new earth, the home of God. *"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them..."* (Revelation 21.1, 3). This is a time which makes universal the blessings of 'God with us'. The healing and teaching of Christ, the challenge and discipline lived out by Jeremiah and Isaiah, the strong comfort of the Shepherd, the assured success enjoyed by Samuel, the guidance and protection received by Jacob: these blessings are for all.

We, meanwhile, having this optimistic world view, must live our lives in the present time. Learning the lessons of our predecessors in the faith, we trust, and we obey. And the wondrous power which created the universe is focussed for us at the Christmas season in a tiny human child.

*Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness,
uncreated light shines through infant eyes.
Stars and angels sing, yet the earth sleeps in the shadows.
Can this tiny spark set a world on fire?
Yet His light shall shine from our lives, Spirit blazing
as we touch the flame of His holy fire.
God is with us, alleluia,
Come to save us,
Alleluia!*

G. Kendrick

GC

Dwight L Moody's prayer – "Great God, let the world learn, through my life, what Thou canst do by a man wholly devoted to Thee!"

OTHNIEL, CHAMPION OF ISRAEL

The rugged old warrior stood on the eminence gazing at the little Canaanite town in the valley. The hero of a thousand fights, Caleb was the idol of his men and at eighty-seven years of age boasted that his strength was as it had been forty years earlier. A twin key figure with Joshua in the conquest of Canaan after the entry of Israel into the Promised Land, he believed that he was wielding the sword of Lord and therefore was invincible. He had just led his men to the capture of the town of Hebron but there was still more fighting to be done. His eyes fell upon his own trusted followers, hardened campaigners all, and at the crowd of younger men, not so experienced as yet in the arts of war, but eager to test their mettle and demonstrate their valour in the wars of the Lord. Caleb looked again at the town in the valley and came to a sudden decision. *"He who attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it"* came his stentorian voice *"I will give him Achsah my daughter as wife"* (Jud. 1.12).

The eighteen-year-old girl standing behind him looked up in sudden alarm. Her eyes met those of her cousin, Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, and not many years, perhaps six or seven, older than herself. Othniel's eyes were already seeking hers; he flashed a reassuring half smile, hardening quickly into a look of determination. Wheeling round to face his own detachment of men, he shouted *"To Kiriath-sepher. Come"* and in a moment they were plunging down the rocky declivity towards their goal. Caleb watched them go, a grim smile on his face; then, to his own men. *"Come, we have work to do"* and the dry dust rose from the ground as they tramped in the opposite direction.

"And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife" (RSV). And so Kiriath-sepher, afterwards known as Debir, became an Israelite stronghold and its luckless inhabitants, those of them who were not able to get away in time, were mercilessly put to the sword, for these were barbaric days, and for all the romance and euphoria that has been associated with Israel's occupation of the Promised Land, Joshua and his followers were in no wise different from the barbaric invaders which have repeated the process in every land and in every generation since. They believed they were doing the work of the Lord, but so have professed Christians in similar circumstances in later times. And it has to be remembered that the Lord had already told these Israelites that they had no need to fight to obtain the land. If they would exercise faith in Him and just march in, He would see that they could settle and the decadent and immoral Canaanites who possessed it would melt away, *"By little and little"* He told them, obviously by natural decrease as the generations passed; they had no need to fight. The Lord told them how they could obtain the land peaceably, but they chose to fight.

So Kiriath-sepher fell, and with it the literary treasures of the Canaanite civilisation, for the name means "the city of books" and this was the place where all the knowledge and learning and history of the Canaanites was stored. Despite their decadence and their immorality, the Canaanites were a civilised people and stemmed from the older civilisations of the Euphrates plains, more civilised by far than these Israelite invaders. So the books were all destroyed and no trace of them has ever been found, to the lasting loss of later generations who would fain know more about these peoples who lived when the world was young.

So Othniel returned triumphant and his uncle was as good as his word and the young conqueror claimed his bride. *"When she came to him she urged him to ask her father for a field; and she alighted from her ass. And Caleb said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to him 'Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb give me also springs of water'. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs"* (Jud. 1.14,15 RSV).

This young lady appears to have known her own mind. These men around her, her father and her new husband and others, were soldiers, having known no other trade in their lives. Caleb, who had endured the rigours of the Exodus for forty years, had only experienced 'living off the land' as his people journeyed towards their goal. Othniel was only in his teens when they entered the land. They had probably given little thought to what would happen when the fighting was over. But Achsah had. She knew that eventually her husband would have to lay down his arms and commence earning a living. And in that land and at that time the only possibility was farming. Her father had given her, as dowry, an area of land, but it was hot and arid (the expression "south" land in the AV really means desert land; it was the territory now known in modern Israel as the "Negev", dry and waterless). *"Give me also springs of water"* she entreated. Caleb apparently had overlooked that essential. So he re-drew the boundaries to include suitable springs or streams and the lady was content. Although the Scripture does not give any details of their future married life it is evident that they did settle down happily for 1 Chron. 4.13-14 does give the names of their two children, Hathath and Meonothai and their grandchildren, Joab and Ophrah.

After that, nothing, for some thirty years, during which the family must have lived, and prospered sufficiently well, and enjoyed the time of relative peace which ensued after the land had been won and settled. Joshua and Caleb, and Eleazar the High Priest, who came into Canaan with them, had long since gone the way of all flesh. But things were not going well in Israel. *"And Joshua, the son of Nun, died an hundred and ten years old, ... and all that generation were gathered unto their fathers, and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord"*. (Joshua 2.8, 10) Othniel and Achsah were of that younger generation but they were of the minority who

remained loyal to God. They must have viewed with apprehension the lapsing into idolatry and the violation of the Covenant with God which guaranteed prosperity and peace whilst the nation remained loyal, and promised adversity and invasion by enemies as the penalty for disloyalty. And now the rain was ceasing to come, the crops were failing, the cattle dying off, and the threat of invasion becoming more real; but still the people in the main went on worshipping Baal as had the Canaanites before them. All this became a test of faith, for the temptation to leave the famine-stricken land of Israel for a greener land across Jordan among the unbelievers, and forsake the land the Lord had given them, was strong and some among Israel yielded to that temptation. Only thirty miles away at the village of Bethlehem lived at this same time another couple whom Othniel and Achsah must have known quite well, Elimelech and Naomi, but they had forsaken the land and gone over Jordan to live in Moab. Related by blood to Salmon the prince of the tribe of Judah, Elimelech should have set a better example, but to Moab he went in fear of what was coming although his cousin Boaz, loyal to God, remained. So the story of Boaz and Ruth is intertwined with that of Othniel and Achsah, for they all experienced the disaster that came upon the land.

"Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, and the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years" (Jud. 3.8).

Invasion – servitude – oppression; these were to be the lot of the unfaithful people. Eight years long were they to reflect upon the consequence of their folly and, perchance, then begin to take some heed to the exhortations of the few faithful souls among them like Othniel and Boaz and others, who endured the judgment with patience, knowing that the Lord would lift His hand if and when the people repented. But in the meantime they groaned under the iron hand of the alien king.

Who is this Chushan-rishathaim, the longest king's name in the Bible? No commentator has ever been able to suggest who he was, and of course there are not wanting those who suggest that he never lived and that the whole story is a fiction without foundation. But Twentieth century discovery can perhaps furnish a clue. The word Mesopotamia is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Aram-naharaim, meaning Aram of the two rivers, and this denoted the territory between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates which at a much later date became the land of Assyria. At this time, however, it was the seat of the empire of Mitanni – a name unknown until quite recent times. The Mitannians were an Indo-Aryan people from the north and were at the peak of their power in the days of Joshua; soon afterwards they were overcome by the Hittites. Their king at the time of Joshua was Tushratta and his sister was married to Pharaoh Amen-hotep III who was the reigning Pharaoh of Egypt when Israel was invading Canaan. And he oppressed Israel eight years.

But even the longest lane has a turning. In the story of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1.6) it describes how Naomi determined to return to the land of Israel because she had *"heard that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread"*. Now this can mean only one thing, that Israel had repented and turned to the Lord and in consequence He had removed the oppressor and sent the rains, and the crops had grown, and all was well again. So this marked the end of the eight years' oppression. In the parallel story, that of Othniel, it is recorded (Jud. 3.9-11) *"and when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel and went out to war: and the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia into his hand, and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim. And the land had rest forty years"*.

So Naomi and Ruth came back from Moab to find a worthy successor to Joshua as the accepted ruler of the nation. Othniel, the victorious warrior, the champion of Israel, fresh from his victory over the Mitannians, leading a people chastened by their first experience of the penalty of the broken Covenant, resolved now to serve the Lord in sincerity and truth. It was in the power of that national mood that the men of Israel followed Othniel into battle against their oppressor and triumphed.

The Mitannians were a vigorous and warlike people. For a century past Egypt had been hard put to it to hold them back on the northern frontier with Syria. Now, with Egypt weakened and impoverished on account of losses suffered by the Plagues and the Exodus, Mitanni was moving in to fill the vacuum, hence the eight years oppression. But their rule was short-lived. Another power further away still, the Hittites, was attacking Mitanni from the rear. Caught between two fires, Hittites in the north and Othniel with his Israelites in the south, the Mitannians retreated and a year later, under Tushratta's son Mattiwaza, were no more. This event has been dated at 1370 BC; an analysis of the data afforded by the first few chapters of Judges and the Book of Ruth gives the onslaught of Othniel lying between the years 1360 and 1380, a witness to the accuracy of Bible history.

So the followers of Othniel went out to battle as they had done in the days of Kiriath-sepher thirty years earlier. They had been young men then, as had been their leader, with life opening out before them. Now they were in their fifties with the sobering knowledge of their years of disloyalty to God and the Covenant and the hardships that had brought them. But they had come back, and God had received them, like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, and, they would not fail again. Perhaps the best part of the story is at the end when they returned triumphant to find Israel a free nation again and the sincere worship of the Lord restored in the towns and villages of Israel.

For forty years thereafter Othniel ruled Israel in justice and righteousness. His personal influence, as a champion for God, must have been tremendous, for during all that time the nation was free from enemies. The Egyptians in the south were quiet; the Hittites in the north were busy consolidating their hold on Mitanni. The nation increased and prospered accordingly. The High Priest Phinehas, son of Eleazar, performed his sacred office and all seemed well. There must have been lapses; the threat of idolatry was always there and Jonathan the renegade grandson of Moses had already set up his idol shrine in the territory of Dan in the far north (Jud. 13) but these were minority events in the otherwise orderly and God-fearing life of the nation.

"And Othniel the son of Kenaz died". He would have been a little over a hundred years of age. A champion for the Lord, like his predecessors Moses and Joshua, he was the third in a line of great leaders who endeavoured to keep the nation on the straight and narrow way. Each of them illustrated the influence an upright and high-souled leader can exert over the people he leads and serves and how quickly that influence can be dissipated when the magic of his presence is removed. After the notice of his death the narrative continues *"and the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord ..."* All the old troubles returned, and once again the penalty of the Covenant. One might be pardoned for asking whether it had all been worth while in the efforts to restore the nation to its rightful place before God. So soon did they relapse. The answer is that of course it was all worth while. The light that burned so brightly during that forty years of Othniel's rule was never completely extinguished during the time of darkness which followed. Some there were who remained loyal, and when at last the people repented again and the Lord raised up another deliverer it blazed into brightness once more. One day it will blaze up for the last time and will not be extinguished. As said Isaiah seven centuries later *"Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended"*.

AOH

O God, help me all through today
To do nothing to worry those who love me;
To do nothing to let down those who trust me;
To do nothing to fail those who employ me;
To do nothing to hurt those who are close to me.

Taken from 'More Prayers for the Plain Man' by William Barclay
and published as a Fount Paperback by Harper Collins

GO – STAND – SPEAK

"But the High Priest rose up and all who were with him that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." (Acts 5.17-20 RSV)

Luke tells us nothing about the angel; his appearance or how he obtained entrance to the prison without the help of the prison guards. He does not announce his name or even where he had come from. Presumably he looked like a man and the apostles were clear that this was an angel speaking to them, God's messenger and he had to be obeyed.

This was the first time that the Apostles left prison without the knowledge of the Jewish authorities so they were not used to this kind of experience. It was very important at this point in the history of the Church that the Apostles should return to the young community. Perhaps it is not fair to make strong comparisons with the church in later years – ten, fifty or several hundred years further on. In any event, the fact was that everyone, and most importantly the priests, knew that these disciples of Jesus had been put in prison under guard and many must have realised that this was a very wonderful miracle.

The angel had given specific instructions but how did these men feel about obeying their commands? They were wanted men and it was for this kind of preaching that they had been placed in custody. In chapter 2 we read of Peter's preaching at Pentecost. In chapter 3 we are told of the healing of the crippled man that resulted in the first visit to prison. In chapter 4 we have the description of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, about the threats and the court's release of the two apostles. In chapter 6 we have a picture of the Christian community – the nice side and the not so nice.

Meanwhile, the hope of the priests that putting their leader to death would put an end to this Galilean movement, was fast evaporating – so was their patience. It was becoming clear to them that the apostles could influence the people much more effectively than they could – and these were supposed to be unlettered men, of whom the Jewish priesthood was jealous. They put them in jail overnight so that their influence was at least temporarily halted, intending to give judgment of them in the morning. Perhaps one of their number in the Sanhedrin would come up with a solution to their problem by morning. Already the captain of the Temple guard had been to the jail and found it securely locked but empty. It was then that someone came hurriedly from the Temple and announced that the 'prisoners' were in the Temple preaching ... again. It was a bigger 'let down' than if they had left them alone to speak to the people, without being put under lock and key. The messenger from the Temple spoke something

of a riddle *"The men you put in prison are standing in the Temple and teaching the people"*.

Those twelve men were in the Temple because they had received instructions from heaven to go there – stand there – and speak the word of 'life' – life which they were experiencing all day and every day. But it was a brave act, for they knew full well that sooner or later the priests would come and someone might get hurt for defying them. God did not always protect from suffering. If they had not seen their resurrected Lord they could never have withstood the Jewish authorities. The appearance of the heavenly messenger to give them release against guarded and locked doors had increased their courage and their conviction that what they were doing was God's will. They, like Paul later, could do all things through Christ that strengthened them.

The angel had said 'Go'. Some of us have heard men in high position say that to us, and we knew we had to obey. As a driver stands at traffic lights and sees the green signal appear, he (or she) knows that they must obey or a driver behind will hoot them threateningly. But for sinful, obstinate human beings, obedience can be very difficult indeed. Disobedience, hidden by all kinds of excuses, is one of the biggest single factors in preventing Christians receiving the blessing that God wants to give. Like David, we need God to search our hearts so that we are certain that no command from heaven has been left disobeyed.

In following Jesus, we need to know where we should go and what we should do. The message to the Apostles was brief and to the point. 'Go... stand ... speak'. They knew where to go and what to do. Not every step of the way of the apostles as recorded by Luke in 'Acts' was clearly defined. It took Paul a little while to by-pass old haunts in Asia Minor so that he could go, stand and speak in the market places and synagogues of Europe.

Out of these experiences, the early Church learned that when they had a problem and were uncertain as what to do, they prayed together. It was an example for the whole Christian church to follow down the centuries till today. Those who have followed it, to them God has given the answer and His people have received the blessing. Sometimes, we are not expected to 'go' at all but to 'stand' firm.

A British army once won a decisive battle against tremendous odds because a relatively few men stood their ground, unmoved. In our own day, there is a great need to stand fast against the odds. The Christian faith is under tremendous strain from those who would oppose and destroy it. Science, philosophy and social welfare are the world's words of 'this life'. In themselves they need not disturb the Christian's faith. When the Christian church holds firmly to the New Testament Gospel, there is a strong love for the Creator's handiwork. It recognises that Paul argued from a great philosophy for life and the Bible strongly urges Christians to do 'good works'. But none of these things is the

mainspring of 'this life'. That lies in the words of Peter to the rulers and elders following their arrest after healing the crippled man, "*.... there is no other name given among men that we should be saved, except in Jesus Christ.*" (Acts 4.14). We need to stand firm on the rock of ages; on the work of Jesus upon which He built His Church – on the firm teachings of the apostle in the New Testament and allow nothing of the modern social, scientific gospel to move us from it.

The message of the angel was "*speak to the people all the words of this life*". It has always been the human goal that people might find 'eternal life'. In earlier days, life was sought through religious philosophy and good works. In more recent times philosophy and technology have given hope that quality and length of life might be considerably improved. But any human panacea from the wise of this world to improve life, in its very nature must be limited because of the lack of power and knowledge. It needs someone outside the human race to provide these. Jesus claims to have what is necessary to provide eternal life in an unimaginably wonderful environment. He claimed while here to be the 'resurrection and the life' and 'the way, the truth and the life'.

These were the words of life that the angels told the Apostle to speak. No matter how much world leaders promise improvement, it may make temporary progress in some respects, but fail to give permanent results. Jesus alone can seriously claim to co-ordinate all aspects of life, morally and spiritually as well as physically and materially. Above all this, only Jesus can give life to the vast majority of humanity that have ever lived on the Earth and who are now dead. This is the message and the first apostles laid their lives on the line to preach it because they had seen the resurrected Lord. That is why they went so boldly and so assuredly into the Jewish and Roman societies to give a message that none could gainsay.

They succeeded but the Devil averted the thrust of the message of the Church by tempting many later Christians to adopt a worldly life style. Much of the power of the Church was dissipated in disobedience through lack of faith. In more recent centuries there has been a return to a spiritually strong message, but there is no Bible promise that there would be world-wide conversion until Christ establishes His Kingdom in the Earth. That does not stop close and obedient followers of Christ from doing what He commanded and what the apostles did as they set us an example.

It is a great privilege to be the mouthpiece of God. Letting the light of Christ shine from our lives brings the blessing of obedience in God's Word. A radiant life is one of peace and progress in walking with Christ.

DN

THE SWORD OF THE LORD

"O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, and be still How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord has given it a charge?" (Jer. 47.6).

Jeremiah of the 6th century BC was a politician as well as a prophet (thus giving the lie to the modern cynical assertion that there are no honest politicians!) His able grasp of the contemporary political arena of his day was on a par with his understanding as a prophet of the ways of God. In both fields he was clear sighted, outspoken and fearless. Both king and priests stood in awe of his forthright denunciations and warnings of troubles and disasters soon to come. Divine judgment was about to fall upon the nation in consequence of its violation of the principles of truth and justice. The priests were heedless of the paganism of the people; the king and his advisers relied on worldly wisdom in their dealings with hostile nations, repudiating the counsels of the Lord. Caught between the two contending military powers, Babylon and Egypt, both priests and king were oblivious to the danger that threatened. They scorned the advice and admonitions of the only honest politician, Jeremiah the prophet, the one who perceived plainly what must be the inevitable end of their course.

So Jeremiah became the sword of the Lord, the man appointed both to pronounce judgment upon the guilty nation and to witness its execution. No better man could be found; he was ready and fitted both by knowledge and desire. He said of himself *"his word was as a burning fire shut up within my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay"*. He saw clearly the relation of personal faith and the worship of God to the trend of political events in Israel. He saw clearly his country's destiny in terms of the purpose of God. He knew that Israel would one day become a light to the nations but not until it had become a cleansed instrument in the hand of God. He knew too that it was at this present time corrupt and apostate and no fitting instrument for the Lord's work. He knew that judgment must surely come, judgment swift and relentless, and that only after the judgment had done its work could there be a blessing. But the blessing would come, for blessing always follows judgment for those who are rightly exercised by it.

So Jeremiah was a scourge to the godless of his own nation as well as a denouncer of other nations. Israelite or Gentile were all the same to him. Injustice, oppression, apostasy from God, he denounced wherever it was found, and fearlessly proclaimed the dire consequences that would result. His fellows feared him and hated him, conspired against him and sought to destroy him, but always he stood erect in their midst, denouncing them in the name of God. He was to that generation the apostle of judgment; the Sword of the Lord.

The Sword of the Lord at any time in history is His instrument at that time for driving home His message, for executing His judgments, for separating the evil

from the good. Particularly it is His agency for proclaiming to the particular generation the significance of the times in which that generation lives. *"You can discern the face of the sky"* said Jesus to the orthodox religious of His day *"but you cannot discern the signs of the times"*. And in consequence it had to be said of them, sadly but firmly *"the kingdom of God is taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"*. In pre-Christian times Israel was the Sword of the Lord when they were loyal to Him and to the Covenant. This was their battle cry when they followed Gideon to the rout of Midian. *"The Sword of the Lord and Gideon"*. At the fervour of that shout and that confidence the enemy panicked and fled. But when Israel relapsed into faithlessness the role was changed and Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, in turn became the Sword of the Lord and God's executors of judgement upon Israel. *"Ho, Assyrian, the rod of mine anger"* He said, referring to Sennacherib, (Isa. 10.5) *"and the staff in his hand, my indignation, I will send him against a hypocritical nation, against the people of my wrath"*. And so they suffered, both in the days of Hezekiah and the days of Jesus, because of their unbelief and heedlessness.

In Christian times the Church in the flesh is the Sword of the Lord, to declare and lay down in the ears of all men the standards of God's righteousness and to pronounce in no uncertain voice the certainty of Divine judgment when those standards are violated. It is to make known with all possible emphasis the full scope of the Divine purpose for human happiness and the reason and place in that purpose of the present reign of sin and death. After that comes the Messianic Age of righteousness when all men, dead and living, will stand before the Lord Jesus to be brought to a full knowledge of Him and, if they will, be fully reconciled to God and thus ushered into everlasting life. And when, as in our own time, the evidences come thick and fast that the change of the dispensation is upon us, that the world is nearing its end to be replaced by that promised Age of blessing, the Sword of the Lord must be drawn, aware of the significance of the times, proclaiming with the confidence of certain knowledge and the enthusiasm begotten of the inward vision, the Baptist cry *"The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"*.

Today, we are the Sword of the Lord. We are to this generation what Jeremiah was to his. But is the sword blunt? Has it lost its keenness? Three generations ago it was wielded to good effect and many heard the message of the Kingdom and rejoiced. The world has changed, and there is more unbelief and indifference.

"How can it be still" cries the prophet *"seeing the Lord hath given it a charge?"* If, with us, His Word truly is as a burning fire, shut up within our bones, how can the sword be still? How can we desist from the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to a world that is so much nearer its end, so much more in process of disintegration. When Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world

and preach the gospel to the whole creation He also said that this gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations and then would the end come. He stipulated no time limit. The preaching was go to on until the end had come. Even then it will not stop, for with the advent of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth the preaching will be immeasurably amplified and extended to reach everyone and the challenge of Christ be faced by all.

Christians live to make non-Christians into Christians, and Christians into better Christians. One does not make real Christians by offering them pie in the sky all the time. Christianity is not just a matter of having a pleasant time sitting round a camp-fire and singing a few songs together. There was a church in a London suburb with a large placard outside inviting the reader to come in for "pleasant Christian fellowship". That church is not there anymore. Not far away, there was a Salvation Army Hall full of wholly devoted and sacrificing Christians continually going out to preach their conception of the faith with drum and trumpet. It is still there and they still do it. The weakness of some witnessing is the tendency to stress the good time that is coming, ignoring the bad time now present. Its easy to tell people how good and happy they will be in the future Age and overlook how bad and miserable they are now. Do we tell them how the desert will bloom and blossom as the rose then, without admitting how increasingly polluted the earth is becoming now? There are two aspects to our message; one is blessing and the other is judgment. It is because the world of man is as it is that judgment must come. After that will come the blessing. John the Baptist started by calling his hearers a generation of vipers, and exhorted them to repentance if they would avoid the wrath to come. Not every modern herald could do that and get away with it. We live in a more prosaic age but we can at least tell people that the time has come for the axe to be laid at the root of the tree and all that is bad and corrupt must be destroyed before the new age can be built. We have to tell men how far short they have come from that which they could be and then how they can, if they will, attain what could be, through Christ. In this modern world of ours, money mad and pleasure hungry, living only for the present, and heedless as well as ignorant of the finer things in life, those who need the message do not understand the language. Sin, death, the Fall, redemption, eternal salvation are like a foreign language to them. Speak of Jesus and His death on the cross and some do not even know who Jesus was. "Back to the Bible and to God" has no appeal to people who have never had the Bible. Paul had a better chance with the pagans. They did at least worship some gods even though false ones; today's pagans worship no gods at all. The Greeks and the Romans did in the main believe that there would be a heavenly life with the gods for the righteous. Modern man believes in no heaven at all and only one hell – the hell he has created for himself upon this earth. And that is where we have to start.

It is this separation of evil from good in our own time and lives that we have to face. Zechariah saw the position in his vision of the flying roll (Zech. 5). It was a giant roll of parchment or goatskin, thirty feet long by twenty across, written inside and out with the Divine law, rolling over the ground and entering into every house to destroy the evil in that house by stating the laws of right doing bringing these things to the notice of every individual in the house and challenging them to renounce the evil and embrace the good.

"When God arises to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth, surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psa. 76.9). "He comes to judge the earth with righteousness and the people with equity" (Psalm 98). Does that sound like a 'dreadful day of wrath'? That is the message we should be proclaiming in whatever fashion we individually can proclaim – judgement then blessing. Evil turned into good. Godlessness turned into godliness. Death turned into life. The tunnel may be dark and long but at the end there is the sunlight.

This is the message. Mankind will be redeemed and the world cleansed by the removal of evil. The way is open for all men by virtue of the death of Christ on the Cross, Christ who *"gave himself a Ransom for All"* and by that one act nullified the power of death over the human race introduced by the sin of their first parents. So they return, all the generations, back to the beginning, in the power of that Ransom. But sin has yet to be removed; as the man dies, so does he rise again. The Millennial Age is appointed for that removal, the reign of Christ over the earth and all the multitudes for whom He died, teaching, encouraging, converting, reconciling *"whosoever will"* until at the last the final traces of evil will have been removed.

(This is an abridged article reprinted from 20 years ago) AOH

It will be as when sunshine draws forth the glory of colour in a landscape that has been lying under a pall of cloud ... Under the direct rays of the Sun of Righteousness buds of earth will become flowers of heaven. Vision will beget likeness, and likeness, again, give clearness to vision, their endless interaction securing endless progress towards the inexhaustible fulness of Christ.

Robert Law

The sweetest perfume that the home circle ever knows arises from the deeds of loving service which its members do for each other. The sweetest perfume of our homes do not arise from elegant furniture, soft carpets, elegant pictures or luxurious viands. Many a home, having all these, is pervaded by an atmosphere as tasteless and odourless as bouquets of waxen flowers.

I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power.

EARTH'S NEW MONARCH

"With all my heart and soul I believe that the only effective rule for humanity is an absolute monarchy; but the trouble is that we have never yet found the Monarch.

For a little while the heavens have received Christ, the only One worthy of unlimited rule; but the King of men is coming back, in infinite compassion for the world which drove him out. For his coming not only the Church but all creation waits.

The Revised Version gives a wider meaning and greater force than the Authorised to Paul's words in Romans 8.19, "*The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God*". Today the sons of God, as such, are unknown, or despised and persecuted; but when the Master comes they will be revealed with him.

Following upon the end of Gentile power comes restoration of God's ancient people Israel to their true position among the nations. I do not say the restoration of the Jew only, that is not comprehensive enough, but of the whole Israel of God.

The Ten Tribes, lost for centuries, shall be found and restored to their land, for the fulfilment of God's purpose for Israel, and through Israel for the race.

I know that some doubt this truth, and say that Israel as a nation has been finally cast off. Can God desert those to whom He has made oath? Absolutely impossible! Never! God's purpose may be thwarted and hindered; but despite all human failure and folly, they must eventually be realised.

The prophecies of the Old Testament concerning God's ancient people have never been wholly fulfilled; and it cannot be that the inspired Word of the Living God should prove a failure."

Rev. G. Campbell Morgan

Take the hardest thing in your life; the place of difficulty, and expect God to triumph gloriously in that very spot. There is no place without its difficulties; by removing you may change them—it may be you will increase them! But you cannot escape them.

L. Trotter

Nothing would turn the nation back to God so surely and so quickly as a church that prayed and prevailed. The world will never believe in a religion in which there is no supernatural power.

Samuel Chadwick

God's comfort is a deposit — a trust. Your only power of comforting others is that you were brought into some deep place and God met you. Afflictions are qualifying you for ministry.

A. Daintree

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