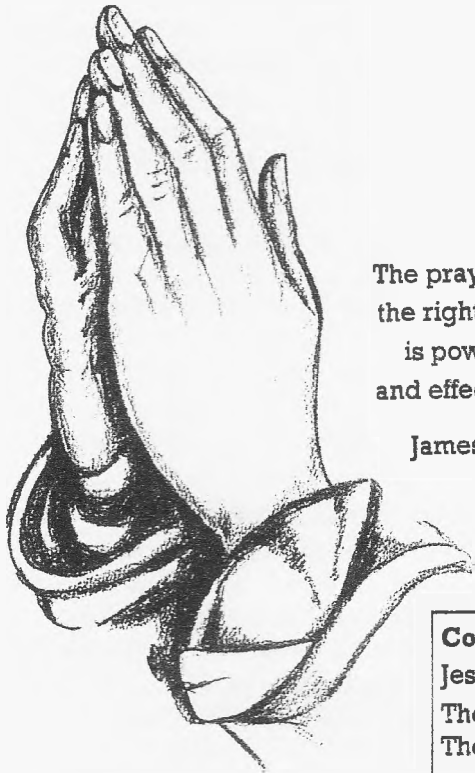


BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY



The prayer of
the righteous
is powerful
and effective.

James 5.16

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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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JESUS ALONE

Our Lord did not get much time to himself. If it was not the crowds around him, thirsty for what he had to say, bringing their friends for him to heal, all as noisy as a hungry flock of sheep, then it was those who came quietly to him for the answers he might give in private. Even at night there was Nicodemus come for conference and consultation, to be shocked into new ways of thinking. If Jesus waited for his disciples by a well, along came a Samaritan woman, in the heat of the day, ready to chat him up and find herself converted. If it was a journey by boat and he fell asleep through sheer weariness, a sudden storm shattered the peace. In a quiet moment after he had been teaching, there stood the disciples asking him to explain to them what he had been saying to all the people.

Yet there were significant times when Our Lord was alone.

Surely he must have been alone after Joseph and Mary inadvertently left him behind at Jerusalem. There is no word of his being with a group of mischievous lads his contemporaries. The older people with whom his parents, when they went back to find him, might have expected him to be with, did not know where he was. They found him on his own in the temple, one youth holding discussions with the many learned doctors of the law. Where did Mary and Joseph expect to find him, he asked. Surely they would realise he had made his way to this place which belonged to his Father?

When his time came he went out alone from the security and bustle of family life at Nazareth to find John the Baptist. John had finished dealing with the crowds that day, and Jesus came to him asking to be baptised. When John had agreed to this, afterwards when Jesus was praying, there was the dove, the voice "You are my dear Son. I am pleased with you." With these words ringing in his ears, Jesus was driven by the Spirit away from them all and into wild, lonely places.

When he came back, he knew what he would not do: not use his power to meet his own needs, but to help others; not to indulge in pointless spectaculars, which never changed anybody's heart; and not to join the circus of kings and governors who in their objectives and methods followed evil and did not acknowledge God. Soon Jesus found himself in the thick of all the urgency and excitement of his own unprecedented work of healing and teaching.

Outside Simon Peter's family home the crowds had gathered. They all needed Jesus. And he gave himself to their needs, and it went on and on into the night. Very early the next morning before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of the town to a lonely place, where he prayed. Simon Peter and his companions went out searching for him... "Everyone is looking for you". Jesus answered that he must go on to the other villages round about, he had to preach there as well. That is why he had come.

All through the period of his ministry there were times when Jesus slipped away on his own, in order to pray, often at night, sometimes all through the night. The gospel writer mentions these occasions especially when he was needing to meet a crisis or take an important decision. For example: 'At that time Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night there praying to God. When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them who he named Apostles... when he came down the hill with them he stood on a level place with a large number of his disciples.' A large crowd from all parts of the country had gathered, to listen to him and be healed. The choice of the twelve had followed his night alone in prayer.

The time when five thousand were fed was significant for the direction his work would take. The crowd were all looking to him for more food. Feeding the five thousand had been a most successful spectacular event. The people were wanting him, to be king. Resisting the temptations implicit in this situation, Jesus sent the people away and went away to a hill to pray.

When Jesus was praying alone one day and his disciples came to him, he asked them who the crowd were saying he was? "Elijah... John the Baptist... one of the old prophets come back to life..." "And you, what do

you say?" "God's Messiah" said Peter. A week later he was again on a hill to pray, this time with Peter, James and John in company. While he prayed they saw his appearance change. There were people with him. Once again, there was a voice: "This is my Son whom I have chosen. Listen to him!" The voice stopped, and the three disciples saw Jesus there, all alone.

Once again Jesus was alone, and leading the way to Jerusalem, for the last time. The disciples followed behind, reluctant, fearful, arguing with one another. Arrived at Jerusalem, Jesus spent nights alone, praying on the Mount of Olives. He was alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet not what I want, but what you want." He was alone on the cross, when he prayed, "Father, in your hands I place my spirit."

Long before this, there had been a time when the Pharisees were disputing with Jesus. He had claimed, "I am the light of the world." They did not believe him. They said he must have someone to back up his claim. Jesus replied, "I am not alone in this. The Father who sent me is with me." But they did not understand, and they would 'lift up the Son of Man' - on a cross. Then, said Jesus, looking to his resurrection, then they would know that God had backed him up completely, because he had been completely obedient. "He has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases him."

When the end came near, Jesus had to tell his disciples that they would indeed run away and leave him alone. They felt confident, at last they were sure about Jesus, because he spoke plainly to them. He had said, "When that day comes, you will ask the Father in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, for the Father himself loves you. He loves you because you love me and have believed that I came from God. I did come from the Father, and I came into the world; and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." "This makes us believe" they said, "that you came from God." "Do you believe?" said Jesus. "The time has come when you will be scattered, and I will be left all alone. But I am not really alone, because the Father is with me." In this way he reassured them, and indeed reassured himself for the next few crucial hours. For them, it truly would feel different, he was about to return to the Father. The disciples would be feeling alone, however much they might wish to keep him with them.

When Mary met him in the garden in the early dawn, Jesus told her, "Do not hold on to me.... go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father..... and their Father. To my God.... their God."

GC

Scripture quotations taken from the Good News Bible.

THE LORD AT PRAYER

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1. 35.)

The details are quite graphic and paint for us a clear picture of Jesus during those happy days of his popular ministry in Galilee. Yet He was aware of the dangers of popularity and of spending too long in one place. As we read on, it is apparent that the sun was up and people were about again, searching for their hero. Jesus knew better, and if there had been any doubt in his mind when He arrived at that quiet spot, He now knew, after communion with his Father, what He must do. He said to the eager disciples, *..Let us go somewhere else so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.*" (vs.38)

Luke gives the most complete record of our Lord's prayer life. Luke was the Gentile writer of the New Testament who spent much time with Paul on his journeys. He is the evangelist who shows us the words of Paul in action - *"Pray continually""pray in the spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests. ..."* (1 Thess. 5. 17; Eph. 6. 18) Luke clearly establishes the links between the teachings of Paul and the work of Jesus, but while it is Luke who tells us where and when Jesus prayed, it is John, the writer of the Fourth gospel, who gives us a detailed prayer of our Lord in chapter 17.

As a child

Like many children brought up in the fear and nurture of God, Jesus must have learned how to pray at his parents' side. By the time He had reached twelve years old He understood that God was his Father (Luke 2. 49). In Gethsemane He called God by the familiar form for Father "Abba" (in our language, 'Daddy' (Mark 14. 36) which is the confident but tender address of a child to its father.

A child needs to learn the skills of communication, for example as in making requests and expressing appreciation for the goodness and gifts of a parent. Parents explore these experiences with their children as they grow from birth, and are communicating with their offspring long before actual speech is learnt. These are the first lessons in prayer and perhaps have bearing on Romans 8. 15, 16, 26.

As a child, Jesus would learn extensive portions of the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament). He must have become very familiar with the stories of the great heroes of Israel. He would have known about Abraham's, great intercessory prayer on behalf of the cities of the plain.(Gen. 18. 16-33). He would probably be able to recite the great dedication prayer of Solomon (2 Chron. 6). He would have known well the prayerful yearnings of Samuel and Jeremiah over a people and king who were backsliding from God. He would

have read the expectant yet repentant prayers of Nehemiah and Daniel, as they looked forward to the restored Israel. Perhaps most of all he pondered the mighty Moses who had enjoyed "face to face" communion with his God (Exodus 33.11).

Jesus' teaching about prayer, and the prayers recorded of him, demonstrate the spirit of childhood which Jesus said would characterise those who entered the kingdom of heaven. The characteristics are dependence and sense of need. Development of those traits enables praying believers to focus upon God and not upon self.

At critical moments

The first reference to our Lord praying is in Luke 3. 21, as He came up out of the waters of Jordan. He appears to be having a two way conversation with his Father. There we have the first of those remarkable utterances from Heaven "*this is my son*", said on this occasion at the critical point in the life of Jesus from which He began his ministry. It was an event which potentially showed the Jewish people that He was about to lay down his life—in order to bring them salvation. It is an example to every believer that at such important experiences in our lives we should pray to our heavenly Father, that He may direct our paths by his Holy Spirit. Jesus urged his disciples to pray for the Holy Spirit. Immediately following his baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert where He was tempted by Satan. At each succeeding critical point in his life it is recorded that Jesus specially devoted time to prayer.

When the Lord prepared to select the apostles, the men who were to be trained and sent out as the foundation members of the Christian Church, he spent all night in prayer (Luke 6. 12). Jesus needed to be sure that He was choosing the right men for this job. They were gifts received from his Father, and even He, the sinless son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, needed to pray about such decisions. He could be tempted to choose leaders of the Church for the wrong reasons by putting his own human feelings before the purpose of God. In another prayer just before his death He was praying again about these men and their special needs in the days that would follow his departure. "*They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*" (John 17.6). Jesus had great concern for these men, and it was no easy task protecting and strengthening such raw recruits to be the leaders of the new kingdom. As the suffering drew near, Jesus had much to teach men like Peter the way of the Lord. "*I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. . .*" (Luke 22. 32), Jesus could not wave his hand over the band of disciples to protect them by magic. This was the real world and they had to face real temptations. It was in such situations that Jesus had grown spiritually and it was in such situations that his disciples also grew to be like him.

Another very critical time in the work of Jesus came when He did the miracle of 'the feeding of the five thousand'. The year of popularity was really ended but He continued to be the centre of attraction, and great crowds went to him. As the thousands dispersed from the meal of bread and fish Jesus told his disciples to get into a boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the lake. He needed to be alone with God. He had been bereaved of his cousin John the Baptist. He had been or was about to be challenged by the crowd to become their king. So He withdrew to the mountainside and there spent time in prayer. (Matt. 14. 23). To reject the people's support would be more than a disappointment for them. Jesus loved these people but now they would turn away from him. This was a turning point in his life and He needed the Father's strength as He laid bare his life in deep humility and patience. Jesus wanted the kingdom to come as much as we all do. He suffered more than we, as He looked at stricken humanity in all its poverty and sickness. Yet He must wait and pass through the valley of shadows itself.

In such an atmosphere He came to Caesarea Philippi with the 'twelve' and asked them the momentous question "*Who do men say that I am?*" Luke 9. 18 records that this question was asked "*when Jesus was praying in private*". The crucifixion was approaching and He and the disciples must be prepared. While they were in an attitude of prayer the great revelation was made. Jesus began to speak to them of his suffering and death. A little later the three most intimate disciples were to go with Jesus to a mountain, (Luke 9.28), for the specific purpose of praying, and while they were there, Jesus was changed, his face and clothing became bright white and they all saw a vision of Elijah and Moses. This is not the place to examine what happened to them all just then but it was further preparation for the coming ordeal and it occurred while Jesus was praying.

While the three disciples were on the mountain with Jesus the others were on the lower slopes and were attempting unsuccessfully to heal a very sick boy. When Jesus returned and healed the boy it was natural for the disciples to ask why they had been unable to perform the miracle. While Matthew's account tells us that they were short of faith, Mark 9.29 says that Jesus explained to them the need for much prayer.

The implication in Luke's record is that these great spiritual experiences which reveal the immediate purpose of God and the work Jesus Christ was to do were linked with prayer. There could be a parallel with our experience. Times of prayer can become the wonderful moments when God reveals something of his guidance and glory.

With deep feeling

There were times when Jesus was in agony of mind over the conditions around him and there were great stirrings of his human emotions. There were other times when He praised God with much thankfulness for the wonderful things that were happening. One of these was on the return of the 'seventy' (or was it seventy two disciples?). As the disciples had gone around preaching and healing, Jesus had seen the powers of darkness shaken and realised that the conquest of evil was in sight. Luke records that *"at that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit said, I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth. .."* and again *"Father, I thank you that you heard me"* (John 11. 41.). It is apparent from the accounts that Jesus need not have made his praise audible, for communication with God was continuous from within. Yet so that the disciples and the people around should know what was going on, He spoke audibly in prayer and thus the praise of God overflowed among those who were with him in spirit.

The deep feelings are of another nature in the next chapter when Philip brought the Greek enquirers to him. The glory of the Father can only be fully revealed in the intense suffering and death of the days ahead. From this point onwards until Gethsemane, He utters groans and questions, with tears and sighs of intense agony. These are referred to in Hebrews 5.7, *"During the days of Jesus's life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. .."*. This was learning obedience through what He suffered and attaining maturity through agony of soul. In all these experiences Jesus wanted only to know and to do the Father's will, so that God could be glorified in the life and death of his Son. It is when we catch this spirit in those glories and groanings, joys and sorrows, that his one reason and purpose was the glory of the Father, that we truly follow Jesus.

Teach us to pray

On one occasion the disciples went to Jesus while He was praying and asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11.1). Do we need to learn to pray? Surprisingly Jesus had already given them some instruction in prayer during the Sermon on the Mount. What prompted the question now? They were aware that John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray and that it was the custom of the Pharisees' teachers to do the same for their followers. They were also becoming aware perhaps that Jesus' approach to God was very different from anything they or anyone else had ever been taught.

An examination of the parable of the two sons (Luke 15. 11-32) gives us an insight into the way in which we may first approach God. We, like the prodigal son, come to our senses at last and realise that we ought to seek our

Father. It is one of the most enlightening stories in the world. It teaches us how the most derelict sinner may draw near to the great Creator of the Universe, the majestic and holy God. If we find that coming to him with our every want breeds contempt by familiarity then we need to ponder his majesty and greatness. Our perception of him is almost certainly too small. Should we not adopt the attitude and spirit of the prodigal who was determined to go to his father and confess his faults and admit that he hardly deserved the lowest place in the household. At once the vision changes and we see the outstretched arms of the father wanting him to come home as a son. How much that picture of God reflects the words of Jesus to a sinful woman of Samaria-"the *Father seeketh such*", to worship him not on a sacred mountain or in a mighty temple, but anywhere, so long as the searching is made without hypocrisy but in sincerity and in reality. The same attitude of heart and mind is shown in Jesus' other teachings about prayer recorded in Matthew 6 and Luke 18. It is so easy for committed disciples of the Lord Jesus, now, to think that the religious leaders and pagans of the First century were the only ones to have the wrong spirit concerning prayer. When Jesus told the parable of the two men praying in the Temple, He had in mind also those who would believe on him because of the message of the early disciples. Many a Christian has silently prayed wishfully "dear Lord, I give thanks I am not as that Pharisee". There exists such a danger in our own century to believe that we can enter the presence of God with feelings of pride, of achievement and of self exaltation, with the result that we suffer from the sin of conceit in our hearts and lives. If that is so, then we shall not be ready for what follows in the teachings of Jesus, nor the model prayers of Matt. 6 and Luke 11. The primary principle of prayer is the hardest lesson to learn. It is focussing attention upon God rather than upon self. In the parable it is not the words of the sons which are of paramount importance but the words of the father. In the joy of reconciliation, there is a gentleness in the rebuke of the father, not of wrath and upbraiding. His one desire was to have the erring son back in the homestead, to restore the relationship and renew the fellowship. The story should be read alongside every passage in the Old and New Testament which speaks of the wrath of God. The question for the believer today is "Have I truly come home?"-have I really entered into the spirit of that home and have I discovered the compassion and joy of that home? The child may yet have disappointed the Father, but the Father eagerly awaits his child.

DN

In true biblical prayer, the person praying is confident not only that God hears his or her prayer, but that God can be met in a personal intimate way.

Houston

THE STORYTELLER

Part 3

As told by Nathanael

He had lots of other stories for us, and some have stayed with me, ever since. Hopeful stories; encouraging stories; stories with unexpected endings. A man gets mugged by bandits while travelling along that rough old road which leads from Jerusalem down the ravine towards Jericho. It's something that happens a lot, I'm afraid, in that wild Judean landscape. He's lying helpless and motionless, by the side of the road. A priest walks down the road and sees him lying there, but he does nothing about it; a Levite passes by, too – neither of them wants to touch what might well be a corpse and by so doing make themselves ritually unclean! Legal correctness comes before compassion!

Then, a Samaritan comes along (and you can hear the crowd gasp when he so much as mentions the name – Samaritans are not exactly welcome, in these parts!) but this Samaritan stops; he takes pity on the poor chap, then he binds up his wounds and looks after him. “And which of them” asks Jesus, in that gentle voice of his, “which of them would you think was a good neighbour to the chap who was mugged?” You could've heard a pin drop – we all knew the answer, of course. Jesus was like that. He just didn't 'toe the party line' at all. Maybe that's why the 'Jerusalem Top Brass' distrusted him so. But it was also why we loved him – and so did the crowds, of course.

Look, I could be here all day, telling you what we did, going around with Jesus. We did make at least one trip through Samaria, in fact, when he wanted to visit the famous site of Jacob's Well, in Sychar; I remember he talked to a Samaritan woman there, and she brought lots of her friends to listen to him. I guess she proved to be a better evangelist than most of us! And at Passover-time, he'd want to go up to Jerusalem, and that always proved an eventful trip. But we don't have all day, so I'm just telling you about some of the stories he used to tell us. I remember them so well.

I can't mention them all, of course, but there was a group of three stories he told us which all seemed to 'fit together'. All these tales seemed to be about being lost and found, and he told them because some of those Jerusalem 'High-Ups' were criticising him for making friends with people who they thought were 'beyond the pale' – especially the hated tax-collectors, who they regarded as traitors to the Jewish cause; admittedly, some of them were dishonest, too – but not all.

“A farmer has a hundred sheep,” he says, “and one of them gets lost. What'll he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the field and go off in

search of the one that's lost, until he finds it? When he finds it, he'll joyfully carry it home on his shoulders, and he'll call together his friends and neighbours, saying, 'Let's have a party! – I've found my lost sheep.' In the same way, there's more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!" – and of course, we all knew who he was talking about – those who were 'righteous' in their own eyes! That's why the Pharisees hated him so!

"Or suppose", he goes on, "a woman has ten silver coins and she loses one." A string of coins like that was really important to a woman – it was like a family dowry, really. So he goes on, "Won't she light a lamp and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she'll call in her friends and neighbours and say, 'Let's have a party! – I've found my lost coin.' In the same way, there's joy in the presence of God's angels, when even one sinner repents."

And then, Jesus told them another great story, about a man who had two sons. I think it's my favourite! Normally, a man's estate wouldn't be divided between his sons until he died, when each would get his share – the elder receiving the main inheritance, of course. But, on this occasion, the younger son was impatient to get his hands on his share, and the father agreed to let him have it. So off he goes, but – as so often happens with young men, I'm afraid – he got into bad company and bad habits, and soon, he and his newly-acquired inheritance were parted, and he found himself flat broke and well-nigh starving! The only job he could get was as a swineherd – and, for a Jew, looking after pigs would be the supreme indignity, of course!

What to do? Eat humble pie! He keeps thinking about home, and how even his father's slaves are far better looked after than he is now. So he decides to head for home, make a clean breast of it, tell his father what an idiot he's been and ask for a job as a humble slave, please, back on the farm. Anything would be better than this!

He's expecting a pretty frosty welcome, but little did he realise that his father had been watching out for him every day since his son had left home. He sees him coming from miles away, runs to meet him, hugs him and kisses him and makes a terrific fuss of him. He tells his servants to fetch the best robe for his son, and to kill the calf that they'd been fattening up for a special occasion like this. "We must celebrate with a feast," he says, "for this son of mine was effectively dead, and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he's found." And so the party begins!

Now, there was a second part to Jesus' story – about the adverse reaction of the elder son, all pompous and self-righteous. We all recognised who that chap represented: those Law-Teachers from Jerusalem! They never liked the way Jesus mixed with people like us, many of whom they considered

to be 'sinners', because they happened to break some of their legal, technical embargoes.

But the really important part of all those stories – lost sheep, lost coin, lost son – was that, to use Jesus' words, "there's more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous (self-righteous, he meant, of course) and who haven't strayed away!"

Now isn't that just one terrific message! Small wonder we all wanted to go out and tell everyone about it – and, at one stage, Jesus did indeed send us disciples out, two by two, to do just that: to spread the good news. And wonderful things happened – healings, conversions – you name it! So exciting!

But after we'd all been following him around Palestine for three years or so, the atmosphere began to change. We knew that the Jewish 'Big-Wigs' in Jerusalem were out to 'get' Jesus. Their spies seemed to be everywhere. And we saw a change in Jesus, too. He was spending whole nights in prayer – often, we would wake up in the morning and he wouldn't be there, returning to our camp later, looking drawn. The Storyteller's stories were changing, too. They were getting darker – more mysterious.

One day, there were lots of Pharisees around, mingling with the crowd and asking awkward questions. So Jesus tells another of his little stories:

"A man planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard out to some tenant farmers, and moved to another country. At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed. The owner then sent another servant, but they insulted him and beat him over the head. The next servant he sent was killed. Others he sent were either beaten or killed, until there was only one left – his son, whom he loved dearly. The owner finally sent him, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.' But the tenant farmers said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Let's kill him, and get the estate for ourselves!' So they grabbed him and murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard. "And what do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do?" Jesus asked. "I'll tell you – he'll come and kill those farmers, and he'll lease out the vineyard to others."

The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus, because they realized, of course, that he was telling the story against them – they were undoubtedly the 'wicked farmers', in his story. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him alone for a while and went away. But they really hated him – they were jealous of him, I suppose.

We could see what he was saying to the Pharisees, alright – and we

loved it, of course! But how slow we were to cotton on to what he was really saying to us! We really believed in Jesus, and we wanted him to throw off the quiet rôle that it sometimes seemed that he'd adopted, as 'The Storyteller', and we all wanted him to reveal himself to everyone as our Messiah and rightful King. So what were we to make of this new story? If the 'owner of the vineyard' was God, as we guessed, and the tenant farmers in the story represented the Jews, then the servants whom God had sent to them must have been the Prophets, who the Jews had often mistreated in the past. But then, in the story, God had sent his own Son to them, and him – they killed! Surely, that bit couldn't be about Jesus – could it?

Now you all know very well how the story of Jesus' life ended, in apparent tragedy, at Passover-time in Jerusalem, and how we all let him down, by running away. I don't want to dwell on that – it's not something I'm at all proud of. But you know, too, that that wasn't the end of the story!

He'd told us countless times what would happen, but either we weren't listening properly, or maybe we just couldn't take it in – perhaps we thought that what he said was just another of his wonderful stories. But it wasn't – it was absolutely true! Jesus did indeed rise from the dead!

He appeared to us all, in the Upper Room – I saw him with my own eyes – touched him, even! He was real – and yet ... and yet ... he was somehow different. He somehow looked different – and yet, somehow, he seemed to look the same, too. I know it seems strange, but I really can't explain it to you any better than that. He could come and go through locked doors, appear and disappear at will. And when he spoke, it was with absolute authority, as though God Himself were speaking to us. I really can't explain it to you any better than that, I'm afraid.

Jesus of Nazareth – how could I ever have said to Philip, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” I'm ashamed of that, now, for Jesus of Nazareth changed my life, as I'm sure he has changed yours too.

Jesus the great Storyteller? – yes, indeed – but Jesus the Great Saviour of the World, too.

Amen

BK-S

Those who are disciples of the Lord Jesus should labour with all their might in the work of God, as if everything depended upon their own exertions. Yet, having done so, they should not in the least trust in their labour and efforts, and in the means which they use for the spread of the truth, but in God alone. They should with all earnestness seek the blessing of God in persevering, patient and believing prayer.

George Muller

LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS

1 Corinthians 13.7

Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail (GNB)

*Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first",
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.* (vv.4-7 The Message)

Do I grumble about the problems and hardships of my life?
Do I accept that true love will always bring suffering?
Am I prepared to take up my cross daily and follow Christ?
How do I try to face doubts?
Do I try to overcome my own bad habits?
Do I lose hope when it seems everyone is against me?
Does my love for those close to me overcome their unkindness, their weaknesses, their letting me down, their failures?
Is my love for those who hurt me such that I can forgive them?
Do I blame God for my sufferings and difficulties?
Is my love for God such that I can accept persecution for speaking out in his name?
Do I realise that to love another means to die to self?
Do I accept that there are three things that last: faith, hope and love, and that the greatest of these is love?

(from a prayer letter - source unknown)

JETHRO

Handsome of person, tall and lean, thoughtful in demeanour and a man of few words. That is how the mediaeval Arab commentators of the Koran described Jethro the Midianite, Shoaib as they called him, surnamed Khatib al Anbiya, "preacher of the prophets". The Koran says it was he who gave Moses the power to work miracles before Pharaoh, and speaks with pride of the fact that he was Moses' father-in-law; pride, because Jethro was not an Israelite, he was an Arab, and as an Arab was used to play a prominent part in the outworking purposes of God.

The Koran has not much else to say about Jethro, and what there is has little value compared with the much more detailed and life-like picture given in the Bible. This hitherto unknown desert sheik was destined to play a vital role in the preparation of Moses for his memorable work as the Leader of Israel in their journey to the Promised Land.

The story commences forty years before the Exodus, when Moses, becoming aware of Israel's need of a champion, had killed an Egyptian taskmaster and in consequence was being hunted by Pharaoh's officers. Somehow or other he must flee Egypt and find refuge in some distant land where Pharaoh could not find him. He got across the frontier without being apprehended and found himself on the Sinai side of the Red Sea where forty years later all Israel was to cross with a mighty deliverance. His first impulse was probably to make his way to Canaan, two or three weeks' journey through sparsely inhabited territory, but he would quickly reflect that Canaan was under Egyptian influence and he might easily be detected or betrayed and taken back to Egypt. The alternative was to turn southward and plunge into the mountainous terrain of Central Sinai. Even so he must needs observe caution, for in that direction, only forty miles from Mount Sinai itself, were the copper mines of Serabit el Khadim, where a strong force of Egyptian soldiery superintended the work of the slave miners, and the high road to the mines, always busy with travelling officials and convoys of copper being taken to Egypt. Moses must have made his way cautiously, perhaps travelling mostly by night, until he was clear of the mines and well on the way to the south.

So it came about that, seeking to put as great a distance as possible between himself and Egypt, he rounded the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula, climbed the mountain barrier which rears its peaks five thousand feet in the air and divides Western Sinai from Eastern Sinai, and then, looking down from those heights, saw the place he sought.

They call it Sharm el Sheikh nowadays; since the six-day war Israel has built a holiday resort there. When Moses looked down upon the land he saw a

green plain something like fifteen miles long by ten wide, bounded upon three sides by the mountains on which he was now standing, and upon the fourth by the blue waters of the Gulf of Akaba. A perfect haven he must have thought; cut off from the world, far from Egyptian influence - he had come nearly three hundred miles since leaving Egypt - and an opportunity for his identity to be lost so that Pharaoh would never hear of him again. Thankfully he made his way down the mountain slopes into the grasslands and sat down to rest beside a well.

It was there that the seven daughters of Jethro found him—seven shepherdesses, come to draw water for their father's flocks. Once more Moses found himself involved in a fight. A party of shepherds jostled the girls out of the way in order to get water for themselves; Moses intervened and compelled them to desist. The seven went home to their father full of their story of the Egyptian stranger who had so chivalrously taken their part. And Jethro, true to the traditional hospitality of the Bedouin Arab, insisted that the stranger be found and brought to his tent as an honoured guest.

Jethro was a Midianite, and Midian was a son of Abraham by his third wife Keturah. Nearly six hundred years had elapsed since Abraham's time; the descendants of Midian had grown into a company of tribes inhabiting both sides of the Gulf of Akaba, Sinai on the west side and Arabia on the east. With some of these Midianite tribes Israel was later to come into violent conflict and after the settlement, in the days of Gideon, to win a notable victory over them. It is evident, though, that here in this remote corner of Sinai the little community of which Jethro was the head had become more or less separated from its brother clans and was leading a quiet untroubled existence undisturbed by their fellows in the wider world. The fact that Jethro is described in Jud. 1.16 as "the Kenite", which in the Hebrew is "of Kain", shows that he had a forebear named Kain who gave his name to this subdivision of the Midianite people. The names of Midian's five sons are recorded in Genesis 25; there would have been three or more generations between those sons and Jethro and in one if those generations this Kain probably settled in this spot and gave his name to the growing community.

It is evident that Jethro formed a liking for the stranger and invited him to make his home with them, an invitation which Moses accepted. Similarity of religious faith probably had a great deal to do with it, and also the fact, which must have quickly emerged in conversation, that they shared a common ancestor, Abraham. Moses served and worshipped the God of Abraham, and so did Jethro. It is likely the latter had not previously known of the existence of the Israelites, or of their sojourn in Egypt; after the death of Abraham, when Jacob was only fifteen years old, there was almost certainly no contact between his father's family and the sons of Keturah, now forming their own

settlements well outside Canaan. But his forebears had evidently remained true to the faith of Abraham so that Moses on his part must have been greatly interested in finding another people, not of the line of Isaac and Jacob, who also served and revered God. The two men must have had a great deal to talk about and perhaps Moses, who had known of the Arab descendants of Abraham only by hearsay heretofore, learned many things which were to be of inestimable value in later life.

So Moses became a member of Jethro's household and undertook the duties of shepherd and herdsman, the occupation of probably nearly all the male members of the tribe, and perhaps anticipated spending the rest of his days in this quiet and sunlit valley, almost another world compared with the Egypt he had left. Eventually - perhaps not at once, but eventually - he married Zipporah, one of the daughters of Jethro, and became the father of a son. The roots were beginning to strike deep. As the years multiplied - for he spent forty years in this valley - he must have wondered at times whether God did indeed intend to use him at all, or whether Israel would in fact be delivered from Egypt. It is very probable that at such times the sage counsel of the older man allayed his impatience and quieted his restless spirit. When the day's work was done, the darkness of the night settled over the land, and the lamps flickered low in the tents, long and earnest must have been the conversations between these two, as each related to the other those things relating to the One true God which had come down to them from their respective forefathers. Much of Moses' deep insight into the character of God and the inviolability of his promises was probably instilled into him by Jethro; part of the credit for the successful outcome of the Exodus must assuredly be awarded to this almost unknown desert sheik.

There is one other significant contribution which Jethro may have made, although there is no proof, only deduction. The origin of the Book of Job, and how this Arab book having only Arab actors in its drama, got into the Hebrew Bible, is a mystery to all except those modern scholars who assert that it was a much later compilation by some pious Jew and falsely accredited to an ancient but mythical hero. The internal evidence of the Book discredits that fanciful theory anyway. The background of the book, and its allusions, no less than its plain statements, attest that it relates to events which happened in the territory to the east or south east of Canaan a few generations after Abraham but at least several centuries before the Exodus. Israel in Egypt could not have known the book, for the happenings it records took place whilst they were in Egypt. At least three, perhaps more, of the historical characters in the book were descendants of Abraham, and one of them, Bildad, did in fact derive his ancestry from Shuah the brother of Jethro's own forebear Midian. The land of Uz, in which the story of Job is set, was in the area peopled at the time

indiscriminately by Midianites, Edomites and Amalekites. Is it reasonable to entertain the possibility that a copy of the Book of Job in its original form, already a couple of centuries old, was in the possession of Jethro the Midianite, whose people had originated in that very land, and that when Moses set out for Egypt and the execution of his life's mission one of the treasures he carried with him was this book which afterwards became incorporated in the Old Testament to the enrichment of the Word of God and the inspiration of succeeding generations? There is no proof that it was so, but the hypothesis does at least provide a suggested solution to a problem that otherwise has so far remained an enigma.

But now things were happening in Egypt. Says Exod.2.23. *"It came to pass, in process of time, that the king of Egypt died"*. Thothmes III, one of the greatest military conquerors of all time, after a reign of thirty-four years went the way of all flesh. He it was who sought Moses' life and caused Moses to flee into Midian. But that was nearly forty years ago and the new Pharaoh, Amon-hotep II, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, had not been born then. The affair of Moses was past history and forgotten; it was safe for him to return to Egypt. But after so long a time in Midian he needed some very special indication from God that he was indeed to go back, and that sign he received in the incident of the burning bush. Traversing the mountains of Horeb somewhere near Mount Sinai, Moses underwent a tremendous spiritual experience in which he heard the voice of God telling him to return to Egypt, *"for all the men are dead which sought thy life"*, and prepare to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land. Moses demurred at first; he was not at all convinced that he was the man for this great work, but at last he accepted the Divine commission and went home to tell Jethro.

A vivid sidelight on the old man's character is revealed here; one might have expected him to object. Moses was as good as a member of the tribe now; he was married to Jethro's daughter and his sons were Jethro's flesh and blood. The proposed course of action could only lead to hard labour and travail for his son-in-law and his daughter and he himself would see them no more. But there is no word of dissent or opposition. Jethro must have realised that this was the Divine leading and like all true servants to God he bowed to the Divine Will. *"Go in peace"* he said to the younger man, and Moses went.

They met once more, a little over a year later. The Exodus had become a fact, Israel was across the Red Sea and in Sinai, and Moses was leading them to their goal in Canaan. News came to Jethro that the host was approaching Mount Sinai, only forty miles from his village, and he went to meet Moses, taking with him Zipporah and her sons who had evidently been left in safety with him while the dangerous process of negotiation with Pharaoh was proceeding. Now for the first time Jethro saw for himself the kind of task with

which his son-in-law was faced - it is probable that the old Midianite had never seen so many people all at once in his life before. Exod. 18 recounts the meeting. He listened to Moses' recital of all the wonders the Lord had wrought on behalf of Israel and of all his hopes for the future, and he rejoiced with him and acknowledged the mighty power of God. When in verse 11 he says "*Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods*" he is not indicating a sudden conversion to a faith he had not formerly professed; the expression is a Semitic idiom testifying to a renewed confirmation of a faith already held and does not even imply a belief in the reality of other and lesser gods. "This is a proof to me that the Lord is supreme above all things" in the fact of his power manifested against the power of Pharaoh and his hosts.

Now here is a strange thing. Jethro offers sacrifices of burnt offerings to God on behalf of Israel, before Moses and Aaron themselves had organised or embarked on any such innovation themselves. The making of the Covenant at Sinai and the institution of the Aaronic priesthood were yet in the future and the erection of the Tabernacle was not to be accomplished for another twelve months. The sacrificing of burnt offerings at this juncture and the ceremonial meal shared between Jethro, Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel on behalf of the nation was a solemn act of thanksgiving to, and communion with, God on account of a great boon. In this case it was clearly an act of national thanksgiving for the deliverance from Egypt and a symbol of entry into the family of God. Says Exod. 18.12 "*...and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.*" The meaning of this ritual was that God himself shared a meal with the participants, his portion being represented by the consumed burnt offering. In accordance with the age-old custom of the Semitic East, those thus having eaten bread together could never be enemies henceforth; they were tied together in the bonds of family relationship. In a very real sense Jethro had anticipated the Covenant so soon to be made at Sinai, and taken the lead in expressing to the Most High on behalf of Israel the gratitude for deliverance, and the pledge of family union, which Israel so far had failed to express for themselves. For, be it noted, despite the marvellous deliverance they had experienced, the delivered ones had so far done nothing but grumble. Just before the Red Sea crossing they cried to Moses "*because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.*" Three days later, at Marah, the people murmured against Moses saying "*What shall we drink?*" A few weeks after that, in the wilderness of Sin, the cry was "*would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt. ...when we did eat bread to the full, for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this*

whole assembly with hunger." Then at Meribah, the complaint was *"Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst."* Apart from the song of triumph immediately after the crossing there was no acknowledgement to God, and even that song savours more of exaltation over the fate of the Egyptians than humble gratitude to God for the deliverance. It was left to someone outside the commonwealth of Israel, a desert Arab, of the despised sons of Keturah, to be the first to offer up formal thanksgiving to God for the wonderful thing He had done for his people. In that solemn act Jethro identified himself with the people of the Lord and testified to his conviction that God would indeed fulfil his declared intention of making this nation his own chosen instrument for the progressive fulfilment of his eternal purposes. It was no credit to Israel, but to the eternal honour of Jethro, that he was the one who spontaneously performed this act.

The astuteness of Jethro's perception is shown by the next great service he rendered Moses. On the morrow after the ceremonial feast he stood by whilst Moses held his usual daily audience of the people, dealing with all comers, adjudicating in all disputes, great or small, from morning to evening. Jethro expostulated with him on the impossibility of one man carrying such a load of detailed administration indefinitely. *"Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone"* (ch. 18.18). He urged on Moses the imperative necessity of delegated authority and decentralised administration, the appointing of local overseers over thousands, and hundreds, and so on, to handle normal matters so that Moses was only called upon to deal with really important cases. The calibre of the man is well attested by the qualifications he counselled Moses to look for in the candidates he would thus appoint *"able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness."* It is good to know that Moses took his father-in-law's advice and organised the national administration on such sound lines that the principles he laid down continued more or less unchanged for six or seven centuries thereafter.

This is the last we see of Jethro. *"Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way into his own land"*. He never saw him again. He was an old man, probably nearing a hundred and twenty which was a normal life span in those days. A year later, when the host was about to leave Sinai for the long trek to the Promised Land, Moses invited Hobab, the son of Jethro, to throw in his lot with Israel and come with them, and although in the narrative in Numbers 10 Hobab declined the invitation, it is evident that he did eventually accept, for his descendants lived in Israel until the Babylonian captivity. Probably Jethro felt himself too old to undertake such a venture and retired to live out his remaining days in his own quiet valley in the south; Hobab, younger and perhaps equally persuaded of the Divine calling of Israel, went

with Moses accompanied by a few of the younger members of the tribe, and these became the progenitors of the Kenites who lived in Israel in later centuries. They remained tent-dwellers, nomads, never assimilating to the settled pastoral and city life of the Israelites, but always sternly rigid in their allegiance to the principles they inherited from their illustrious forefather. So late as the days of Jeremiah, when the Babylonians brought the kingdom of Judah to its downfall and the independent nationhood of Israel came to an end, the Kenites were among them and still dwelling in tents, abstaining from wine, and in all respects following the traditions of their noble predecessor. So great was their faithfulness in these respects that the Lord cited them as an example to Israel (Jer. 35. 6-19) and promised that there would always be a man of their house to stand before him for ever. Known at that time as the House of Rechab, a Kenite who lived about B.C. 900, they have given their name to a modern Friendly Society based on the principle of temperance, the Rechabites, and in this at least there is an echo of the sterling rectitude of the remote ancestor of Rechab whose name is forever linked with that of Moses.

What of the future for Jethro? Has God anything in store for this son of Abraham who rendered such faithful service in those long-past days of Moses' exile and the succeeding Exodus? If it is the case that the patriarchs of Biblical history who *"received a good report through faith"* (Heb. 11.39) are to be leaders and administrators upon earth in the days of Christ's kingdom, when righteousness will prevail and evil be restrained with firm hand, here also is one who was faithful to God and zealous in his service, who played a vital part in the Divine purpose in his day, a man who for uprightness, mature judgment and loyalty to God ranks with those who are indicated in Scripture as destined for such high office. May it not be expected that God, who is no respecter of persons, with whom there is no intrinsic difference between Jew and Greek, Israelite and Arab, has already entered upon the roll of those who in the Millennial day shall emerge from the grave to be "princes in all the earth," the name of an upright, courteous and wise old Bedouin, Jethro the Midianite?

AOH

PRAYER IS

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful, because I come to you for safety.
In the shadow of your wings I find protection until the raging storms are over.*
Psalm 57.1

We may not be skilled like the writers of the psalms to express our joys or our fears, but like them, when we pray we bring our whole selves before God. Sometimes we may have a practical problem, sometimes we may be worried about a loved one, but whatever the particular reason we are praying, underlying the prayer is the way we feel in our heart toward God. It may be that our feelings do not greatly change from day to day, there is a certain mood which is characteristic of our life. This mood is expressed in our prayers: it may be altered by the fact of our praying and God answering. He gives us 'the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness' (Isaiah 61.3).

There are hymns which express the feelings with which we come in prayer. Hymns like this one:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed,
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.*

*Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye
Where none but God is near....*

Prayer is the glory in all of life's circumstances, from the child's first simple talking to God, to the intelligent praise of the student or scholar, from a joyful release from the power of sin to strength in spirit when our bodily strength is failing.

*Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach
The majesty on high.*

*Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice
Returning from his ways,
While angels in their songs rejoice
And cry, 'Behold he prays!'*

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,

*The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gate of death;
He enters heaven with prayer.....*

When we read words like these we often wonder - who wrote this? What were his life experiences? (It is the same with the Psalms, for example when an incident in David's life can throw a vivid light on the words he speaks to God.) The hymn we have been quoting was written some 200 years ago by James Montgomery of Sheffield.

James was born in Scotland into the Moravian fellowship. Both his parents went off as missionaries in the West Indies, leaving him at school to train for the ministry. They both died, very soon, leaving James stranded at school near Leeds. His chief interest at school was not in the curriculum - poetry. He was apprenticed to a baker, then to a store keeper. He went to London, but failed to make his fortune as a writer. Despite all this, it was writing that became his career in Sheffield. For 30 years he was editor of the local newspaper, he wrote poems, and twice he was put in prison. This was because of his political views, especially his praise of the Revolution in France - the English authorities deemed this a dangerous tendency.

In his work he fought the cause of child chimney sweeps and of the abolition of slavery. He lived to be over 80 and had streets named after him, and was commemorated for his work in establishing Sunday schools (in the days before state education). During his life he wrote some 400 hymns, starting in his teen years and in later life supporting the Anglican Vicar of Sheffield whose congregation did not like new hymns. Many of his hymns were methodical teaching hymns, but often there was a flash of inspiration - two hundred years on, we still sing 'Angels from the realms of glory' at Christmas.

'Prayer is the soul's sincere desire' also contains the verse

*O Thou by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer Thyself hath trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray.*

Montgomery's active life as poet, editor, activist, philanthropist, must have taught him his need for the inner peace and assurance of prayer. He was aware not just of his need to pray, but of the need for prayer to be genuine. 'Lord, teach us how to pray aright.'

GC

TEACH US TO PRAY

When Jesus gave his disciples the prayer which we have come to call the "Lord's prayer" He set new standards of prayer and showed them a new approach to prayer.

Prayer with understanding

Prayers of pagans to their gods were long and mechanical. They believed that their prayers were effective by their continuous repetition of the same old formulae. "O Baal hear us," shouted on Mount Carmel, was typical and the apparent sarcasm of Elijah was not without foundation. The ancient gods were no more than glorified humans with all the infallibility and passion of the great leaders of men. The patterns of chanting which men used to these deified humans were expected to work like charms, or else, like the unjust judge, to bring about action through losing patience. Nothing which we know about the compassion and patience of our mighty God, who is always righteous and holy, was known to the vast majority of pagan worshippers.

Jesus' instruction showed clearly the intelligent manner to approach a God who knows all things including the things which we personally need. It was not that we should attempt to remind God of the things we need or persuade him that we want something. Yet the fact that he knows about our needs does not exclude us from making a request. Prayer is the opportunity for us to have fellowship with God. By entering into this communion with him we become aware of his will, we share his love and we bring ourselves into alignment with his purpose. Our intercession for others, our thanks for the Father's gifts, and confession of our faults, is all part of our spiritual growth and understanding.

Personal growth in prayer, not display

"Lord teach us to pray" was a very important request by the disciples in view of the type of teaching they probably had up till this point. The Jewish religious leaders of the first century were frequently seen at street corners displaying their piety by praying. Their manner of dress, their posture and their manner of speech was an adopted stance to demonstrate to onlookers that they spent much time in prayer. Jesus turned their minds back to the Old Testament men of God, whose primary object in praying was to become aware that they were in God's presence. If we use any means at all to draw attention to ourselves in prayer we are in danger of adopting the same attitude as the Pharisees. Even parading the fact that the believer is hidden behind a locked door for a certain period each day could become disobedience to the words of Jesus in this matter. Anything that is done which deflects attention from the sole joy and purpose in prayer is defeating the Lord's desire for the disciple's growth in his prayer life. Anything which becomes a stereotyped prayer, and which is thought to be heard by God because it conforms to a

special pattern, will prevent us from becoming totally absorbed into the will of God.

Private prayer

"...when you pray," said Jesus, "go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen". This enables the child of God to concentrate completely on him. It is a wonderful privilege to have a trysting place which has God's blessing. Yet it is not necessary to have a room or some other place specially prepared to seek the Lord. A crowded train, a bus or a busy street can become a place of hallowed ground if there we are able to give ourselves wholly to him. Jesus sought a mountain, not because it was high or had some sacred connection, but the solitary place made it easier to shut off the busy world to be alone with his Father. Neither would he make himself and his own ideas the centre of attraction.

God as Father

The prayer which Jesus taught the disciples enshrined most, if not all the principles of prayer. He revolutionised their prayers by addressing God as Father. The idea of fatherhood was not unknown to the people of Israel (Psalm 89.26), but as the centuries rolled by He became for them an even more distant God, unknown and unknowable, except for those few devout souls who really drew near to God in their hearts. For Jesus it seemed natural to think about God as Father. Jewish boys at twelve or thirteen had their Bar Mitzvah. They became 'sons of the Law' and transferred their loyalty from their parents to the Law. Jesus had transferred his loyalty to the Heavenly Father and declared it publically in the words "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house" (Luke 2.49 NIV). His confidant, his mentor and guide, the constant companion of his daily life was his Father in Heaven.

The One from whom Jesus drew his power and to whom he looked in danger and temptation was the One to whom the disciple could look now. My Father became Our Father and with it the recognition of brotherhood in Christ. It is difficult after two thousand years in which Christian people have been discovering God as their Father for his children in the twenty-first century to realise fully what this must have meant for the ancient people. For countless centuries before that, mankind had sought God but He appeared not to listen. It is clear from Cornelius' experience that God is not deaf to the cries of his creatures. They thought He didn't understand their pain ridden world and could not enter into their interests and feelings. He seemed too distant to notice their hopes and fears. Yet here was Jesus telling them to address the great Creator of the Universe as their "Father".

Learning to *wait* in prayer

It is part of the Christian's growth in grace that we learn to wait upon God in prayer. And we must learn the lesson of the parable of the importunate widow. There is no need to find a mountain or a temple, but like Nehemiah of

old, when there is an opportunity or need, we must 'send a sentence to Heaven'. It does not need to be a carefully worded prayer couched in 'special' language. God understands colloquial expressions such as 'sorry' and 'thanks'. Whether we are in front of an employer or employee, or the tradesman at the door, we need God's counsel all the time. Consciousness of the Father in the lonely and quiet moments has its effect in the busier times when folk are around. Only thus can a Christian guard against those offensive remarks and actions which do not reflect the glory of God. In the same way the child of God is prompted to say and do positive things which show that there is a God in Heaven who cares for the whole world. So may it be understood that He is more tender and forgiving than any earthly parent. He is not looking over His child's shoulder to criticise and bully. He remains at our side and waits for the sideways glance which can challenge us in every situation. "Jesus looked at Peter"; if only Peter had looked and caught that glance earlier! If only we would do so too! (Luke 22.61).

Reverence and the Name of God

"Hallowed be your name." Perhaps it hardly need be said that the name which speaks to us of all that is noble and true, good and right, is a name that can never be taken on the lips of a believer lightly. To the child of God it means so much more, for it is all that is patient and gentle, forgiving and generous. In the twenty-first century world it is becoming more and more common for people of all shades of belief at all, to use the name of God in a blasphemous way. Are those that surround the Christian aware that such abuse of the holy name is hurtful? Does the believer's life reflect true holiness which in itself 'hallows' the name of the Father?

Many years ago a saintly Christian lady always walked about her home quietly, concerned that the Master, present with her, should be offended by her blustering manner. Stumbling one of God's little ones is so easy. This is not the 'holier than thou' attitude of the outwardly pious religious folk. The kind of life which deliberately embarrasses unbelievers does nothing for the Master's cause. Religious Jews of Jesus' day were constantly expressing disgust for the unholiness of fallen brother Jews, and for the pagan Greeks and Romans. Their own holiness was a pretence Jesus called them 'play-actors' - and it was not a good witness for the Holy God they pretended to serve and worship.

Just before his death, Jesus prayed to the Father in these words, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name -the name you gave me -so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17. 11 NIV). What was the name that God gave to Jesus? Was it 'Jesus', which means 'the LORD saves'. God was also Israel's saviour. Paul wrote of him as being the saviour of all men (1 Tim. 4.10). Does the passage in John 17 refer to Jesus' use of the name 'Father' which he was now passing on to the disciples? Or does it refer to the giving of

a name by which Jesus was able to do his mighty works? They were to do miracles also 'in the name of Jesus'.

Belonging to the Father's family

Jesus was very concerned about leaving his disciples in a very unholy world. They needed to feel free to approach the Father in Heaven in his name about any kind of problem. The disciples must be able to go forth into the world without fear, to accomplish the task He was now giving them. As members of the people of Israel they would have known God by a variety of names, each distinctive and expressing the attributes and personality of God. These things spoke of what God was like. 'Father' expresses the relationship to God in a unique way. More than anything else Jesus wanted his disciples to share the oneness which he had with the Father. Only by so doing could they begin to understand the oneness which must exist between all true followers of the Lord. They are part of a brotherhood and yet in two thousand years of Church history, failure to develop this sense of unity has promoted divisions, separations and even conflict between those who are supposed to be in the Divine family. It is not part of the believer's prerogative to make judgments about fellow Christians or to separate themselves from them. Ultimately those who judge are judged by their own judgment, because such separation hinders the growth of spiritual life. Failure in communication with brethren in Christ causes failures in communication with God.

Kings and the kingdom

To pray "Thy kingdom come" recognises the inadequacy of the kingdoms of this world and the desire to see them superseded by a kingdom where injustice, deprivation and sorrow shall be unknown. Jesus said in his remarks to Pilate, one of the rulers of the world in which he lived, that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18. 36). The nature of Jesus' reply shows that this kingdom was still future.

Through the apostles Jesus also taught that believers must pray for kings, princes and those in high authority. They fulfil a function in the purpose of God until he establishes the kingdom of Christ, when those nations will become part of that kingdom (Rom. 13. 1-7; 1 Tim. 2.1-4; 1 Pet. 2.13-15). It must have been very difficult to pray for some of the Roman emperors and rulers, especially if born a Jew. It may also be difficult to pray for some of the citizens of the 'kingdoms' in which we live. But to ignore the needs of ordinary folk around us is to miss a part of Jesus' work while He was here. They too need our prayers so that they may see the witness of Jesus' love in our lives. In his prayer recorded in John 17 Jesus spoke of the unity of believers being a witness to the world that he was the Son of God (v.23).

God's will - doing it

Jesus taught the disciples to pray "Thy will be done". This was the

driving force of Jesus' life. In Hebrews 10.5-7 we read Christ's thoughts in which Psalm 40. 6-8 is quoted. This was the cry of the heart from Gethsemane and this is the attitude in which God's children make known their requests to him. Some words of Jesus recorded in John 14.13 are sometimes quoted as if there was no qualification to the expression "I will do whatever you ask in my name". If the phrases which follow were to be quoted also, it would be seen that Jesus makes a limitation upon what we may ask. "So that the Son may bring glory to the Father." In the next chapter of John's gospel, verse 7, we have another qualification "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you". Desires of our human nature and comforts for our physical bodies can only be acceptable if they promote spiritual growth in Christ. It is to God's glory that we live and for that purpose that we pray.

"Your will be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven." It must be our longing that the whole of God's intelligent creation should find that fulfilment in the purpose of God. It should also be our longing that our words and actions are so much a part of God's purpose that we live here and now as part of his kingdom. It is only by prayer, persevering, importunate prayer, that the ideals will be realised in our lives.

Obedience

When Jesus was in the wilderness He was tempted to take the short cut to bring in the Kingdom rapidly by giving Satan the place that God should have in his life. The same kind of temptation must have been made more than once during his ministry. It definitely occurred as He hung on the cross, through the mouths of those who reviled him. What a dramatic and spectacular means of drawing all men to him! "Come down from the cross, if you are the son of God" (Matt. 27. 40). How that expression echoes the very words of Satan in the desert! God's will is not always easy. Our patience is exhausted; our ideas of glory are frustrated and like James and John of old we are eager to be seated on the right or the left of Jesus in the Kingdom. There are some things which Jesus cannot do and cannot ask on behalf of his followers. There are some things which the Apostle Paul could not understand and could not have. We need to learn that God's will must be done, not out of a sense of resignation or of great outward piety, but because our hearts are genuinely surrendered to God.

Jesus, the sinless son of God, needed to discover his will and to be given strength to do it. There is only one way to discover that will for us. With the Psalmist we must pray constantly "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God, may your good spirit lead me on level ground" (143. 10). By the doing of that Will from the heart we shall show that we are truly the closest kin to the Master (Matt.12.50; Eph. 6.6).

DN

QUIZ

1. Who told the Israelites, 'The Lord forbid I should sin against him by no longer praying for you'?
2. *Who were told that Job would pray for them?*
3. Who did the disciples try to prevent from having Jesus pray for them?
4. *'How broad and long and high and deep is Christ's love',
Who prayed for who to know about this?*
5. Who did Paul ask to pray for him to give a good witness when he was in prison?
6. *Who prayed for God to act, and was answered by fire?*
7. What did Elisha pray for his servant at Dothan?
8. *Who prayed and also set a watch of men on guard?*
9. Who did the apostles pray for and place their hands on?
10. *For whom did Peter and John pray that they might receive the Holy Spirit?*
11. Who ordered that the priests in Jerusalem should pray for him and his sons?
12. *Where is the scripture 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem'?*
13. Johanan son of Kareah and Azariah son of Hoshiah with people of every class came and asked a prophet to pray for them. Which prophet?
14. *What do those who pray for those who persecute them become?*
15. After the Last Supper, who was Jesus praying for besides his disciples?
16. *James says that praying for one another goes along with something else. What?*
17. People were worshipping God with all their heart but were not ritually clean. Which king prayed for them?
18. *Who knelt down at the open windows and prayed three times a day to God as he had always done?*
19. Who had just finished praying when the house shook?
20. *When the church at Antioch set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special work, what else did they do beside pray for them?*

Answers on page 39.

A MISCELLANY OF THOUGHTS ABOUT PRAYER

Peace with God

Peace with God is not a static motion. It is a positive gift which accompanies our living in harmony with God's Plan. Dante's oft-quoted saying, "And in His will is our peace", is not to be understood as surrender, resignation and quiescence. The Christian will discover that he knows God's peace as he is aligned with God's Purpose. He may be called upon to be strenuous; but he is inwardly relaxed, because he knows he is doing the Will of God. This sense of knowing that he is co-operating with the Purpose defies human analysis, and is always found singularly irritating by the opponent of Christianity. But Christians of all ages, not excepting our own, have found it to be true. However painful or difficult, or on the other hand, however inconspicuous or humdrum the life may be, the Christian finds his peace in accepting and playing his part in the Master Plan. Here again we must ask ourselves, "Am I doing what God wants me to do?" It is not a question of what my friends or particular Christian pressure-group want me to do, but of what God Himself wishes. By sharing our life with God, by throwing open our personality to His love and wisdom, we can know beyond any doubting what is God's will for us. When we are at one with Him in spirit and at one with Him in purpose, we may know the deep satisfaction of the peace of God.

J B Phillips in New Testament Christianity Hodder 1956

Writing down our prayers

A prayer is a communication between us and God, which obviously does not need to be put on paper. Even so, if we have the gift of writing, some of us may find it helpful to write down our prayer.

Writing down a prayer may help us to be definite that we really mean it.

The act of writing down our thoughts in order helps us to be clear what we want to say. (The same would be true if we used a computer, or recorded our words, or discussed with someone how we wanted to pray.)

If others see the prayer we have written down, it creates fellowship. We feel less lonely in our prayer life (we shouldn't feel lonely of course, but God may seem far away.) They may be helped as they pray themselves, and if they know what we are praying they can support our prayer with theirs.

There was a Christian brother in hospital some 25 years ago, who had been told that his illness was terminal. He did not know how long he had to live. He prayed a lot, and wrote down some of his prayers in simple verses. Here is one of them:

One Step

One step I see before me.
Is there more I'd wish to see?
Can I not trust my God
Who gave His Son - for me.

One step - not the far distant scene -
Today, this minute, with my Lord to be,
To be, to be alone - nothing between,
Nothing between my Lord and me.

One step - one step of faith,
By faith into the unknown
For I know not tomorrow's plans
But even they are in His hands.

He takes and undertakes
And sometimes overtakes
But He will see me through -
His love has planned the best
In His care I will be blest.

So there's no time for idle fear,
My Lord is always here.
He Himself my guide will be
For what He has prepared for me.

JFO

There was no miracle recovery, but he was helped and supported in the days he had left and he was a great encouragement to the rest of us.

The 'Jesus Prayer'

This prayer can be taken as a pattern for our praying, or as a prayer which we repeat, with the aim of going further into God's presence. It can be said easily and slowly with the rhythm of one's breathing.

'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

Praying for mercy doesn't just mean 'I've done something wrong, so please forgive me.' It's a much wider petition, that God will send his merciful presence and help in a thousand and one situations, despite the fact that we

don't deserve it and never can. It is made in the confidence that when we come *to* Jesus we thereby come *through* him to the Father. Saying this prayer over and over again is not a kind of 'heaping up of empty phrases' which Jesus criticizes. It is a way of coming into focus, of concentrating on the God we know in Jesus as the one we can trust in all circumstances, and of holding before his mercy all that we want to pray about - delights, problems, sorrows, anger, fear, other people, government policies, social problems, wars, disasters, celebrations.

From Tom Wright in Simply Christian

Prayer Lists

Anyone can get a notebook and organize into daily or weekly lists the people and situations they want to pray for. Even those who can't bear lists at any price may find that a diary and an address book, and perhaps even a map, will remind them of situations and people. There will be things to thank God for (gratitude is always a sign of grace) and things to say sorry for (penitence, likewise). There will be things to ask for, not least in relation to God's love and power surrounding and helping particular people for whom we wish to pray.

As we reach for some of the astonishing promises in the New Testament ('If you abide in me,' said Jesus, 'and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done' [John 15.7]), we discover that they are balanced by a strange phenomenon. When we come eagerly to claim such promises, we find that, if we are serious, our desires and hopes are gently but firmly reshaped, sorted out and put in fresh order.

Using other people's prayers

Help in prayer is available from those who have trodden the path ahead of us. Part of our difficulty about this is that we are so anxious to do things our own way, so concerned that if we get help from anyone else it won't be 'authentic' and come from our own heart, that we are instantly suspicious about using anyone else's prayers. We are like someone who won't feel she's properly dressed unless she has personally designed and made her own clothes; or like someone who feels it's artificial to drive a car he hasn't built all by himself....

There's a lot that comes from the depths of our hearts which may be authentic but isn't very pretty.... When Jesus' followers asked him to teach them to pray, they wanted a form of words which they could learn and use.....

There is nothing wrong with having a form of words composed by someone else.... Some Christians, some of the time, can sustain a life of prayer entirely out of their internal resources, just as there are hardy mountaineers who can walk the Scottish highland in their bare feet. But most of us need boots, not because we don't want to do the walking ourselves but because we do..... Good liturgy (prayers) can be a sign and means of God's grace.... an occasion of humility (accepting that someone else has said, better than I can, what I deeply want to express) and gratitude.

Tom Wright in Simply Christian

THE UNCHANGING GOD

Sovereign God,
Lord of past, present and future,
 Lord of all,
 we come together, as we have so often come across the years,
 to thank and praise you.

We come rejoicing that, in all the uncertainties of life,
 we find in you one who is unchanging,
 a rock on which we can base our lives,
 a shield to protect us along the way,
 a light to guide our footsteps,
 and a love which fills our hearts with joy.
You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

We come to praise you for all the ways you have blessed us,
 as individuals and as a church -
 for the times of fellowship we have shared,
 the faith that has been nurtured,
 the support given and received,
 and the friendships established.

You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

We praise you for the experiences we have gone through together -
 the hopes realised,

disappointments overcome,
lessons learned,
service offered.

You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Forgive us that we are slow sometimes to remember your goodness,
and swift to forget your many blessings.

We lose sight of the resources you put at our disposal,
dwelling on *our fears* rather than *your strength*,
our problems rather than *your promises*,
our lives rather than *your kingdom*.

We become wrapped up in what is unimportant,
putting our trust in what finally cannot satisfy,
and our energy into what ultimately is secondary to our calling.

Our love, faith and commitment ebb and flow as each day passes,
yet still you have been true to us,
rich in mercy and grace.

You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Receive our thanks that you are so different from us -
faithful,
constant,
unchanging,
always willing to show mercy,
forever reaching out in love.

Receive our praise that you have been able to work through our lives,
despite as well as because of us.

You have been our dwelling place in all generations
From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Sovereign God,
go with us now in the days ahead.
Help us to recognise that, though all else may fail,
you will not,
and may that knowledge shape our life together.
Help us to build on all that has gone before,
so that we may follow you more faithfully,
love you more truly,
and see more clearly what you would have us do.

You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

From everlasting to everlasting you are God.

To you be praise and glory,
now and for evermore
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

This prayer we found as a photocopy on a sheet of paper. We do not know where it was copied from in the first place, but we are thankful to the writer.

A DREAM - JESUS AND THE BUSINESSMAN

I saw in my dream that Jesus came to a great city and stayed in the house of a certain business man. And one morning, the man, thinking to please his Guest, said, 'I will show you the church where I worship.' But Jesus said, 'No; show me the business where you work.' So the man took Jesus and showed Him round his business, and Jesus took an interest in all He saw. But He was not allowed to see everything. He did not see rooms where men worked like rats in dark and dirty holes. Other things also the man concealed; but Jesus did not say anything. And in my dream I could not tell whether He knew that He was being deceived. Taking him into a private office the man showed Jesus his books and his last balance sheet. Jesus sat in the office chair, and, His finger on the page, read through every item. At some items He paused, and, though He did not say a word, the man's face was covered with blushes and his heart throbbed with shame, for he could see that Jesus knew all that had happened before some items could be entered on the credit side. Then, very quietly, Jesus spoke. 'I will write the true balance sheet,' He said. I could not see all that He wrote, but on the debit side were entries like this: 'Men kept overtime so late that they were utterly fatigued, their spirits depressed, and temptation found them spent and exhausted'; 'The wrong man made foreman in the workshop; a shrewd man but a bully; the lives of many embittered, the lives of some made fearful'; 'Practices continued after the discovery that they were wrong'. And on the credit side were entries such as these: 'An interest in the personal happiness of certain men'; 'The refusal to do a big stroke of business by an underhand method'; 'A little trouble to see that really good work was turned out.'

And when Jesus had finished writing, I could see there was something

the man wanted to say, and at last, after much hesitation, he said it. 'Business is business,' he murmured; 'everybody does these things. If I don't do them my business will suffer, and with me my wife and children.' And Jesus looked into the man's eyes as though He perfectly understood, and, indeed, sympathized. But He said, 'Don't lose your life in trying to find it.' And there were tears in the man's eyes.

And the man took Jesus and showed Him all the things which previously he had concealed. But Jesus never said a word of condemnation. He just said, 'You will be far happier when you have altered it all. Don't be afraid. Your heavenly Father knows what you need.'

And in my dream I was allowed to look into the future, and I saw that the man became much poorer, and many said he was a fool. But there was peace in his heart, and a shining gladness in his eyes, and not a trace of worry in his soul. And I wondered in my dream whether he would become rich; but I learned that the man did not even care.

And so my dream of Jesus and the business man ended.

Leslie Weatherhead in The Transforming Friendship Epworth 1928

MAINTAINING SPIRITUAL LIFE

In order to live a life of New Testament quality, we shall find it necessary to work out some kind of practical plan to keep us alive and sensitive to the Spirit of the living God, which will keep us supplied day by day with the necessary spiritual reinforcement, and which will help us to grow and develop as sons and daughters of God. It is unfortunately only too easy to slip back into conformity with our immediate surroundings, and to lose sight of the supra-human way of living, except perhaps as a wistful memory. This does not in the least mean that real Christian living is a kind of spiritual tight-rope walk, a fantastic and unnatural progress which can only be maintained by intense concentration. On the contrary, the Christian way of living is *real* living, and it carries all the satisfaction and exhilaration which living in reality can bring. It is quite simply because we are surrounded by unreal and false values, by a pattern of living divorced from and unconscious of spiritual realities, that we have to take time and trouble to maintain supra-natural life, even though that life is in the truest sense the natural one. Experience shows that Christians whose lives are illuminated by the new quality of living, only maintain that inner radiance by taking certain practical steps. Now, naturally

these will vary in individual cases, and there are people who either by temperament or through long years of practice can absorb God through the pores of their being, so to speak, as naturally and easily as most of us can breathe. But for the majority of us who are walking "by faith and not by sight" there are some essentials for the maintenance of real Christian living.

The first essential need is for quiet. The higher the function of the human spirit, the more necessity for quietness. We cannot, for example, solve a difficult mathematical problem, neither can we appreciate good music, nor indeed art in any form, if we are surrounded by noisy distractions. It is imperative that somehow or other we make for ourselves a period of quiet each day. I know how difficult this is for many people in busy households, and for some even the bedroom is not quiet or private enough. But if we see the utter necessity for this period of quiet, our ingenuity will find a way of securing it. Many churches are open for this purpose among others, and there is no reason at all why we should not use the quiet of the reading-room of the public library. But daily quiet we simply must secure, or the noise and pressure of modern life will quickly smother our longing to live life of the new quality.

What we must do in the period of quiet is to open our lives to God - to perfect understanding, wisdom and love. Perhaps it seems unnecessary to point this out, yet pastoral experience convinces me that people need to be reminded that we must be completely natural and uninhibited in our approach to God "in whom we live and move and have our being". Most practising Christians have got beyond feeling that God must be addressed in Elizabethan English in deference to His Majesty, but there still lingers on an idea that we must be spiritually "dressed in our best" as we approach Him. I am far from suggesting that we should ever treat the awe-inspiring mystery of God with over-familiarity. Yet we know perfectly well, on the authority of Christ, that He is our heavenly Father and our common sense tells us that, although He respects our individuality and our privacy, yet everything about us is quite open to His eyes. We are not addressing some super-earthly King, some magnified Boss; we are not even addressing a purified and enlarged image of our own earthly fathers. We are opening our hearts and minds to Love, and we need have no fears, no reticences and no pretences. Strange as it undoubtedly is, He loves us as we are, and indeed we shall make no sort of progress unless we approach Him as we are.....

In our prayers we should not merely confess our sins and failures to God, but claim from Him the opposite virtue. If we stress again and again our own particular failings, we tend to accentuate and even to perpetuate them.

Many of us Christians need to adopt a more positive attitude. We need to dare to draw upon the inexhaustible riches of Christ, not as though that were some poetic and metaphorical expression, but as though it were a fact. The Gospel is not Good News if it simply underlines our own sinfulness. That is either a foregone conclusion or it is Bad News! But the whole wonder and glory of the Gospel is that into people who have sinned and failed badly God can pour not only the healing of forgiveness but the positive reactivating power of goodness. It is not the mere overcoming of a fault that we should seek from God, but such an overflowing gift of the opposite virtue that we are transformed. I cannot believe that the miracles of personality-transformation, which undoubtedly occurred in such places as Corinth and Ephesus nineteen centuries ago, are beyond the power of God's activity today. We are altogether too timorous and tentative. Why should we not make bold and far-reaching demands upon the spiritual riches which are placed at our disposal?

I should like to stress the value of intercession for other people. I do not pretend to understand the mystery of intercession, though I am sure it is never an attempt to bend the will of a reluctant God to do something good in other people's lives. But somehow in the mysterious spiritual economy in which we live we are required to give love, sympathy and understanding in our prayers for others, and this releases God's power of love in ways and at depths which would otherwise prove beyond our reach. I confess I stand amazed at the power of intercessory prayer, and not least at what I can only call the "celestial ingenuity" of God. He does not, as a rule, directly intervene; He assaults no man's personality, and He never interferes with the free-will that He has given to men. Yet, working within these apparently paralysing limitations, God's love, wisdom, and power are released and become operative in response to faithful intercessory prayer. It is all part of the high Purpose, and all true Christians are responsibly involved in such praying.

J B Phillips in New Testament Christianity Hodder and Stoughton 1956

The old man said, 'When I come to the service, sir, I cannot follow what they do up at the altar. I just kneel down and think about Jesus. I think of that last week with his friends, and the last supper; how He knelt in agony in Gethsemane; how they arrested Him and all night tortured Him, and how He died...' The old man's eyes filled with tears. 'I get very near to Jesus then, sir, and when I go home I feel He comes with me.' The old man didn't find a value in the service as such, he just knelt down in that quiet place and opened his heart in prayer, and his Friend came right in. He was not concerned with ritual or doctrine, but Jesus did become real to him.

Salvador

Quiz Answers

1. Samuel 1 Samuel 12.23
2. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (his comforters) Job 42.8-9
3. Children Matthew 19.13-15
4. Paul and God's people in Ephesus Ephesians 3.18
5. God's people at Colossae Colossians 4.3,4
6. Elijah 1 Kings 18.36-38
7. That he should be able to see God's protection 2 Kings 6.16-17
8. Nehemiah Nehemiah 4.8-9
9. 7 deacons Acts 6.3-6
10. Believers in Samaria Acts 8.14-15
11. Darius, emperor of Persia Ezra 6.10-12
12. Psalm 122.6
13. Jeremiah Jeremiah 42.1-3
14. Sons of your Father in heaven Matthew 5.44-5
15. Those who believe in Him because of their message John 17.20
16. Confessing sins to one another James 5.16
17. Hezekiah 2 Chronicles 30.18,19
18. Daniel Daniel 6.10
19. All the believers Acts 4.24-31
20. Fasted, laid hands on them, and sent them off Acts 13.1-3

Gone from us

Sister Millie Couling

Rugby

Brother Bill Appleton

Billinge

'Till the day dawn....'

BFU The secretary and treasurer is Nicholas Charcharos.

Gordon Chilvers does the editing. We would like to repeat our thanks to Derrick Nadal who did this work for so many years.

A Winter Meditation

"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth...."

Mists have been over the earth in recent days. Morning has awoken grimly, noon has not seen the sun's light, evening has gloomed to its close. Horizons have been hidden, and we have seen only the near view, a view where ice-clung branches become swallowed in ice cold mists, where dim lights dimly

come and go, where the prospect is empty and grey, and the peering eye in search of clear cut shapes sees only its own empty image reflected in the window glass.

Through the glass darkly has been our vision in these last days. It has been a time of waiting. We have waited for the mists of winter to be gone. We have looked into the uncertain future wondering what dark shape would next emerge from its obscurity. We have perforce been content with near and familiar things, things of home and fireside, things of our daily oft-repeated round. And all the while we have waited for the mists to be gone.

Ours is a waiting world. While the affairs of nations roll slowly on from danger signal to danger signal, shocked by sudden warnings or lulled by the sameness of continual checks, men and women wait for their own mists to clear. Life or death? Success or failure? New hope or renewed despair? It is hard to wait, uncertain, insecure, wondering, with a doubt for the future that nags the heart. Especially hard is it for the young, whose nature has not yet been chastened by hopes disappointed and aspirations unfulfilled, whose limbs have not yet learned to be still. But patience is the watchword of our waiting world, until the veil over all nations be lifted and the beauties of creation stand clear and true.

Until that time we each may have our own uncertainties, worries perhaps or fears. Yet we need not keep them. If our faith is strong and simple, they can be transcended by a glorious certainty. The glory of the everlasting gospel will disperse all the mists that linger in our eyes. We must look to our bibles and the promises that we find there, promises of death swallowed up in victory, of the earth filled with the knowledge of God, of peace and healing for the nations, promises of God's watch care over us even now, while we commit ourselves to Him.

Mists there have been, but they lasted only for a time. The sun at last breaks through. Winter will yield place to an eternal Springtime.

"but the Lord shall arise upon thee..." Is.60.2

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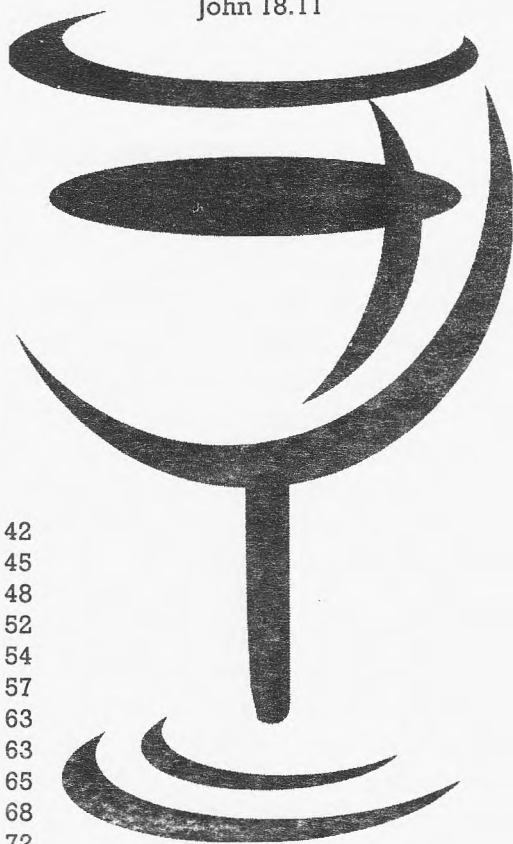
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 90 Issue 2

March/April 2013

The Cup which my Father
hath given me, shall I not
drink it?
John 18.11



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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.

THE CUP WHICH.....

The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?

When Jesus said this, he was not making a calm reflection on his ruling purpose in life, but he said it while he was acting vigorously to prevent bloodshed in a confused situation.

This was the final night of his life, and the last supper had finished a few hours ago. He told his disciples that they would all fail, be caught out by what would happen, and find the test of following him too great. Even Peter. Their time of working together under the Father's protection was at an end, they could not count on protection any more. *"So sell clothes, buy swords!"* This was not serious instructions but a bitter comment. Their time as a group of disciples was fast winding down toward the end that had been foretold, and he would be arrested as a lawbreaker. They took his words literally. *"Here are two swords,"* they replied (they would not have to go and buy them!) *"That's enough."* Enough for what? Enough to get them classed as criminals. But it was also enough of thinking in terms of violence.

All too soon came Judas guiding the armed band to find them at

their favorite resting place. Amid his own human fear, Jesus was also concerned for the disciples. He stood forward to be recognized. *"Who do you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth." "I am the one."* They fell backwards. Again, *"Who do you want?".... "I am the one. Let these others go."* Judas kissed him and clung to him. Peter found a sword, and slashed with it, wildly enough to cut a slave's ear. The soldiers began to close in on the disciples. Jesus said to those arresting him, *"Let me do this"* and he touched and healed the slave's ear (his name was Malchus). Then he told Peter, *"Put your sword away. Those who take up the sword will die by the sword. Don't you realize I could still pray for the support of armies of angels? But then, how could the scriptures about me come true?"* Quietly, he added to Peter, *"The cup that my Father has given to me, shall I not drink it?"* They tied Jesus up, and took him away, and the disciples in safety melted into the darkness.

While the moment that Jesus said this was one of stress, nevertheless the words did express his settled purpose. Early on in his ministry he explained that the Father's will was meat and drink to him. *"My food is doing the will of him who sent me, and finishing the work he has given me"* (John 4.34 JBP) At the time, that had meant having a spirited conversation with a Samaritan women. Jesus was not living to please himself, but to do the will of the Father that sent him (John 5.30) and this had the implication that his judgments about people were accurate and made him a true judge. *"I have come down from heaven, not to do what I want, but to do the will of him who sent me"* (John 6.38 JBP). That will is for him to accept all those who come to him, and raise them up on the last day. Everyone who sees the Son and trusts him should have eternal life. For them to see him, he must be visible (John 3.14), and at what cost to himself.

So, in his last week he was saying, *"Father, save me from this hour"* (John 12.27) *"No, it was for this very purpose that I came to this hour. Father, honour your own name. As for me, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself."* Yet, later, at the last minute, he was still praying, *"My heart is nearly breaking. My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me - yet it must not be what I want, but what you want."* (Matthew 26.38 JBP) Only minutes later, he was

saying "*The cup that the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?*" No going back.

Earlier during that evening, as we know, Jesus had handed out a cup to his disciples (probably a large earthenware bowl). He said he would drink no more wine until he drank it afresh with them in the Father's kingdom. He distributed pieces of a loaf to them - he had blessed it, and said "*Take and eat this. It is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*" Then the cup. He thanked God and gave it to them with the words, "*Drink this, all of you, for it is the new agreement made in my blood, shed to set many free from their sins.*" The wine in this cup had been a symbol of the life he was going to give. And now, soon afterward, he spoke of taking and drinking a cup given to him by the Father as a symbol of the suffering he must experience in the actual process of giving up his life.

The prospect of giving up his life must have been constantly with Jesus, and especially during those last weeks. So when James and John urged by their mother came, asking for positions of authority in his coming kingdom, it was to the symbol of drinking from a cup that he referred. "*Are you willing to drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the experience that I undergo?*" They said "Yes." We do not know how much they understood of his serious meaning. "*All right, you shall drink of my cup.*" It must be the same for every willing disciple, then and now. Obeying and following Christ, we do not know exactly what we are letting ourselves in for. But all of our experiences we must accept as from his hand, whatever they are. We know what was the cost in his case. And a reward? That is not the point, to try to spell out our reward. The point is to serve Him and be faithful, whatever the cup contains. If the Lord has something good for us in future ages, that is His decision, and we are content to leave it to Him.

GC

Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be! Lead me by Thine own hand, choose out the path for me. Take Thou my cup, and it with joy or sorrow fill, as best to Thee may seem; choose Thou my good or ill. Not mine, not mine the choice in things or great or small; be Thou my guide, my strength, my wisdom and my all.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

Taking the bread and wine links us with our brethren in all lands and all times. But in how different circumstances has the sacred feast been observed during the past two thousand years. Consider that first anniversary, just a year after its inauguration by our Lord on that night in which He was betrayed.

Can we picture the disciples gathering in response to his love's request? It was no effort for them to remember him. Their memories were crowded with mental pictures of scenes in which He had been the central figure. All the four Gospels, put together, record only the merest fraction of what Jesus did and taught with which they had been familiar. How wonderful for them to be able to visualise our Lord enacting some of those scenes with which the Gospels have made us so familiar, such as the cleansing of the lepers, the restoring of sight to the blind, causing the lame to walk, casting out devils, cleansing the Temple, rebuking the winds and the waves, walking on the sea and even restoring the dead to life. How vivid and tragic must the closing scenes have been to them; the triumphal procession on Palm Sunday followed by the terrible cry of "Crucify Him"; the sad procession from the judgment hall to the place called "Calvary" and the crowning horror when the three crosses were erected with Jesus in their midst.

As they gathered together for the first memorial each would have specially treasured memories of personal contacts with the Lord. Mary, the Lord's mother, would be able to go furthest back. If every mother's mind is richly stored with precious recollections of her first born, how transcendently more must Mary's have been. Possessing the secret of his birth, with what wonder must she have watched her child's personality unfolding as He grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man. She would recall the wrench when at the age of thirty He left home to take up the work for which He had been born. The parting, however, had been softened by the hope that He had gone to lead the nation, as their Messiah, back to God and to fulfil the angel's words given before his birth. How sorely tried was her faith by subsequent events. But now she understood the reason for it all and all the wealth of her affection had been transformed into a passion of love as she saw him wounded for her transgressions, bruised for her iniquity and the chastisement of her peace upon him. It was surely with trembling hands

and eyes and a heart that overflowed that she partook of those sacred emblems of that broken body and shed blood that had meant all the world to her.

Those amongst the disciples who could look farthest back were John and Andrew. At the first memorial they would be recalling that first meeting with the Lord on the banks of the Jordan. It had been a meeting never to be forgotten; what a wonderful evening they had spent together. First impressions are lasting and probably all would recall the circumstances in which they had first met the Lord. There was Nathanael; he would be thinking of how he had been making it a matter of prayer under the fig tree when the Lord gave him that heart-searching glance, spoke those thought penetrating words and that splendid commendation which he should never forget as long as he lived. Nicodemus too would be there. How he would recall the events of that memorable night when the Lord had spoken to him those wonderful words of life. Little had he realised at the time the meaning of the saying addressed to him "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of man be lifted up.*" As he thought of his Lord there on the cross he could now see something of its meaning.

Martha and Mary would also be there with their precious store of personal recollections. How much the Lord had loved them and how frequently had he made their house his home! The sisters could still hear the ringing tones of that voice that woke the dead. And what about Peter and James and John, the three so often singled out by the Lord for occasions of special intercourse with him. How much they would recall of personal contacts. As they shared the bread and wine surely their minds would go back to that wondrous vision on the mount of transfiguration when Moses and Elijah had spoken of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Instances could be multiplied of how the disciples would in the most natural and spontaneous way remember him. To them it would not be so much God's purpose as Jesus as a person that would be uppermost in their minds; not so much the truths about him as the personal love of their Lord.

As we look forward to another anniversary we cannot help but recognise a difference between ourselves and these brethren of whom we have been speaking. Unlike them we have no personal recollection of the Lord as He was in the flesh. Our knowledge of the Man Christ Jesus is second hand, books forming the principal source of our know-

ledge. God caused the New Testament to be written specially for that larger body of his brethren whom our Lord referred to as "those also who shall believe on Me through their word." By its aid we can remember him in those incidents portrayed so simply and beautifully in the Gospels, using our sanctified imagination to make the scenes live. As compensation for our lack of first hand knowledge of the human life of our Lord, we have a more complete knowledge than those first disciples of his resurrection life. The epistles written over a long period give evidence of how gradual was the growth into the fuller knowledge of the person and work of Christ. Even Peter refers to Paul's writings as containing some things hard to be understood. The disciples then could look back over the three and a half years of our Lord's earthly ministry; we can look back over nearly twenty centuries and see the Lord in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, watching over his people with patient tender care.

If our knowledge of our Lord as he lived on earth is of necessity second hand, not so our knowledge of the risen Christ. There is no child of God who has not abundant occasion for remembering the Lord in respect of his own personal contacts. While it is true that

*"The sands have been washed in the foot-prints
of the stranger on Galilee's shore,
and the voice that subdued the rough billows
is heard in Judea no more" .*

it is also true that

*"Warm, sweet living yet,
a present help is He,
And faith has still her Olivet
and love her Galilee".*

We must all have had personal contacts with the Lord. Why else have we a place at the feast? We have been cleansed from sin; our blind eyes have been opened and our deaf ears unstopped; He has opened our lips that our mouth should show forth his praise; He has given us power to stand erect and walk in his ways; He has quickened us and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.

These and countless other blessings are common to all God's people, yet each one has had experiences in connection with them peculiarly his own. The members of the new creation are not mass produced. The Lord has an individual plan for every individual life.

When we take bread and wine it is an occasion for remembering him with deepest gratitude for all the peculiarly personal expressions of his love.

The next feast, for all we know, may be the last. It almost certainly will be the last for some. Let us go forward with this solemn thought in mind, not only looking back to the cup which our Lord drank to the dregs at Calvary and in which we are privileged to share, but also forward to the ineffable joy, which he gives us, of drinking the wine new with him in the Kingdom of God.

UNTIL HE COMES

"Every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" 1 Corinthians 11.26 GNB

The hope of Christ's coming is implicit in the Last Supper, whenever and wherever believers have obeyed the command to remember Him by sharing in bread and wine. The following article is written from the perspective of a believer who takes communion once a year as a memorial of His death.

If ever there were words vibrant with hope and longing, an expression of all the heart's deepest convictions and fervent expectations for both church and world, surely these are those words, *"Until He Comes!"* In those syllables is summed up all for which Christ's disciples have stood throughout the centuries, the fellowship and the witness, the self-denial and the consecration, the endurance and the suffering. All has been because *He*, once so long ago, promised that at the end of days He would come again, and receive us unto himself, that where He is, we might be also.

That is not all. Our desire to be gathered together to be with him is not - or should not be - dictated only by selfish reasons, the hope of personal salvation and deliverance from the distresses of this world. It is only natural that like the few pious ones of Ezekiel's day, those who *"sigh and cry for the abominations"* of man's world should earnestly desire the coming of the better world, the heavenly, where

righteousness will be at home. . But we who know something of the Divine Plan realise that God is not working just to take away from an evil world a small elect of righteous ones and leave the world to its evil, but rather for the coming of Divine power *to* that evil world so that his righteous ones may convert and transform it into a place of harmony and peace. If we go to be with our Lord Jesus, and enter the presence of his Father with exceeding joy, it is so that we may be present with him in the great work of restoring to righteousness all the families of the earth. That is why Jesus comes again. That is why the words of hope written aforetime for our comfort are not "*Till we go!*" but "*Till He come!*"

So many in past ages failed to realise that difference and in consequence became apparently self centred, bigoted, concerned only for their own eternal interests and caring little or nothing for those of humanity in general. They forgot that our Lord came "*to seek and to save that which was lost*". They did not heed, perhaps never really understood, the fact that God did not create man upon the earth in vain; that even although He foresaw the fall into sin He had made provision for the recovery of "whosoever will" from that sin, and the eventual restoration of the human race to the Divine likeness. Men became so pre-occupied with the theology of the Church's salvation and the golden prospect of the heavenly city that they overlooked the promise of another aspect of salvation and the creation of the green fields and sparkling streams of an earthly paradise. And so, whilst they still paid lip service to the hallowed words "*Till He come*" the thought that was really in their minds was "*Till we go!*"

Was this one reason why the Apostle Paul, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, brought these words into such close association with the Memorial? "*As oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup*" he said "*ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come*". The Memorial is a time when we come together to commemorate, not only our Lord's death for us, but also his death for the world; not only the privilege we have of association with him in present sacrifice and future service, but also his intention to give life and human perfection to all men at the right time; not only our fellowship together as one family, now, as fellow-heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant, but also our service together as able ministers of the New Covenant. And because these things require for their accomplishment the long awaited Second Advent of our Lord in glory and power, the predominant thought in our

celebration together is always *"Till He come!"*

This prayer is not completely fulfilled when He comes for his saints. That is only one phase of his coming. After that, how long after we do not know, He comes again with his saints for the setting up his Kingdom and the blessing of all the world. It was for this, as much as for the other, that He died. It is this, as much as the other, that is shown forth year by year in the ceremony of bread and wine. It is not until this has taken place that it can be said He has "come" in the sense which Paul intended when he wrote the words. He has not yet "come" in the glory of the Kingdom to rule over the nations, and until that event has taken place and the world is no longer in ignorance it cannot be said that He has fully "come".

There is much that is disappointing and saddening and unsatisfactory in our daily lives and it is easy to let the mind dwell on the future glories that are promised to faithful ones, and hope fervently for their speedy coming. But the world also is groaning with pain like the pain of childbirth, waiting for God to reveal his sons, and their distress is far greater than ours, for they have not the hope that we have, no knowledge or expectation of future deliverance. Some may have nothing but a dull despair that sees no avenue of escape from the oppression of this world's evil. Where we can lift up our hearts to heaven and rejoice, knowing that deliverance draws near, they can only *"look unto the earth, and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness"*. So we ought to take thought for the world more even than for ourselves, and in the good that we are able to do our fellow men show them something of the hope that fills our hearts.

Another testimony to our hope is in the manner in which we keep the Memorial of our Lord's death together. It is the day by day conduct of our Christian communion together, which is symbolised for us in the Memorial service, that is the effective witness and of which men will take notice. *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* No amount of preaching that "God is Love" will impress our hearers if we do not have love one toward another. It is of no use expounding John 3.16 if we ourselves are not also found to be "giving" of our best and dearest so that others may be saved, nor of talking about the One Who came to be a servant and serve mankind if we show no disposition to serve them too. Our lives must match our

profession and our own fellowship become a miniature, within present limitations, of what the Divine Kingdom on earth will be in the future Age; and then we can reasonably expect men to listen. We can then say with confidence "See; this is what the Lord's death has done for *us*. It can do the same for *you*".

It is in some such way, it may be, that we may show the meaning of "proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes". It is not the only meaning; undoubtedly the ceremony of bread and wine is in itself a testimony, a declaring between the participants, although privately, that they continue to share the same faith and hope in the fundamentals of the faith and the promise of the Kingdom. But none would want to restrict that declaring to one day in the year, and not many would want to confine it within the bounds of "the elect". We are all in some way ambassadors for our Lord Jesus in this world, and we want to show his Name and his message and his saving power in such a way that, if it be possible - as one day in the future Age it will be possible - *"all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God"*. And so we can take this into our daily lives and make the communion of our fellowship, the Christian brotherliness that should exist between all of us and knit us into one family "in Christ", *the* outward evidence to all the world that Christ's death has indeed borne fruit, giving assurance of greater fruits yet to come. We are a kind of first fruits of his creatures, the Apostle assures us. There are to be after fruits. In our daily lives we can demonstrate the nature of those after fruits which are to be the result of our Lord's death but cannot be seen in their fulness "until He comes".

So let us resolve, that, casting aside all that makes for disunity and unbrotherliness, and scrupulously respecting each other's convictions in those matters of our faith and practice which do not violate the fundamentals of the faith, and remembering that as servants we each stand or fall to our own Master, we may become a community united in our fellowship, persuaded of the truth of our message, possessed with a sense of the urgency of the times in which we live and the imminence of the Kingdom. Let us show the truth among ourselves of the famous saying attributed to Tertullian seventeen centuries ago, *"Behold, how these Christians love one another!"* With that resolve in our minds and hearts we can come together to eat of that bread and drink of that cup in full confidence that in this way we are proclaiming our Lord's death *"until He comes"*.

BSM reprint, updated.

I CANNOT TELL

'I cannot tell' is in some ways a strange beginning for a favourite hymn. Are not hymns supposed to help us be sure and reflect the things in our faith we are certain about? In fact, should we not be living a life based on the certainties of what we know? If God has chosen us, and made us his sons and daughters, and told us his plan, should we not expect to be sure about everything? And if we are asked some question about what we believe, what sort of answer is *'I cannot tell'*?

The hymn, however, does go on to reply *'But this I know'*, and says some glorious things about our Lord Jesus. It must be these things that make it so popular.

The hymn is set to the 'Londonderry Air' and was written by an Irishman born in Belfast in 1857. He grew up in the Baptist community. He was converted by the preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, he knew - and wrote the life story of - F B Meyer; he himself became a preacher, speaking often at the Keswick Convention, and was an influential leader among the Baptists, writing books (particularly in his later years) and compiling hymnals. His name was William Young Fullerton. It is eighty years since he died in London, and there may not be many now who remember him or know about him, but there are many who know and sing this one hymn that he wrote, *'I cannot tell'*.

'I cannot tell, why...' Jesus Christ, the Word of God, why does he love people? Love all mankind? Why is he the 'good shepherd', bringing us back from danger? Why did he care? Why does he care? I suppose one could prepare an explanation, and show that His attitude is logical and consistent with what we are told about him. But no such explanation could actually make him love us. He just does. It is pointless - irreverent - to discuss His motivation. Why should he be interested in our human race when the whole creation is so boundless? Yet He loves *us*. So we worship him, and wonder why.

Yet some basic facts are recorded in scripture: his mother, Mary; his birth, in a stable; his early home, Nazareth; his first 30 years of ordinary human life. These details of how the Saviour arrived on the scene, we know.

It is difficult to enter into a person's inner feelings unless we have had the same experiences. Can we enter into Jesus' feelings? His

ministry was so determined, so positive, but how may He have been feeling inwardly all the time, in the face of the opposition and the suffering of those around him, all of which culminated in the suffering of the Cross. We cannot really tell what it was like for Him.

All that was long ago. But Fullerton's hymn speaks of Christ's presence with us now - to heal broken hearts, prevent sinful thoughts and actions, calm fears, relieve the pressure on our minds. The hymn speaks of all this as something we experience, which we know. The Saviour is still here!!! This is something which comes now to believers, but we still look for his Coming.

Still future, and shrouded in mystery, is the coming of the kingdom in its full sense: a time when all nations belong to our Saviour, when he claims his inheritance and satisfies the needs and aspirations of all mankind. That is the future, but what are the details, the timing, the method of how it will come about? How much are we expected to know about the details? Those who have expected it to come about through missionary work and organic growth may be disappointed: those who look for a dramatic intervention in earth's affairs may be impatient. Fullerton did not know 'how' - but he did know that the Saviour will be known. 'All flesh' shall see his glory. When? Fullerton put it. 'some glad day' (date not mentioned).

Another thing that he could not tell was the full joy that Christ's reign will bring. He speaks of all the lands worshipping, of storms (between nations and between individuals) being still, of the jubilation as we all find ourselves loving each other, loving the world around us, loving God. He seems to have a clear idea of what it will be like: but he realises that there is even more to it than he can visualise. He does know that there will be joy filling earth and sky, songs from million upon million of human kind. At last, at last the Saviour of the world is King.

As we live our faithful, believing lives in the present time, it may be that all of our experience lies somewhere in between 'I cannot tell' and 'this I know'. Seeing 'through a glass darkly' (1 Cor. 13), we sometimes find the glass clearer, sometimes more opaque. We see enough to give us hope, too little to let us be Christian know-alls. Enough to hold on to in dark times, enough to work for us 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory' while we look at the eternal things which we do not quite yet see.

A COVENANT SERVICE

It must be thirty years ago that we began to attend a little local Methodist chapel, and discovered that once a year they had what was called a Covenant Service. At this service those who wished would renew their promises to Christ (not, that is, to the church). Not everybody attended, the service seemed to sort out those who were happy to attend the church on Sunday and enjoy the company, from those who felt the urge to take their Christianity further, and be fully committed.

Most Christian groups seem to have this kind of distinction. Seventy years ago I remember we used to look down on the 'nominals' and we enquired carefully whether any brother or sister we met had 'consecrated'. It can be a little dangerous for a congregation to make a point of classifying believers into those who are true 'sheep' and those who, if not actually 'goats', are not quite living up to being 'sheep'. Especially so if we make our opinions obvious to those concerned. It is to our Master that we stand or fall (Rom.14.4). Even so, it cannot be denied that we *all* need to 'grow in grace' (some perhaps more than others?)

I was reading in a book by a nineteenth century Church of England bishop about believers whose faith did not go beyond a certain point. They might say, 'The Lord has loved me', or, 'the Lord has sought and found me', or, 'the Lord has shed his blood for me'.... 'the Lord has changed me'.... 'the Lord leads and guards me'. All of this, if they are speaking truly, is very good indeed. But, he said, our Christian life can not end there, saying what the Lord has done for us. We need to respond, and in love and obedience, to be 'in Christ'. Understanding this relationship pours into life 'a new light, a new power... "I am in Christ and He is in me. I am the branch, the limb, of my living Lord. He and I are at this moment one spirit... I belong to Him."'

The Covenant Service, we discovered, had been in use among the Methodists for over two hundred years, since the days of John Wesley. 'The idea of Covenant was basic to his idea of Christian discipleship. Relationship with God in Covenant was like a marriage between human beings on the one side and God in Christ on the other (see Ephesians 5.21-33). His original Covenant Prayer involved taking Christ as "my

Head and Husband, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, for all times and conditions, to love, honour and obey thee before all others, and this to the death.” Wesley recognised that people needed not just to accept but also to grow in relationship to God. He therefore emphasised that God’s grace and love constantly prompts and seeks to transform us, and so we should continually seek and pray to grow in holiness and love.... Over a number of years Wesley gradually saw the need for some regular ceremony which would enable people to open themselves to God more fully. He looked for some means of helping them to hear God’s offer and challenge ever more deeply, and to allow God to prompt and enable them to respond.’

So this service begins with rejoicing in all that God has done for us, our Creator, who has given us ‘the light of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor.4.6) Joy about Jesus ‘who was rich and for our sake became poor’(2 Cor.8.9) and all he did while on earth. He opens the kingdom of heaven to every believer, and will come again. By God’s Spirit we are born into the family of God. He will do for us ‘More than we can ask or think’(Eph.3.20) All this, and more, is something to be enjoyed by even the least of Christians, when we stop to think.

Both the least of Christians and the best of Christians are aware of failings, deficiencies, sins. For example, are we quick to learn, or slow? Do we follow Christ, always? Are we prepared to take up our own personal cross? Do we use our opportunities, whether to worship together, or to witness? Are we good stewards of the gifts given to us? These things are mentioned, so that we can repent of them, and seek forgiveness. *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*(1 John 1.8,9)

The service includes in the readings the one from one from Jeremiah (31.33) concerning the new covenant with the house of Israel, *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.”* There is quotation from Hebrews 12, mentioning the ‘*assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven*’ (v23) while from John 15 comes word of the true vine, *“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that*

you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples."

Then comes the explanation of how the covenant is understood in this service. *'In the Old Covenant, God chose Israel to be his people and to obey his laws. Our Lord Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection, has made a New Covenant with all who trust in him. We stand within this Covenant and we bear his name.'*

On the one side, God promises in this Covenant to give us new life in Christ. On the other side, we are pledged to live no more for ourselves but for him.

Today, therefore, we meet expressly, as generations of our fathers have met, to renew the Covenant which bound them, and binds us, to God.'

The people stand, and the minister says: *Beloved in Christ, let us again claim for ourselves this Covenant which God has made with his people, and take the yoke of Christ upon us.*

To take his yoke upon us means that we are content that he appoint us our place and work, and that he himself be our reward.

Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some bring honour, others bring reproach; some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests, others are contrary to both. In some we may please Christ and please ourselves, in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves. Yet the power to do all these things is given us in Christ, who strengthens us.

Therefore let us make this Covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves anew to him, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

Eternal God, in your faithful and enduring love you call us to share in your gracious Covenant in Jesus Christ. In obedience we hear and accept your commands; in love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to you. We are no longer our own but yours.....

These words, or ones much like them, have been repeated with deep feeling by faithful Christian people for centuries. We found it a privilege when we heard about this service and were able to take part in it. Whatever the form of words used, and whatever the different traditions of various groups and denominations, we must be grateful for anything which helps us to give our hearts and lives more fully to our Lord Jesus Christ.

AHIJAH OF SHILOH

The little priestly settlement at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood for four centuries during the period of the Judges, had lain desolate since the disastrous day when the Ark of God was captured by the Philistines in the time of Eli and Samuel. It was still inhabited, but its glory had departed, for the Tabernacle had been hurriedly taken down and re-erected at Nob out of the Philistines' reach. Later it went to Gibeon, and now, in the middle of the reign of Solomon, it had for twenty years past been superseded by the magnificent Temple the Israelite king had built at Jerusalem. But Shiloh had still one claim to its credit; it was to produce the first of the long line of Hebrew prophets who rose up, one after another, to call kings, priests and people from their indifference and idolatry back to the worship of God and allegiance to the Mosaic Covenant. That line terminated in Malachi, who, four hundred years before Christ, foretold the coming of a Herald of Messiah and then Messiah himself, the Sun of righteousness, to arise with healing in his wings. Malachi was the last of those prophets, and the first, more than five hundred years before him, was Ahijah of Shiloh.

Ahijah, like Malachi, recorded his prophecy in a book. Unlike Malachi, his book has not survived. All that is known of his preaching and work is contained in the First Book of Kings. From that brief record we can draw a picture of the man and his character, a picture which is tantalising because it is so dim. But the fact that he conveyed the Divine message to the principal figure in the secession of the Ten Tribes in the days of Rehoboam shows that he was a man of God and stalwart for the delivery of his message in a day of general apostasy.

Although Ahijah's book has not survived, it is just possible that part of the First Book of Kings is from his hand. Chapter 11 vs. 1 to chapter 14 vs. 20 constitutes a self-contained account of Solomon's decline into idolatry and its consequence in the emergence of Jeroboam, with Jeroboam's own similar course, ending with his death. The details given can only have been known to someone familiar both with Solomon's reign and the intimate incidents of Jeroboam's life. A man of God, living in the northern kingdom, is indicated. It is to be noted also that only in this account is the story of Solomon's idolatry to be found.

The remaining portion of 1 Kings, and the parallel narrative in 2 Chronicles, contains no hint of this and from these accounts it would be assumed that Solomon was faithful to God to the end of his life. It might well be, therefore, that these particular chapters in 1 Kings represent all that remains of the lost book of Ahijah the Shilonite. If that is so they constitute a testimonial to a faithful man who lived his life in obscurity but was used of God to do great things. Others writing at the time were the prophets Nathan and Iddo (2 Chronicles 9.29)

It was at the time that King Solomon, at the height of his power and glory, had begun to relapse into idolatry himself that Ahijah comes on the stage. The great king had multiplied himself wealth and possessions beyond all kings of his own time and before, extended his dominion from the borders of Egypt to the Euphrates, increased the number of his wives and concubines, erected imposing buildings and splendid palaces, and now all these things had stolen his heart away from God. Among the people, who had been compelled to pay heavy taxes for all this glory, and labour at the arduous work involved, discontent was rife. The prediction of Samuel had come true, and the people who had clamoured to have a king over them like other nations were now paying the price. And God, looking down from heaven, foresaw unerringly the disruption to which all this must inevitably lead. So he sent Ahijah to declare his judgment.

At a time which cannot be closely determined, but was probably about ten years before Solomon's death, his attention had been attracted to one of his servants, an upstanding, courageous and industrious young man named Jeroboam, an Ephraimite of Zereda, a village in the Jordan valley. Solomon needed a trusty man to supervise the forced labour levies in Ephraim; Jeroboam was given this commission and set out to assume his new duties. It may be he had no ambitions beyond earning a reasonable living and keeping out of trouble; better men than he had dabbled in politics and either succeeded or failed and that was not for him. The duty now laid upon him by the great king was an honour and a promotion and he considered himself fortunate but that was as far as his thoughts went. Until he met Ahijah!

The way to Ephraim from Jerusalem led past Shiloh. As he drew near the almost deserted village he saw coming towards him a strange figure, a man with flowing beard and burning eyes. Jeroboam knew that this was a prophet of the Lord and entitled on that account to some

respect but he could have had no idea whatever of the message and the admonition he was to receive. The story is found in 1 Kings 11; *"and at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had clad himself with a new garment; and the two of them were alone in the open country. Then Ahijah laid hold on the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces."* (vs. 29-30). Rather strange conduct, and disconcerting, to say the least. But before he could so much as expostulate, Ahijah had thrust ten of the pieces into his unwilling hands and told him that God intended to sever ten of the tribes from the kingdom of Solomon and make Jeroboam king over them. Because Solomon had forsaken God, and worshipped the abominable gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations, and had failed to keep God's statutes as had David his father, then at his death this judgment would come upon his kingdom. Came the charge to Jeroboam *"it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee"* (vs. 38). Then, abruptly, the prophet turned and stalked away, his gaunt figure receding rapidly into the distance, and Jeroboam was left standing alone, holding the torn pieces of the new garment helplessly in his hands.

He had a lot to think about as he continued his journey. It has to be assumed that Jeroboam was at time a faithful worshipper of God and adhered to the Covenant. The Lord would hardly have called and appointed him otherwise. That mandate and exhortation which had just sounded in his ears could only mean one thing, that he was to have the opportunity with the ten tribes which both Saul and Solomon had had with all Israel, and both had thrown away. He was to be a king, and reign as king in Ephraim. But he was to lead the ten tribes in firm allegiance to the God of Israel. That was the condition; there is little doubt that at that moment of time Jeroboam fully intended to implement that condition. It must have been, almost immediately afterwards, either by overt action or indiscreet word, Jeroboam revealed abroad what Ahijah had told him, for news came to Solomon and he sent emissaries to execute Jeroboam; high treason in the kingdom was not to be tolerated. Jeroboam got away to Egypt and remained there

until Solomon's death, but not before he had so impressed his fellow Ephraimites that he was marked out as their champion when the inevitable rebellion broke out. So soon as Solomon's son Rehoboam had ascended the throne, representatives of the ten tribes, with Jeroboam at their head, came to the new king with requests for the alleviation of the servitude his father had imposed on them. This part of history is well known, how that Rehoboam refused and promised them even greater burdens so that the Ten Tribes revolted from Rehoboam and set up a separate kingdom under Jeroboam as their first king. Thus the prediction of Ahijah was fulfilled.

Now, for a span of years, Ahijah drops out of the picture. The sequel shows that he continued to dwell quietly at Shiloh. Rehoboam went to war in endeavour to regain his lost subjects but to no avail. Jeroboam was firmly in the saddle and he set about organising his new kingdom on a permanent basis. There is no reason to doubt his sincerity and endeavour to exalt the worship of the God of Israel among his subjects. There was one serious handicap. He had no centre of worship, no Temple as had Rehoboam in Jerusalem; instead, there was the opposition sanctuary in the town of Dan in the north, established several centuries previously by Jonathan and served still by his descendants, still nominally worshipping God but with many of the appendages of idol worship. It seems to have been this which gave Jeroboam his idea. To dissuade his people from going to Jerusalem to worship and becoming too intimate with the subjects of Rehoboam and perhaps repenting of the separation and so threatening his own kingship, he determined to institute two sanctuaries to Jehovah in his own territory, one at Dan where the existing establishment could be utilised, the other at Bethel in the south of his dominions where he would install a priesthood of his own creating. For each sanctuary he provided an image of Jehovah in the form of a golden bullock, and invited all his people to join him in worship. *"And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan"* and Jeroboam offered incense upon the idol altar (1 Kings 12.25-33) and the people assented, and that day the fate of the Ten Tribes Kingdom was sealed.

For how long Jeroboam thus led Israel away from God cannot be determined precisely, but the judgment of God was near and the erring king was once more to meet the man who at the first had conferred the

Divine commission upon him and declared the condition. Considering that he first built his new capital of Shechem and spent probably a few years organising his political framework before thinking about his religious sanctuaries the apostasy would not have come at once. It is recorded that Shishak of Egypt, first Pharaoh of the 23rd dynasty, invaded Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam and forced the Hebrew king to surrender all his treasures; since Jeroboam had been given refuge in Egypt by this same Shishak it is probable that these two had formed a political alliance aimed at embarrassing Rehoboam, and if this be so it might well have been fifteen years or so before Jeroboam's apostasy at last incurred its inevitable retribution.

The son of Jeroboam fell sick, and the sickness seemed to be unto death. He must have been at least a youth for it is stated that *"in him there is found something pleasing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam"* (1 Kings 14.13 RSV) It would seem that his father had brought him up in the nurture and fear of the Lord, to such good effect that the son had not followed his father into apostasy. He was probably heir to the throne, and Jeroboam was deeply concerned. In this concern, he bethought himself of the prophet Ahijah whose prediction so many years ago had come so startlingly true. He told his wife to disguise herself, go to Ahijah and ask what would be her son's fate; *"he shall tell thee what shall become of the child."*

This is where the prophet comes back into the picture. It does not seem to have occurred either to the king or to his wife that if the prophet could read the future he could also see through any disguise. And, of course, the disguise was useless. *"When Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? For I am sent to thee with heavy tidings."* Then, in all its awful solemnity, came the judicial sentence *"Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to thee; and yet thou hast not been as my servant David but hast done evil above all that were before thee ...made thee other gods, and molten images ... therefore I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam ... and I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam ... for the Lord hath spoken it. Arise, get thee to thine own house, and when thy feet enter into the city, the*

child shall die." (1 Kings 14.6-12).

So the unhappy woman returned, and as she entered her house, her son died, and all Israel mourned for him, for he was well loved. But Ahijah had said that he only of all the house of Jeroboam would go to his grave in peace because he only was righteous in the Lord's sight and he was to be taken from the wrath to come. And from that day to the time two centuries later when Shalmaneser of Assyria overran the Ten Tribe Kingdom, and brought it to an end, and transported its people to remote corners of his empire, there were no good kings, only bad ones, and the people sank further and further into idolatry. There were many prophets sent to them after Ahijah, but they heeded them not, and at last the penalty of the violated Covenant was exacted from them.

Of Ahijah we hear no more. He probably died at Shiloh, and with his passing a light went out of Israel. He wrote his prophecies in a book, for it is referred to in 2 Chron. 9.29 and from that reference it would appear that he must have lived through the reign of Solomon. The story in 1 Kings reveals that he was old and blind when Jeroboam's wife visited him. As a youth he probably saw the rise of the kingdom under David and shared in the high hopes of so many at that time that the kingdom would endure forever under David and his successors, by the power and blessing of the God of Israel. As a mature man he lived through Solomon's reign and witnessed the gathering worldliness and indifference to the things of God which increasingly characterised king and people. He must have spoken out against that. Then came his mission to Jeroboam and perhaps he had high hopes of this enthusiastic and upstanding young man whom God had appointed to make a fresh start with Israel, only to have those hopes dashed when he saw the old evils, and more, creeping in again. So, as an old man whose life's work was nearly done, he became the messenger of judgment and knew that after his death final disaster must come. Perhaps, though, it was also revealed to him, as it was to Daniel at a much later date, that despite all these apparent failures of God's purposes with Israel, there would at the end come success, a day when Israel shall have learned the lessons and come wholeheartedly to God in a loyalty that will thenceforth never falter. Like so many of his fellow-prophets, he must have died in supreme content, assured that evil will one day pass away and everlasting righteousness be supreme.

From article by AOH

Translators, beware!

In 403AD in North Africa a bishop was reading the scriptures aloud. He had got a new translation of the Book of Jonah. He came to the place where a plant sheltered Jonah from the heat. It was a passage familiar to his hearers, they had chanted the same words for generations. Jonah was sheltered by a **gourd**... but the bishop read out, 'ivy'! The congregation rose up in anger at the change. There was a riot. The bishop had to climb down, and go back to the old words, or else lose his flock.

The author of the new translation, Jerome, had gone back to the original Hebrew. He asserted that the Hebrew *did not say* 'gourd'. The Hebrew was 'niceion', which nobody would understand if he put that. He had put 'ivy' as the best equivalent, for 'a kind of shrub having large leaves like a vine'.

Jerome was advised that it was dangerous to change familiar scriptures.

Story from *God's Dangerous Book* Nick Page Authentic

A QUIZ AT EASTER TIME

The events of 'Easter Week' are recorded in each of the four gospels. In which Gospel are the following events recorded (and which chapter?)

1. Some Greeks ask to meet Jesus?
2. Jesus tells the parable of the 10 girls (10 virgins)?
3. Jesus appears before Herod?
4. The thief on the cross asks Jesus to remember him?
5. Nicodemus helps in the burial of Jesus' body?

*There were many well remembered sayings.
Who said the following, and to whom?*

6. What you are doing, do quickly.
7. Lord, show us the Father and that is all we need.

8. I do not know the man.
9. What is truth?
10. What do we care about that? That is your business. (GNB)

Where did it happen?

11. Where did Jesus go when he was welcomed by crowds with palm branches?
12. Where was Jesus when he answered the disciples' questions about the future and the temple being destroyed?
13. Where did Judas identify Jesus with a kiss?
14. Where was Jesus' cross placed?
15. Where did Jesus, alive from the dead, walk with Cleopas and another disciple?

What was the reason for it? There could be various reasons for things that happened, but what is the one that is mentioned?

16. Why did the priests make plans to kill Lazarus?
17. What did Jesus say was the significance of the woman pouring expensive ointment over him?
18. What did Judas receive for betraying Jesus?
19. Why did Jesus wash his disciples' feet?
20. Why did they not break Jesus' legs on the cross?

Answers on page 74.

When my love to Christ grows weak, when for deeper faith I seek, then in thought I go to thee, Garden of Gethsemane. There I walk amid the shades while the lingering twilight fades, see that suffering friendless One weeping, praying, there alone.

When my love for man grows weak, when for stronger faith I seek, Hill of Calvary, I go to thy scenes of fear and woe; there behold his agony suffered on the bitter tree, see his anguish, see his faith, Love triumphant still in death.

Then to life I turn again, learning all the worth of pain, learning all the might that lies in a full self-sacrifice, and I praise with firmer faith Christ who vanquished pain and death; and to Christ enthroned above raise my song of selfless love.

J R Wreford 1800-81

JUDAS AND THE POTTER'S FIELD

An apparent discrepancy in the two accounts of Judas' actions after his betrayal of Jesus has often provoked a query. Matthew (ch. 27.3-10) says that immediately after the trial before the High Priest at which Jesus was condemned, and whilst He was being taken to Pilate, Judas repented of his action and took the thirty pieces of silver back to the priests, declaring that he had betrayed an innocent man. Finding them completely indifferent, he threw the money on the floor of the Temple, went away and hanged himself. It was the priests, reluctant to put the money into the Temple treasury "because it is the price of blood", who used it to buy the "potters field" for use as a burying place for "strangers" i.e. non-Jews who happened to die whilst in Jerusalem. Hence it was thereafter called the "field of blood".

Luke, in Acts 1.15-20, records Peter as saying that Judas himself purchased a field with the thirty pieces of silver, fell headlong therein and his body burst asunder, whence it was called the "field of blood".

Who did purchase the field, Judas or the priests? What was the real origin of its name, "the field of blood", the fact that it was the scene of Judas' tragic death or that it had been purchased with blood money?

At first sight it seems that the accounts are contradictory and cannot both be true. As with so many apparently contradictory passages in the Bible, the two accounts can be understood perfectly harmoniously if the entire transaction is reconstructed. The first point to notice is that the priests "covenanted" with Judas for thirty pieces of silver if he would betray Jesus (Matt. 26.15). This implies that he would receive the money when he had fulfilled his obligation. [This is not borne out by some translations, which give the sense of the money being actually paid out, others simply state that the amount was agreed.] As soon as Jesus was taken into custody and brought to the High Priest's house where the Sanhedrin was assembled, Judas would be calling upon some appointed official who would pay him his money. This would have been between nine and twelve o'clock at night; by six the next morning the illegal trial was over and Jesus on his way to Pilate. Now it is in the highest degree unlikely that Judas, during those few early morning hours, would find anyone willing to negotiate the sale of a piece of land - and on the eve of the Passover to boot!

Whenever Judas agreed to buy the land, it was not that night.

But before the second trial began before Pilate, Judas was back with the money. It had been in his possession for less than six hours.

The High Priest and his supporters began seriously to consider the arrest and execution of Jesus a week before the Crucifixion. The raising of Lazarus had alarmed them; as they themselves said, with that act there was danger of the whole nation becoming adherents of Jesus and they feared for the consequences, both political and ecclesiastical. So they discussed the possibility of having both Jesus and Lazarus put to death, *"but, they said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people"* (Matt. 26.5). The Feast of Passover would begin in a week's time; the city would be thronged with people from other parts, including many turbulent Galileans who knew Jesus to be of their own province, and there could be a mass uprising in favour of the man they plotted against. The trial and execution must be carried through and completed before the commencement of the Feast, and that was the day after Passover itself.

In this dilemma the visit of Judas came as an unexpected assistance. That visit must have been during the course of their deliberations at some time between six days (John 12.1 and 4) and two days (Matt. 26.2 and 14) before the day of the Crucifixion. The agreement was made and Judas went off satisfied that within the next few days the money would be in his possession.

This is when he went off to buy the field. He could not yet pay over the money for he had not yet been paid. He could however agree the matter with the owner and they would "strike hands" on the bargain, probably with witnesses, as is related of Abraham buying the land from Ephron the Hittite in which to bury his wife. From now on the field belonged to Judas and he was bound to pay the money at the agreed time a few days hence.

What was his purpose in buying the field anyway? The motives of Judas in the whole matter of the betrayal have always been shrouded in obscurity for no real lead is given us in the Gospels. The most reasonable explanation is that he realised full well the supernatural powers possessed by Jesus, was convinced that He was the Messiah, but was sorely perplexed at his hero's refusal to use his powers to dispossess both the Roman occupying authorities and the ecclesiastical powers and establish himself by force as King of Israel, so fulfilling the ancient

prophecies. By scheming to put Jesus in a position where He would be compelled to use his power to avoid condemnation and death, Judas would have precipitated the establishment of the Kingdom and more or less urged his Leader into the kingly position. If this was in fact the motive of the betrayal then this business of buying land might have been connected with some idea of providing a site for some great dream palace suitable for his king, or an arena from which the ceremonious announcement of the Kingdom could be made. No one can know for sure, but that this field was intended for something that had relation to Jesus and his assumption of sovereignty after He had delivered himself in some spectacular fashion from his captors may well be the solution of the enigma. And then, as the mockery of a trial dragged towards its climax, Judas suddenly realised that Jesus had no intention of saving himself. He intended to go, as He so often said He would go, to death.

In the shock of that discovery the demented man went first to the priests, with his unavailing cry. In unreasoning despair and remorse he flung the money before them and rushed out to the field he had contracted to buy, and there hanged himself on one of its trees. How long the body hung there we do not know; it may have been for days or even longer. Probably a superstitious horror of his deed precluded men from approaching it. At length the rope parted and the body crashed down to the rocky ground and was dashed to pieces. Peter recounted what was an accredited fact in all Jerusalem.

Now the field was defiled - defiled with the blood of a traitor. The former owner would want nothing to do with it; moreover a bargain had been struck and he wanted his money. To resolve the problem he went to the priests, who were the administrators of legal affairs. They also had a problem - the money was in their possession but it was tainted money, the price of blood. They had not hesitated to shed the blood of an innocent man but they would not use blood money for sacred purposes. They picked on an obvious solution. They paid the money over to the vendor who then was satisfactorily dismissed from the transaction. The field, now their property, itself defiled with blood, became a useful cemetery for any who were not of the covenant people, not Jews, and therefore could be buried in such ground without compunction. *Aceldama* was the Aramaic name by which it became known

in after days, "the field of blood", doubly so because it was purchased by the betrayal and death of Christ and because it held within itself the blood of the betrayer.

Thus viewed, the two accounts are in harmony and every statement in each account fits into its place in one consistent narrative.

AOH

KING JESUS

"My kingdom is not founded in this world" said the Messiah to Pontius Pilate.

The accusation the priests had made against Jesus when they brought him to the Roman procurator was that he claimed to be Messiah, a king, teaching the people not to pay taxes to Caesar. They were in the Roman province of Judea, where the authorities were always on the look out for rebellions against Roman rule. "Are you a king?" Pilate asked him.

Jesus explained that he had no armed followers. His purpose in being in the world was to bear witness to the truth. (He demonstrated the true character of his Father, he showed by example the true way to live your life.) Everyone who loved the truth would listen to what he was saying. *"What is truth?"* asked Pilate, who was accustomed to half-truths and lies, and who governed by violence.

Jesus' kingdom was not founded on lies, half-truths and force. Only those who acknowledged the truth when they saw it could be his subjects. His rule is God's rule in the human heart.

His rule is of the kind that makes us respond to goodness, but this is not to say that all governments of the earthly kind are evil. Not every ruler controls his people by manipulating the media and using secret police. The world's people, in general, are glad to be governed, because a strong government brings benefits. Paul, the apostle, told Christians to be good citizens because it is God's will for there to be effective government. *"Give everyone his legitimate due, whether it be*

toll or taxes or reverence or honour" (Romans 13.7). Jesus himself said "Give Caesar what is Caesar's" - and to God what is God's.

It was not necessarily easy in the Roman empire to keep this distinction between what was the emperor's and what belonged to God. There was a strong tendency for even the most beneficial of rulers to claim the position and authority of a god. The emperor Augustus, for example, not so many years earlier, while doing great things in organising his empire and bringing peace (he who decreed that 'all the world should be taxed'?) became in some localities an object of worship. In BC 9 an inscription was made at a town in Asia Minor concerning him: *'The providence which has ordered the whole of our lives, showing concern and zeal, has ordained it the most perfect consummation for human life by giving to it Augustus, by filling him with virtue for doing the work of a benefactor among men, and by sending in him, as it were, a saviour for us and those who come after us, to make war to cease, to create order everywhere.... the birthday of the god [Augustus] was the beginning for the world of the glad tidings which may have come to men through him....'* News about the ruler, Augustus, was glad tidings. It was a gospel, good news for all, and whenever a new ruler was proclaimed, it was called gospel (*evangelion*).

Jesus too had been a bringer of good news, to the poor:

*God's spirit is in my heart;
He has called me and set me apart....
He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
Tell blind people that they can see
And set the downtrodden free...
And go tell everyone
The news that the kingdom of God has come...*

Alan Dale Luke 4.18 Matthew 10.9ff

The Jewish people, following the prophet Isaiah, had been looking for the Messiah as their national deliverer (which had international implications for world rulership) as prophesied by Isaiah. Jesus was the powerful figure to bring the good news they were looking for:

*Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings....
say to the cities of Judah*

'Here is your God!' (Is.40.9 NRSV)

How beautiful upon the mountains

are the feet of the messenger who announces peace...

who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' (Is.52.7 NRSV)

The Lord has anointed me

to bring good tidings to the afflicted (poor) (Is.61.1 RSV)

It was the verse in Isaiah 61 that Jesus read aloud in the synagogue, and applied it to himself (Luke 4.18). It was to these same actions and the same message that Jesus appealed when John the Baptist (then in prison) had misgivings about who he was. *'When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Matt.11.2,3 NRSV) "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" was the reply. And when Jesus declared, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden....." he added, "Take my yoke upon you...." (Matt.11.28,29)* A yoke implies that one must obey.

There are similarities between the claims that were made for the benefits given to the world by Augustus and Jesus' words about who he was and what he was doing. Although Jesus was a different sort of king, with different aims and methods, He did make a claim for people's loyalty.

When Paul, having been dramatically converted, was sent to the non-Jewish world, his mission was like that of a herald telling of a new king's accession to the throne. He explains himself when he writes to the Christians at Rome. He is a servant of Messiah Jesus, called as a messenger, set apart for telling God's good news which had been prophesied in the sacred writings long ago. The good news is about God's son, who has risen from the dead. He is Jesus, Messiah, Lord. He has chosen Paul to promote belief in Him and *obedience* to Him among all nations.

This is what Paul explains to believers who lived in the city which was the heart of the Roman empire. He was engaged in the propagation of the kingdom which would spread through all the world, not by armies or political intrigue, but entering the hearts and minds of those who were ready to listen to the truth.

The term 'King Jesus' was never used by Christians, but in effect he ruled their lives. When they called him 'Lord', or referred to 'Christ' (the anointed and chosen one, the one sent by God, Messiah), they were acknowledging his sovereignty. As Paul said when he wrote to the believers at the Roman 'colony' of Philippi, Jesus was not only their personal example for their conduct, but had become supreme in all the world. *"The attitude you should have is the one Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took the nature of a servant. He became like man and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death - his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2.5-11 GNB)

Nearly two millennia later it is easy for us to take these titles for granted. When praying about a personal concern, we 'talk to the Lord' about it, in a relationship which is comforting, even cosy - but prayer is in fact an awesome privilege.

*"Thou art coming to a King:
Large petitions with thee bring,
For his grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much."* ! John Newton

Likewise we may make statements about Jesus Christ, in a discussion for example, and we are just using it as his everyday name, the 'handle' by which we refer to him without any particular sense of what the name means or who He is. In the same way we might refer to King Alfred or Queen Victoria, merely as historical figures. But if in daily life we had an occasion to 'meet the Queen' personally then her title would become more meaningful (even to the staunchest republican!) She would be special, real.

So, even if we do not use the term 'King Jesus', let us always remember who He is. The person whom Pontius Pilate caused to be strung up on the cross, with the contemptuous label 'King of the Jews', is truly King to each one of us.

GC

SERVANT SONG

Isaiah 52.13-53.12

*My servant
he will prosper
he will be exalted and lifted up
he will be very high.
Many, many were appalled at the sight of him,
so disfigured was he that he did not seem human.
Many nations will be astonished at him,
kings will be speechless,
for they will see what was unheard of
and witness what was unthinkable.*

*Who could believe our story,
to whom could God's power be revealed?
He grew like a sapling out of dry ground,
he had no beauty, no majesty, no attraction.
He was despised and men rejected him,
a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering.
We looked away from him, despised him, thought nothing of him.*

*And yet, ours were the sufferings he bore,
ours the sorrows he carried,
and we thought it was him that God was punishing.
He was wounded for our wrongdoing,
crushed because of the evil we have done.
The punishment he suffered has made us whole,
through his wounds we are healed.
We all have each one gone his own way,
like sheep we have gone astray.
The Lord has piled on him the sins of us all.*

*Harshly was he dealt with, and he took it humbly,
silent like a lamb being slaughtered,
quiet as a sheep being sheared.
He was taken by force, without justice,
and who could plead for him?*

*His life was taken, struck down was he for our faults.
He was buried along with the wicked,
dead in a rich man's grave,
although he had not committed violence
nor ever told a lie.*

*Yet to crush him with suffering was what the Lord wished.
When he gives his life as a guilt offering,
he will see his posterity, live a long life.
Through him what the Lord wishes shall be done.
His anguish over, he shall see what has been accomplished, and be
content.
By his sufferings shall he justify many,
taking their faults on himself.
I will give him many people as his tribute,
he shall divide the spoil of victory with the mighty
because he surrendered himself to death,
letting himself be taken for a sinner
while he was bearing the faults of many
and praying for sinners.*

Readers will recognise this is a version of Isaiah 52.13 to 53.12, one of four passages which students call 'servant songs' in Isaiah. (The others are 42.1-4, 49.1-6 and 50.4-9.)

If one looks at this scripture in modern versions, it is remarkable how each version puts it in a slightly different way. The version above is eclectic, drawing on several different versions, in an attempt to express the same emotional feel as the Authorised Version but in modern speech. It is not intended for close analytical study, there are commentaries which can be used for this. It aims to give the feel of the passage as a poem or song, pointing a contemporary reader to the 'Man of Sorrows'.

This passage is quoted four times in the Gospels.

1. In John 12.38, the apostle John quotes 53.1, 'who has believed our report', and says it was fulfilled when the people did not believe in Jesus, despite his miracles.
2. In Matthew 8.17, the writer quotes 53.4, 'carried our sorrows' as

being fulfilled when Jesus gave himself to the task of healing many people's sicknesses

3. In John 1.29,36 the phrase 'Lamb of God' used by John the Baptist is referenced to 53.7, where the Servant is described as being like a lamb. Being the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' is not a word for word quotation from Isaiah, but has the same general meaning.
4. Luke 22.37 is a quotation by Jesus himself of 53.12, when the Servant is counted among the transgressors. He saw the sequence of events leading to his death as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.

Quiz Answers

1. John, chapter 12.20-21
2. Matthew, chapter 25.1-13
3. Luke, chapter 23.6-9
4. Luke, chapter 23.40-43
5. John, chapter 19.39-40
6. Jesus, to Judas John 13.27
7. Philip, to Jesus John 14.8
8. Peter, to servant girl Luke 22.57
9. Pilate, to Jesus John 18.38
10. Chief priests and elders, to Judas Matthew 27.4
11. Jerusalem and the Temple Mark 11.11
12. On the Mount of Olives across from the Temple Mark 13.3
13. In Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives Mark 14.32
14. At the place called 'The Skull' (Calvary) Luke 23.33
15. From Jerusalem to Emmaus Luke 24.13
16. Because people supported Jesus on account of him rising from the dead John 12.9-10
17. To prepare his body for burial Matthew 26.12
18. 30 silver coins Matthew 26.15
19. As an example to them John 13.15
20. Because he was already dead John 19.33

COINCIDENCE - OR WATCH CARE?

A senior executive worked in central London, who had a keen interest in Christian things. One day when he was expecting an important business message, a sudden call to God's business took him away from his place of work. Dealing with the concern took longer than expected, and there were problems with transport for getting back. He returned anxiously, long after the time when his message was expected.

The message itself had been delayed even more. It arrived just five minutes after he got back. A coincidence - or an example of God's care?

Later on, this man was looking at a picture (this was in the 1930s) of our galaxy 'as it is revealed to the eye of the star-camera. Myriads on myriads of flaming suns, remote beyond our comprehension, yet each in its appointed place, obedient to one tremendous Law. Could I accept the argument that the Giver of the Law was the Father whom Christ proclaimed; that the Intelligence which numbered and named the stars was the Love which as surely took count of the sparrows; that regardless of class or nation or creed, each one of this world's two thousand million souls was individually known to that Intelligence and individually cared for by that Love?'

Hugh Redwood in Kingdom Come 1934

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. Isaiah 40.26

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10.29-31 RSV

A version of the Lord's Prayer

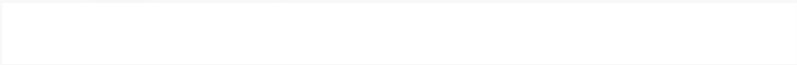
I recently received a birthday present of a heavy book, 'The Lion Literature Collection'. It was published in 2003 and I had not seen it before. (There must be millions of books I have never seen, but if I had

been keeping up to date with Christian books there was a fair probability I might have seen it.) It is a collection of short prose extracts, selected by Mary Batchelor. They are quite a mixture - some by famous authors, some very serious, some quite funny, all are thought provoking. The mixture is 'human and divine', with some quotations from writers of various backgrounds, and many by writers who are definitely believers. Passages of scripture are included at frequent intervals.

In particular I appreciated a version of the Lord's Prayer that was included. In checking which translation it was from, I discovered that this book included passages taken from seven different English versions! This particular passage is from the Contemporary English Version (American Bible Society 1995). Do you like it?

*Our Father in heaven,
help us to honour
your name.
Come and set up
your kingdom,
so that everyone on earth
will obey you,
as you are obeyed
in heaven.
Give us our food for today.
Forgive us for doing wrong,
as we forgive others.
Keep us from being tempted
and protect us from evil.*

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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Consider the lilies of the
field, how they grow...even
Solomon in all his glory was
not arrayed like one of
these.
Matt.6.28 &29

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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CONSIDER THE LILIES

Many and varied are the lessons taught by the Master during his earthly ministry, and they never grow old. To the true disciple of Christ they are ever new, ever fresh. Whether He taught by the seaside or on the mountains or by the wayside, as He walked and talked with his chosen Twelve, his words of wisdom and grace come to us vibrant with meaning, pulsating with life, full of strength and power, cheering, encouraging and blessing our hearts.

To the people whom the master generally addressed, the matter of providing for the necessities of life was a very important one. He rarely had the very rich amongst his audience, generally the poor; and the poor in Palestine and other Eastern countries found it very difficult to obtain food and clothing. In many parts of the world to-day, as in India, there are people who scarcely ever go to bed without going hungry; and to these the necessities of life are a very important consideration.

Our Lord Jesus indicated that this was so in his time, saying that the important consideration with most people was, "What shall we eat

and what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?" They were anxious and worried. *"After these things do the Gentiles seek"*, said the Master. Their object in life was to procure food and raiment. That was the burden of their prayer. And even the Jews, though professedly the people of God, had not learned implicit trust in him, but were to a large extent grasping after the material things, seeking chiefly worldly gain rather than the true riches. Our Lord said that his disciples were to realise that God knew what they had need of before they asked him, and should rest fully content in the matter of what God would provide respecting mundane things. Jesus wished them to be sure that God would so supervise their interests that they should not be in want of anything really good and needful to them.

This seems to be the whole lesson that our Lord was inculcating in bringing in this illustration from Nature - *"Consider the lilies of the field"*. It was a forceful reminder that the things of the Kingdom were the things of paramount importance, and that, seeking these things first, they might have the assurance that all needed earthly things should be theirs.

What is it that we are to consider about the lilies? *"How they grow!"*. What does this mean? Jesus himself answers, *"They toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these"*. That is, the lilies grow in a very reasonable way; they develop grace and beauty, and are adorned in robes of loveliness without putting forth unnatural, unusual stress or effort. They are not worried about growing. The lily does not wake up in the morning and say, "Now, I wonder if I can make another quarter of an inch today: I wonder if I shall be able to grow as fast and to look as beautiful as that lily over there; and I wonder what people will think about me". It simply assimilates what it can absorb from the earth, and from the atmosphere what God has provided for it there. It does not say, "I think that I shall go to another place, I cannot grow here", but it does the best it can wherever it happens to be.

The lilies of Palestine, to which our Lord referred, were not the flowers that we term lilies, but of another plant family, and a very numerous species, growing everywhere. Those who are accustomed to the flowers of Palestine point to a common reddish flower which they

think was meant by "the lilies of the field".

Our lesson, then, is that since we have given our hearts to the Lord we are not to be worried, anxious, about the things of the present life. Nor are we to be over-anxious regarding our spiritual growth. We are simply to do our best, and trust the growing to him. But we are to be particularly engaged respecting the things God has promised us, that we make our calling and election sure and attain to the glories which our Father has in reservation. If we give our attention to these things, the Master assured us, the Heavenly Father will so supervise our affairs that we shall not lack any necessity of a spiritual kind or of an earthly kind. He will give us whatever of spiritual blessings and of temporal blessings we need as children of God that we may "finish our course with joy".

We are not to interpret our Lord's words to mean that we are to neglect proper duties in life; that He would not have us do any more spinning or toiling than the lilies do; that He would not have us labour with hands and brains in order to care for our family or home. Surely not, for these things are inculcated in the Word of God. Here, evidently, he is impressing us with the thought that while we are doing to the very best of our ability in harmony with the surroundings and conditions which God has provided for us, we are not to be worried. We are to be as free from anxious care as are the lilies, to be fully content and to look up in faith to our Heavenly Father, expecting and accepting his providential care and overruling in all our affairs and interests.

God knows all about our circumstances. If we need to be transplanted to another place, into a different kind of soil, where our new nature can better thrive and expand, or where our reasonable, temporal needs can be better obtained, He can arrange for it. He knows just what is good for us, best for us, temporally and spiritually. It is our part to look for his leadings, not attempting to take the helm into our own hands, not concluding that the Lord will never change our conditions. If it is best for us that they shall be changed, He will change them, if we trust in him; and surely, if we are his children, it is his will that we desire, not our own! We are to be perfectly restful in whatever conditions or circumstances we find ourselves, restful in the thought, *"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him "*. (Matt. 6.8).

Will this not mean sometimes strong tests of faith and endurance,

if the conditions of our lot are painful and hard to bear? It may be so, but if the Lord's providence does not for a time offer a way of escape, we may be sure that the test will prove one of the "all things" that will work out our good, if we submit to his will and wait for him to point out a different way, if it shall seem best to him. Let us, as lilies of his planting, bloom for the glory of the Heavenly Husbandman.

While Jesus tells us that we should ask, "*Give us this day our daily bread*", this is not a specification of what we would prefer to have in a temporal way. We are not to specify things that would be most pleasing to our palate. We are to leave that part to him. We are to acknowledge that we are dependent upon him, that we are waiting on his providence and will accept those things which his Wisdom provides as proper for us in connection with the instructions of his Word.

So on we go, growing daily, happy and content in God, and preparing for the Kingdom; for Christians who cannot learn now, under present conditions, to trust in God, would probably not be able to learn this lesson under other conditions. Present conditions are especially helpful, indeed, for those who would cultivate trust, dependence upon the Lord. In this respect we see that the poor have an advantage over the rich; and it was those who were poor, like the lilies of the field, that our Lord Jesus was addressing in the words of our text. And it is to those who are poor in spirit, who realise their own impotency, who long for the rest and peace that Jesus alone can give, who come to him for that rest, that all the Master's gracious promises and lessons of wisdom comfort and instruction are given.

TWW

SOMETIMES A LIGHT SURPRISES

*Who gives the lilies clothing
Will clothe his people too*

These lines of a hymn are based on Jesus' words in Matthew 6.28 and Luke 12.27. Jesus was telling his disciples not to get worried about food or clothing - diet or fashion. Of course, we need food to keep us alive. We need clothing to protect us, whether from the heat of the sun or the iciness of the snow. But choice of food or clothing should not be

a cause for worry. There is more to life. Ravens don't spend their lives planning for food - "God feeds them". In other words the natural order contains food for the species. Worrying won't make you grow taller, or live longer [whichever meaning we attach to the Greek *helikia*]. The beauties of the flowers don't come by worrying.... instead, Jesus tells us to trust our Father, who knows our need for the essentials of life, and to focus on his kingdom. Don't worry. Don't panic.

The hymn containing these lines is '*Sometimes a light surprises the Christian when he sings*'. Besides these lines, it also brings in thoughts from the Old Testament. Some see a reference in it to Psalm 147, but apart from the reference to ravens, Psalm 147 is more closely linked to a different hymn,

*Praise ye the Lord! 'tis good to raise
Your hearts and voices in His praise ...
The beasts with food His hands supply
And the young ravens when they cry.* (Isaac Watts)

But in our hymn, there is a more direct reference to Malachi, '*But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings*' (Mal.4.2 RSV). Also, Habakkuk, '*Though the fig tree do not blossom nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*' (Habakkuk 3.17,18 RSV) This scripture shows an attitude of faith in God which goes beyond trusting him for everyday food and clothing. Trust Him, even when absolutely all supplies are cut off! But let us quote our hymn in full:

*Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord who rises
With healing in his wings:
When comforts are declining
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining
To cheer it after rain.*

*In holy contemplation
We sweetly then pursue*

*The theme of God's salvation,
And find it ever new.
Set free from present sorrow
We cheerfully can say,
Now let the unknown morrow
Bring with it what it may.*

*It can bring with it nothing
But He will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing
Will clothe His people too:
Beneath the spreading heavens
No creature but is fed;
And He who feeds the ravens
Will give His children bread.*

*Though vine nor fig-tree neither
Their wonted fruit should bear,
Though all the field should wither,
Nor flocks nor herds be there,
Yet, God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice;
For, while in Him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.*

Who was it that wrote this hymn of serene trust, and what sort of person was he?

It was William Cowper (1731-1800). The son of a clergyman who moved in the circle of the royal court, he lost his mother at the age of six, and was promptly sent to boarding school, where he had horrific experiences. In due course he moved on to Westminster School, where he learned to lead a fashionable life. He courted Theodora, a Christian lady, for seven years and was then refused permission to marry her. He set out to be a lawyer, but did not do enough work to succeed. He appears to have had no money sense, and was well supported by rich friends. He had skills as a poet. When at the age of 33 he was about to be publicly questioned to discover whether he was suitable for a particular public post, he had a nervous breakdown, three times

attempted suicide, and was placed in a private lunatic asylum suffering from black depression. After many months he began to recover - he had a conversion experience and became a Christian. He had been in contact with evangelical Christians for many years. Now he found a faith that was real and personal.

It was during the next period of his life that he wrote this hymn, and many others (including *God moves in a mysterious way*). He came into close friendship with John Newton (who had become a minister and wrote '*Amazing grace*'). Together, they brought out the 'Olney Hymns' (Olney, Bucks., being where they lived at that time). He was well mothered by a widow, Mary Unwin, and, living a quiet country life experienced a lot of happiness, and gained fame as a poet.

It is easy to imagine how our hymn arises from his experience. Coming out of black depression he was well able to appreciate God's love, the light which surprised him. He wrote about the confidence in God's care which he clung on to.

William Cowper still needed to cling on. From time to time his mental illness came back, and it is said he died in despair. Should he not have been able to fight off the illness, this man who wrote such a hymn about God's support? The unknown tomorrow 'can bring with it nothing, but he will bear us through' - was this his experience? There were indeed long periods when he lived a cheerful and useful life.

As for us, we are given no promise that we shall be immune to all the evils and illness in the world. Cowper's recurring problem is a reminder to us that whatever our health, whatever our circumstances, we must maintain our trust in the Lord even if we are not able to trace his hand in our lives.

GC

THE HOLY CITY

Written over 50 years ago, this article is written with the understanding that the last chapter in the Bible refers to the Millennial Age..

The vision of the new Jerusalem, the account of which concludes the Book of Revelation and the Bible, is a symbolic representation of the final phase, the consummation of the Divine Plan. John saw a

wonderful city descending out of the heavens to settle everlastingly upon the new earth created by God to take the place of that old earth which had passed away. This city was to become the dwelling-place of God, where He would dwell with men, and into it there should nothing defiling ever enter; only those that were accounted worthy of everlasting life. From the city there flowed a "River of Life", having "Trees of Life" growing upon its banks, and from this water and food of life the sinsick nations of the world were to derive sustenance and healing. The vision closes with a gracious invitation to all men, that they come and partake of the water of life freely.

This is not a vision of Heaven, as so many have supposed. Its essential basis is the coming of Divine government to earth and the presence of God to be with men, It foreshadows the restoration of Edenic conditions upon earth, for the connection of this River and these Trees of Life with the Genesis story is too plain to be ignored. It pictures the time when this rebellious earth has become fully reconciled to God and, to use Paul's words in Rom. 8. 21 *"The creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God"*. The Church of Christ has already (in the 20th chapter) been exalted to Heaven and eternal association with Christ the Lord; the 21st and 22nd chapters tell of the corresponding completion of the Divine Plan for the earth, a completion which is to be effected during the Millennial Age.

John's introductory synopsis of the vision (chap. 21. 1-8) records the words he heard from heaven *"Behold the tabernacle (dwelling place) of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away"*. It is sometimes suggested that this chapter records two separate descents of the Holy City to earth; this is not likely. It is more probable that John prefaced his account of the actual vision with a short summary and then in verse 9 addressed himself to the vision in detail.

The city as it appeared to John was square in outline, surrounded by a high wall of gleaming green jasper, the golden buildings set in terraces, one above another so that at the centre its height appeared to be as great as the width. This square form symbolised the justice and

righteousness of the new Divine government, and its intimate connection with the heavenly powers was shown by its towering up to the skies. The wall rested upon twelve foundations bearing the names of the apostles, and at each of the twelve lofty gateways there was posted a guardian angel. The number twelve had particular significance to the ancients, for they pictured the sun as issuing forth from twelve successive portals in the heavens in turn, as month succeeded month, and this, with the division of the day into twelve hours, invested the number with the idea of earthly or material completeness and universality. Hence the twelve gateways, facing three each to north, south, east and west, symbolised the universal invitation to all peoples of earth to enter the Holy City; *"Whosoever will, let him come"* (Rev. 22. 17). *"In this mountain will the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things."* (Isa. 25. 6). The twelve foundations bearing the names of the Apostles stood for the universal appeal of the Gospel upon which the City is built. The height of the wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits, indicated the full comprehensive nature of the Kingdom, that it will contain all of God's earthly perfected creation; nothing will be left outside.

The first function of the Holy City is to cleanse the nations. God is pictured as dwelling in the centre of the City, seated upon His Throne, the Son beside Him, for the purpose of "wiping away all tears" from the eyes of men (Rev. 21. 4 and 22. 3-5), and bringing healing to all. This work is denoted by the spectacle of a River of Life, seen by John to proceed from the Throne and issue forth from the city to flow through the country outside. The A. V. verse division of chap. 2. 1-2 is unfortunate and obscures the true sense. Rightly expressed, the passage reads *"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street of it (the city). And on either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manners of fruits; and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations"*. The term "street" means a broad highway, and "tree of life" is a generic term referring, not to one single tree, but to the species generally. John saw this broad highway extending outward from the city and the river flowing along its centre, the sides of the river being flanked with trees of life bearing twelve varieties of fruit. This is much like the vision seen

by Ezekiel when he saw the river of life issuing from the Millennial Temple and flowing out to the east country, the trees of life on its banks also being for food and healing (Ezek. 47. 1-12). This "street" corresponds to the "Highway of Holiness" spoken of by Isaiah in his 35th chapter *"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it (overlook it or miss finding it); for he shall be with them"*. This "Highway of Holiness" is the symbolic road along which mankind will be invited and exhorted, during the Millennial Age, to travel, toward harmony and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as Saviour.

"And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." (21. 24). These are the peoples to whom are addressed the words in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 25.34). When the evangelical work of the Millennial Age has been completed and all who are capable of recovery have become reconciled to God and attained human perfection, they are depicted as being the perpetual citizens of the Holy City. Every man will be a king, for God created man lord of the earthly dominion, and all men will share in the task of administering this earthly dominion in harmony with Divine laws. Hence all are "kings" and all will bring the glory and honour of sinless manhood into it.

Here the veil is drawn. The Holy Scriptures do not take us beyond the end of the Millennial Age to talk in detail of the "ages of glory to follow". Of the condition and life of the redeemed through the everlasting years they say nothing. We are shown the Plan of God for this earth at its triumphant conclusion, sin and evil doers destroyed, the Church of Christ exalted to the heavens, and all the nations fully converted to God and enjoying His munificence on the restored and perfected earth. *"Not a stain of sin mars the peace and harmony of a perfect society."* For the further glories of revelation, of knowledge and of activity that must assuredly be the lot of all the redeemed we must wait, until the time shall come; but we can wait in full assurance that as Isaiah predicted (Isa. 32. 17) *"the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"*.

LEAST

A word study

Does it matter if you are at the bottom of the pile? Life is competitive. In football, teams struggle to win the cup, come top of the league. Athletes do not like to come last in a race. In politics there is a fight not to lose the election. In society, families compete to have their children at the best schools, and to live in the best district. Husbands and wives have been known to separate after a power struggle within their marriage. In churches there may be competition for the leading roles, to be archbishop or pope! In all this very human aspiration for the prestigious top position, for success, does it matter if you fail, come at the bottom not the top, are the 'least'?

'Least' is a Bible word which can be the translation of different Greek words. One is *elachistos*, the 'most little'. Another is *elachistoteros*, 'more little than the most little'. Then there is *mikros*, meaning just 'little', and *mikroteros* meaning 'more little'. These are translated 'least' in the AV., and are among the references considered in this article, along with *eschatos* meaning 'last' or 'lowest'. Our opening question can not of course be answered simply by a word study, but we shall draw out some threads of thought in the New Testament linked with these words.

There are passages where **even the least are included**, where the phrase is 'from the least to the greatest' or 'small and great'. These refer to people's position or status in society. The greatest might be royalty, celebrities, government ministers, generals. The least might be the poorest, those who are ill, people belonging to the lowest caste in society such as, in India's caste system, the untouchables. Wherever there is a 'pecking order', whether because of brute strength or ingrained privilege, both the first and the lowest are all included in these expressions. There are no exceptions. It is one and all, everybody.

The phrase 'small and great' is used in various connections, employing the Greek word *mikros*. All the dead are included in Revelation 20, and they are all judged. The scene in the vision is that heaven and earth have vanished, and there is only a great white throne with the dead 'small and great' standing before it. The record books are

opened, and the book of life with its verdict (if the Revelation had been given today, would it have been a computer print-out?). It is a universal judgment of all those who have ever lived.

* Revelation 19.18 paints a gruesome picture. The carrion birds feast on the carcasses of every last one of those who formed the Beast's army - great and small. Whatever that army may depict or represent, it is completely destroyed. In Revelation 13.16, the Beast had forced all the people, small and great, to have a mark on their right hand or forehead, permitting them to take part in life and engage in trade. Some form of universal economic dictatorship.

* On a less fearful note, the gospel was preached by Paul to both small and great. He assured King Agrippa and the Procurator Festus that his gospel was that the Messiah should suffer, and be the first to rise from the dead, and would show light to Jews and non-Jews alike. He had spoken this to both small and great, not just the dignitaries who were hearing his defence at that moment (Acts 26.22).

* Consequently, those who believe and are Christ's servants, small and great, can rejoice when the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. The time for the dead to be judged and to reward his servants - the prophets, the saints, all who fear his name both small and great (Rev.11.18) In Revelation 19.5 all his servants, small and great, are called upon to praise God - it is the time of the 'marriage supper of the Lamb'. It is to be noted that among God's servants there do exist those who are small and those who are great: but all are included in the rejoicing.

The words 'from the least to the greatest' occur twice in the NT. There is an occasion in Acts (8.10) where Simon Magus by his magic was making for himself a position of authority in Samaria. Everybody there, from the least to the greatest, did what he said. This was a local situation, which changed when Philip came preaching the gospel. Then Peter came on the scene, and showed that the gifts of the Spirit were not a superior type of magic (which Simon thought he could buy into), but were part of a message which required repentance even of those who wanted to be great.

The second place is in Hebrews 8.10-12, a quotation from Jeremiah. *'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and*

write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.' This is the new relationship between God and Israel, in Christ, set out in the first century AD. We wonder when it will be the case that all Israelites know the Lord - one and all?

From all these instances we take the point that in the situation to which each refers, no one is left out. Whether for good or ill, condemned or rejoicing, along with the great ones, 'the least' are included.

The least may have power.

We should not suppose that what is least, or whoever is least, should be ignored. A case in point is the 'little town of Bethlehem'. One of a thousand villages when the prophet Micah was writing (5.2) it was not a fortified city like Jerusalem. Though small, it had associations with King David. Centuries later it was the birthplace of the Messiah, and so 'not least' among the cities of Judah.

Quite different is the reference by James to a ship's rudder (3.4). *"Look at the ships... though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder [elastichos]."* In the same way, man's tongue has immense influence - James might have said the same thing about not a tongue but a pen, or a mobile phone! The smallest word can have great effect. For example, when Paul was explaining his life story and his message to the crowd in the temple at Jerusalem they listened to him patiently. He spoke the one word 'gentiles' and there was a riot which threatened his life (Acts 22.21).

The least may not remain the least for ever. Take the mustard seed, *'a grain of mustard seed... the smallest [mikroteros] of all the seeds on earth.... it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade'* (Mark 4.31-2). Jesus took this least seed as a picture of the kingdom of God. From the tiny beginnings in Palestine it has indeed grown worldwide, creating a home for all sorts of 'birds': but still we pray, 'Thy kingdom come'.

How we behave in the least things of life

Our behaviour in the least things is a clue to our future destiny. Jesus said, *'The one who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.'* (Luke 16.10) He had been speaking about the dishonest steward who was clever in the way he covered his back after cheating his master, which led him on to speak about the way we act as stewards of the money and possessions which come our way. It is startling to find Him speaking of money and possessions as a little thing. Nevertheless, our financial probity is an indication of whether we shall be given the 'true riches' - eternal life.

There is a similar thought in Luke 19.17, in the parable of the pounds. The master returns to see what his servants have been doing with the resources he put in their care. To one he says, *'Well done, good servant. Because you have been faithful in a very little you shall have authority over ten cities.'* The 'very little' in the story was not exactly insignificant, the ten 'pounds' could be the equivalent of £30,000 today. But the lesson is clear. Whatever He gives us to use in this life, we must be faithful about it: being faithful is the key to our usefulness in coming ages.

Jesus is quite drastic in his words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.19). Speaking of those who would use his teaching as an excuse to avoid obeying 'the law and the prophets', he said *'whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.'* He went on to widen the understanding of what the laws implied, with his own teaching about murder, adultery, false testimony, revenge, and love (love for one's enemies). Exact obedience in small matters is significant, even if a society is ruled by universal love.

The apostle Paul uses the continuity between present and future in the reverse direction, leading back from future expectations to present problems. 1 Corinthians 6.2. *'Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? and if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases [elastichon]?'* If Christians have disputes with one another, they should be sorted out and settled within the Christian community.

Sensitivity about status

Within the company of the believers there must always have been concerns about power, authority, being important. Jesus may not have had this problem in mind when He said that the least important member of his kingdom [*mikroteros*] was greater than John the Baptist (Matthew 11.11) - but there is an implication for those who are concerned about their status. John the Baptist was famous, effective in his preaching, a great moral teacher and was the herald of the Messiah. To be greater than him? Jesus doubtless was using striking language to make his point, but the thought must have shocked healed lepers, rejuvenated widow women, reformed prostitutes, tax collectors. What did Jesus mean by being great? Not necessarily doing a great public work, but great by being valued, by having accepted the teaching and the love which He was giving, by being accepted to a place under His authority.

The apostle Paul was one who was sensitive about his position. He called himself the 'least of the apostles' [*elachistos*] (1 Cor.15.9), it was only by God's grace that he was what he was. On another occasion he termed himself 'less than the least' of God's people [*elachistotero*] (Eph.3.8). It was God's undeserved kindness, the working of God's power which enabled him to preach to the nations 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' and to reveal God's eternal purpose. This being the case, that he was Christ's servant, the opinion of other people about him did not matter in the least (1 Cor.4.3).

But in practice Jesus' disciples did care what other people thought, and Jesus had to deal with them when they vied for position. They wanted to be 'greatest', at the top of the pecking order. Perhaps they wanted authority to tell all the world what to do. *'And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." (Mark 9.33-37 RSV) He who is least among you all is the one who is great. (Luke 9.48).*

Jesus returned to the theme that the way we treated the humblest of those around us was the way we treated Him. He was concerned about how we meet the needs of 'the least', starving perhaps, or parched with thirst, or unwelcome, without clothing, or sick, or held in prison. Such people were the least of His brothers, and in treating them well or badly we were so treating Him. (Matt.25.40)

To be a servant

Jesus taught us, not just to accept being the least, but actually to choose the lowest place (eschatos, 'lowest') An occasion which provoked this teaching was a dinner party, where the guests all went for the best places. The way he put his teaching, was that one always should choose the lowest place so that the host would invite you to come up to a better one, "*Friend, go up higher!*" This would look good to the other guests, and feel good to yourself. "*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted* (Luke 14.11). However humorously Jesus put this advice, he meant it seriously. As he had said when he took the child in his arms, if anyone wants to be first (and it is not necessarily a bad thing to be ambitious) he **must** be last of all, servant of all.

Frances Ridley Havergal's hymn is relevant.

*Master speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee;
What hast Thou to say to me?*

*Speak to me by name, O Master!
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the rock.*

*Master speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;*

*Master, speak! For O thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak, and make me blest indeed.*

*Master, speak! and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.*

*I am listening, Lord, for Thee;
Master, speak! O speak to me!*

FRH

GC

BIBLE SAYINGS - A QUIZ

Many sayings from the Bible are used in daily conversation or in writing, sometimes by people who are not particularly believers or interested in the Bible..

In this quiz we have taken some of these expressions, and you have to match up each saying with an everyday meaning, and then find the correct Bible reference. You may be interested to look up the reference and see how the saying arose, and perhaps notice how it is being used differently today.

The meanings and references have of course been jumbled up, but not too much!

SAYING	MEANING	REFERENCE
1 a good Samaritan	a a wasteful person who reforms	A John 20.24-29
2 a prodigal	b someone sceptical who needs proof	B Luke 10.33-5
3 a doubting Thomas	c someone who helps others in need	C Luke 15.20-24
4 a Jonah	d not to want to be involved any more	D Gen. 4.9-10
5 my brother's keeper	e someone who brings	E Matt. 27.24-5

	bad luck	
6 to wash your hands of	f responsible for someone else	<i>F</i> Jonah 1.6-7
7 at the 11th hour	g an enthusiastic convert	<i>G</i> Gen.. 4.9-10
8 born again	h behaviour should be appropriate	<i>H</i> Matt. 20.6
9 spare the rod and spoil the child	i nearly too late	<i>I</i> John 3.3-4
10 a time and a place for everything	j children need discipline	<i>J</i> Prov. 13.24
11 the writing on the wall	k greed is responsible when things go wrong	<i>K</i> Eccl. 10.1
12 blind leading the blind	l impatient with those who make mistakes	<i>L</i> Dan. 5.5
13 not suffer fools gladly	m helping others when you need help yourself	<i>M</i> Matt. 15.14
14 money is the root of all evil	n what spoils something good	<i>N</i> 2 Cor. 11.19
15 the fly in the ointment	o signs of approaching ruin	<i>O</i> 1 Tim. 6.10
16 can the leopard change his spots	p made to take the blame for others	<i>P</i> Rev. 3.14-16
17 the powers that be	q lukewarm and can't be bothered	<i>Q</i> Ezek. 1.16
18 a scapegoat	r people never change their ways	<i>R</i> Rom. 13.1
19 Laodicean	s a complex series of related influences	<i>S</i> Jer. 13.23
20 wheels within wheels	t those who are in charge	<i>T</i> Lev. 16.10

Answers on page 117

*Within Thy circling arms we lie,
O God! in Thy infinity:
Our Souls in quiet shall abide,
Beset with love on every side.*

Anon.

DEMAS

Why did he forsake Paul?

"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4. 10). There is a world of sadness in Paul's regretful words.

Demas was one of the brethren in the Roman church at the time of Paul's first visit to Rome, at the close of which he was acquitted by the Roman tribunal and set at liberty. Now at the time of his second visit under arrest and eventual death, Demas was no longer there - departed to Thessalonica. Demas, who had been so close to the Apostle during his first imprisonment that his name was added to those of Luke, Aristarchus and Mark, Paul's closest companions, in sending greetings to the Asiatic Churches, evidently someone well accepted in the Christian community, had disappeared, *"having loved this present world"*. For Paul's companions and for the Roman church generally, no less than for the Apostle himself at this time of acute crisis, it must have been a bitter blow.

The defection of Demas is recorded in the Second Epistle to Timothy, the last letter to be written by Paul before his death in AD 67. Paul had probably arrived in Rome under arrest some time later in AD 66, probably only about six months before his execution. Whether Demas left him during this period or was already gone when the Apostle arrived is unknown. The severe persecution instigated by the Emperor Nero following the Great Fire of Rome of AD 64 which was falsely blamed on the Christians, may well have had something to do with it. Perhaps Demas, his fortitude failing, had quietly slipped away to Greece to get out of the way.

There is nothing whatever said of him beyond this allusion and the mention of his name in two other texts. He may have been a Roman, he may have been a Greek; it is actually the diminutive form of Demetrius, but although two individuals in the New Testament bear that name it is certain that Demas was not one of them. The most likely supposition is that he was a native Roman who had become a Christian and a member of the Roman church at some time prior to Paul's first visit, and become a close confidant of Paul so that his name would naturally appear in the greetings together with those of Paul's other close associates. The Roman church had been established at least some fifteen or more years

before Paul came to them, and this perhaps is the period during which Demas became a convert. He would in that case have been in fellowship with Linus of 2 Tim. 4. 21, who succeeded Peter as "Bishop" or leading elder of the church. Linus himself was British, son of the Christian King Caracos - Roman name Caractacus - both being held hostage in Rome to guarantee the good behaviour of the Britons, under Roman rule since the days of the Emperor Claudius twenty years earlier. So too was the Christian daughter of Caracos, Gladys — Roman name Claudia, after the emperor Claudius who had proclaimed her as his adopted daughter - with her husband Pudens Pudentinus, an officer in the army of Aulus Plautius, the Roman general who overran and conquered Britain in the year 43. (Whilst so engaged in that rather difficult task, ably assisted by his second-in-command Vespasianus, who eventually became Emperor after Nero, he found time to court and marry another Christian, Gladys, the sister of Caracos, and she by now was at Rome with him under the name of Pomponia Graecina. All of which leads one to wonder how Christianity got to Britain so quickly after the Crucifixion).

Nothing more is known of Demas after his departure from Rome to Thessalonica, no mention of his name by the brethren in the latter city and nothing whatever in the annals of the Early Church. It is true that Chrysostom in the fourth century makes one mention of him in his writings to the effect that after his defection and flight to Greece he became a priest in one of the pagan temples, but he gives no authority for this statement and there is no earlier reference to this, so not much credence should be placed upon it. Much more likely it is that upon arrival at Thessalonica he did not attach himself to the local Christian community and spent the rest of his life in a different sphere. That comes back to the question, the answer to which is not likely to be found whilst this present Age endures, "why did he run away?"

There could be at least three possibilities. Paul's words "*having loved this present world*" could indicate that his new-found faith proved insufficient to wean him away from such attractions as this world has to offer. It must be admitted that Rome under Nero was not a particularly attractive place for the working classes of the day and Demas was probably one of these. The rich and opulent lived in luxurious mansions but the rest were mostly condemned to multi-story slums, with hard work and little of the amenities of life. Perhaps he never really understood the

call to be buried with Christ by baptism into his death, and rising to walk with him in newness of life, to take up his cross and follow him whithersoever that might lead. Perhaps his consecration was only on the basis of the coming halcyon days of the Messianic Kingdom which the Christians preached and promised, and when that kingdom seemed slow in coming he gave up hope and reverted to his former life. Perhaps failures on the part of a few of his Christian brethren to maintain their professed high standard caused him to decide that the Christians were really no better than the pagans from whom he had turned away and he might as well go back to them and find some enjoyment in the old life. These things have happened so many times in every century since and most of us can remember some who "ran well" for a time, and then departed and were seen no more.

A second hypothesis is that it was the Neronian persecutions, when so many Christians were thrown to the lions, which caused his faith to fail and evoked the determination to get away to a quieter place where he could keep his Christian feelings to himself and stay more or less out of sight. Greece was a long way from Rome, and there was little or no animosity to Christians there at that time. The persecution instigated by Nero, which subsided after his death in A.D. 68 was at its worst confined more or less to the city of Rome. Perhaps Demas was somewhat akin to what we in our day sometimes refer to as a "fair-weather saint", faithful enough when times are easy but not able to stand the storms of opposition. A lot depends upon the individual make-up, and our Lord must understand the make-up of each one who comes to him. Some are born fighters and some are more placid; maybe there is a place for each in his scheme of things.

There were two notable men of mediaeval times, co-workers and friends, Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus. Luther in his reforming zeal had been summoned to account for his actions; Erasmus was afraid that he was being unnecessarily provocative in advancing the cause for which he stood. *"You are trying to walk on eggs without crushing them"* Luther accused his friend. *"I will not be unfaithful to the cause of Christ"*. *"I will go to Worms"*, shouted Luther, *"though the devils were combined against me as thick as tiles upon the housetops"*.

As for Demas, the one clue, that he went to Thessalonica, may perhaps point to the true reason. Thessalonica in Greece was an important commercial centre, conducting a lively trade with Roman

Asia and the farther countries on the other side of the sea. A smart businessman could achieve considerable prosperity in Thessalonica. When Paul first visited that city he found a 'seller of purple' in business at Philippi, not far away. She was evidently an importer of and dealer in the costly purple dye and associated garments which came from Roman Asia and the coastlands of Syria, obtained from certain shellfish found only on those coasts. Did Demas reason that under prevailing conditions a vigorous association with the traders of Thessalonica might be more pleasant and certainly more profitable than enduring the definitely more unpleasant life of a Christian in Rome? Did the attractions of this present world outweigh the promised felicity of a problematical future world?

"Having loved this present world." The words have familiar ring. How many of us can recall the youthful zeal for the Lord of one who in the first flush of youthful enthusiasm appeared to make rapid progress in the things of the spirit, one who began to be helper and a father in God to others as they in turn entered the same calling, one who gave his all in consecration to the Lord - and then as business life developed and he won earthly prosperity found those business interests absorbing more and more of his time and attention, to the detriment of both his own spiritual life and his service for his brethren. The bright vision fades away and is replaced by property and money, and he is seen no more. And then, advancing age begins to preclude any more money-making, and the wealth and the property seem somehow to be of less account, and he realises the end is approaching, and he recalls the happy days of his youth. Perhaps he even attempts to join up again with the friends of those days - but it can never be the same. He has pulled down many barns and built greater, but they are of no use to him now, and there is no treasure laid up in heaven. He never actually denied his Lord; he just failed to follow his Lord. The Lord will certainly have a place for him in the world that shall be, but - it is not the place he could have had. *"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."*

AOH

*He often acts unjustly who does not do a certain thing;
not only he who does a certain thing.*

Marcus Antoninus

EPAPHRAS... HAS A GREAT ZEAL FOR YOU

Paul said that Epaphras 'laboured greatly in prayer'. ...He was a good colleague and a faithful minister *because* his character was founded in prayer. Paul tells us that his prayer was largely intercessory. ...He was praying for them. What an insight Paul must have had into the character of Epaphras when they prayed together at Rome! Epaphras shared Paul's imprisonment while he stayed with him, and when he prayed for the church at Colossae Paul saw him in a new light. Like some modern minister praying with his church roll open before him, praying for his people one by one, I imagine that Epaphras in memory went through his distant flock member by member. This was when he remembered their limitations and difficulties: he prayed for them with insight and fervency and Paul's heart glowed.

Men and women, if your heart has said in response to this story, 'I should like to be like that', be sure of this - the secret of this man's spiritual success was his prayer-life. He was great in soul because he prayed much and because he prayed with the unselfishness that marked all he did. Copy him in this and you will be easy to work with and careless about credit: you will learn his secret of co-operative service. Follow him here and your judgments of others will be sweetened and you will be known for your charity of thought. Earnest and persistent prayer was the secret of his sanctity. That secret is available to us all.

My biography or your biography may be written in few words or many (perhaps not written at all), but I will not grieve and I think you will not grieve if at our passing it can truthfully be said of us, 'He was a good colleague, was swift to see and ready to speak of the good in others and reinforced all his service with persistent prayer'.

W E Sangster Why Jesus Never Wrote a Book, pp 118-19

ALL SOULS

What is a soul?

I am a soul. "And 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 AV, or, "became a living being" as in NIV and NRSV. The term 'soul' is also applied to those who have died

(Rev.20.4). If I were martyred for Jesus' sake, the Revelation pictures my 'soul' as being 'underneath the altar' waiting for the full complement of martyrs to be made up. My soul is me, my essential identity. My soul is me, preserved in God's memory. It is me, alive and responding to Christ. It is me, sleeping the sleep of death. It is me, 'face to face with Christ my Saviour'.

When Dean Farrar in 1877 spoke about 'all souls', he meant everybody who has died. Here is a little part of what he said:

In past centuries the second of November was set apart in honour of "All Souls"....It was the feast of *All Souls*. It is true that, it was originally intended only for the faithful departed; for the souls in purgatory. But in the title of the day at any rate there was no exception made. On that day men might think, if they would of all the souls, of all the innocent little ones that have passed away like a breath of vernal air since time began; of all the souls which the great, and the wise, and the aged, have sighed forth in pain and weariness after long and noble lives; of all the souls of the wild races of hunters and fishermen in the boundless prairies or the icy floes; of all the souls that have passed, worn and heavy laden, from the roaring city streets; of all the souls of those whose life has ebbed away in the red tide of unnumbered battles, or whose bodies have been dropped into the troubled waves unknelled, uncoffined, and, save to their God, unknown; of all the souls even of the guilty, and of the foolish, and of the miserable, and of those who have rushed by wild self murder into their Maker's presence. All Souls' Day was a day of supplication for, of commemoration of, all these. For these too are souls that He created; into these too He breathed the breath of life; and all these lie in the hollow of His hand as the snows of the countless water lilies - whether white and immaculate, or torn and stained - lie all on the silver bosom of the lake. Yes, there is a grandeur and sublimity in the thought of all human souls, as one by one they have passed away and been taken to the mercy of the Merciful.... Our finite imaginations may grow dizzy at the thought of these infinite multitudes, these who at each ticking of the clock pass from the one thousand millions of the living [1877]; the tribes, the generations, the centuries, the millenniums, the aions of the dead; all of which are but the leaves - green or fallen - of the mighty Tree of Existence; - the

wave after wave of its illimitable tide. As we think of all these souls, we recall the imagination of the great poet of the *Inferno*, and seem to be gazing on a white, rushing, indistinguishable whirl of life, sweeping on and on and on, from horizon to horizon, in ever-lengthening cycles and infinite processions, endless, multitudinous, innumerable, as the motes that people the sun's beam. To us, inevitably, in this infinitude, all individuality is lost; human numeration reels at it. But it is not so with Him to whom is known the number of the stars of heaven, and the sands of the sea, and by whom

*"..Every leaf in every nook,
Every wave in every brook,"*

are heard as they sing forth their unending Paeon all day long. And knowing this, we are not appalled at the thought of these vast multitudes, whose bodies are now the dust of the solid earth, even though so many millions of them have passed away in sin and sorrow, because we can say with the Holy Psalmist of Israel, *"O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee, according to the greatness of Thy power, save Thou those that are appointed to die: so we, that are Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture, shall give Thee thanks for ever, and shall alway be shewing forth Thy praise from generation to generation."*

NEPHESH AND PSUCHE

These are the words, Hebrew and Greek respectively, which are commonly translated 'soul' in the AV.

Nephesh first appears in Gen.2.7, where the AV translation 'soul' in modern versions is translated 'living being', or even 'living person' (NLT). It has the primary significance of a 'breathing creature', and points back to the account of man's first appearance on earth as a creature dependent on breathing in order to continue life.

The use of *nephesh*, which can be translated 'soul', as a word denoting a living being is constant throughout the OT. Animals are described as souls in Num.31.28. Souls are said to eat (Lev.17.10), to eat blood (Lev.17.12), to eat dead bodies (Lev.17.15) and to have a longing to eat flesh (Deut.12.20). They can be thirsty (Prov.25.25) and

have a longing for strong drink (Deut.26.16). They may on the other hand have an abhorrence for meat (Job 33.20). It is conceivable for souls to swear or to touch unclean things (Lev.5.2 and 4).

Although all these operations denote life and that the soul is a living entity (in fact, a human being?) it is also possible for the soul to be smitten by enemies (Josh.11) and to die (Ezek.18.4 and 20). References such as these can be found scattered all through the Old Testament. The word occurs seven hundred times, and in the AV is translated 'soul' 471 times, 'life' or 'living' 150 times, and also by such words as *man, person, self; they, me, him, anyone; breath, heart, mind, appetite, this body, lust, creature, and beast*. 28 times is the word applied to the lower animals.

The New Testament word corresponding to the Hebrew *nephesh* is *psuche*. In the AV this is translated 'soul' 59 times, 'life' 40 times; as well as *mind, us, you, heart and heartily*; occurring 150 times altogether, of which 2 references are to the lower animals.

While not making any exhaustive study, it is interesting to refer to just a few of these references. One might think of one's soul as being one's self - a living personal identity. The word *psuche* is used in various connections.

Matt.2.20 Joseph is told to take Mary and the infant Jesus back from Egypt to Israel, because the people were dead who had sought the child's *life (psuche)*. Herod had wanted to get rid of the person who was prophesied to be Israel's Messiah.

Luke 12.22 Jesus told his disciples not to worry about what their bodies should wear, or about what they should eat, to maintain their *lives (psuche)*. Obviously they needed to keep themselves alive, but they were not to worry.

Matthew 11.29 This is the notable passage where Jesus invites those with a burden in life to come and he will give them rest. By taking his yoke and learning from him, because he is meek and lowly they would find rest for their *souls (psuche)*. As living breathing individuals, they would find rest for their minds? hearts? not, perhaps, rest for their bodies. Inner peace.

Luke 9.24 Jesus is challenging his disciples to follow him, even at the cost of denying themselves and taking up the cross daily. It was a case of saving their *lives (psuche)* or losing them.

Matthew 10.28 They were not to fear those who could kill their bodies (*soma*), but were unable to kill their souls (*psuche*). Only God was able to destroy both *soma* and *psuche* in *gehenna*. Jesus makes a distinction between what we are (human bodies) and who we are (personal identities known to God).

Acts 2.27 Peter is quoting from the OT the words of David, that God would not abandon the Holy One's *psuche* in *hades*. Nor would he (his body?) see corruption.

Rev.20.4 John in his vision saw thrones, and the souls (*psuche*) of those faithful through persecution, and they lived again and were kings along with Christ a thousand years.

BSM Old article, expanded

THEY KNEW HIM

It is freely allowed that no man is a hero to his valet. The world may speak of him in superlative terms, but the servant who sees him at all odd hours - at night when he is overtired; in the morning before he is properly awake; when business overpresses; when disappointment comes; when he is off-guard and under no temptation to pose - this man does not normally think of his master as a hero. He knows the other side.

It is easily possible to know too much about some people. I remember from my college days that the head gardener never came to the college chapel when a student was planned to preach. He said, half in jest and half in earnest, 'I know 'em. I'm like the man who works at a jam factory; he has no taste for jam.'

Who was it first claimed that Jesus was sinless and used of him the awesome name of God? The disciples ! The men who had shared every kind of experience with Him that mortals could share; who had seen Him at all hours of day and night; who had seen Him tired, hungry, disappointed; scorned, abused, and hunted to death; who had ridden with Him on a wave of popularity and hidden with Him from inquisitive miracle-mongers; who had met Him when He came down from a sleepless night of prayer on the hillside, and known Him physically overworked and emotionally over-wrought ...these were the

men - eleven of them, who, with amazing unanimity, declared Him, at the last, to be the sinless One. ...No thinking man can doubt the quality of Christ's character if he give attentive heed to the unanimous testimony of the men who knew Him best.

W E Sangster Westminster Sermons (vol. i), pp 40-1

SIX SCENES

1 Near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, between the Phoenician seaports of Tyre and Sidon, lay the walled town of Zarephath. The times were hard, no rain, the food was short. Outside the gates, a widow was gathering sticks, when a rugged looking man approached from the south. In that direction lay Samaria, capital city of Israel's northern kingdom. Among the Israelites there were still a number who still trusted in the living Lord their God, as did this woman who lived among the Sidonians. The stranger spoke with her, and she fetched him a drink of the scarce water. She shared with him her last flour and olive oil which she had been saving to share as a last meal with her son, before food ran out entirely. The stranger, who was a man of God, came to live at her home in a room set upon the flat roof of the house, and he stayed for a long time. They did not run out of food.

2 A rich farmer with his younger wife lived in a fertile spot just south of the hills of Galilee. Often they were visited by a holy man with his servant. The wife thought it would be a good plan to offer the holy man proper hospitality, and build him a guest room on their roof with bed, table, chair and lamp. Her husband agreed. They went to a lot of trouble for the holy man, and he was grateful. He asked his servant what he could do for her in return. Put a word in on her behalf with King Joram in Samaria? She did not want that, she was happy where she was. "She has no son, and her husband is an old man." Next year they did have a son, who grew strong and helped his father among the servants in the fields. The holy man was still a frequent visitor from his home 25 miles away, and continued to use the special room which they had provided.

3 He was the ruler of the synagogue near the lake. Each morning the sun rose over the far hills and glinted across the waters. He was a busy man, choosing those who were to lead the prayers, read the scriptures, preach - and of course he conducted the worship himself. The town was a busy place, the Roman centurion had his men there, a tax collector was in residence. The lake was alive with fishing boats. Just now there was a lot of excitement about the new teacher who had made his home in the town. But the ruler's chief joy was his family and his twelve year old daughter.

4 Nain lay in the south part of the district of Galilee, the other side of the mountain from Shunem. You needed all your strength to make a living there, but there was a good community spirit. Nain lay near the great bowl-shape of Mount Tabor, a small town without stone walls. Where the road from Nazareth ran through a hollow there were tombs hewn out of the rock, and this path led up into the town. Among the people a woman was living who had lost her husband. As a widow she was very glad she had a son who would become the man of the household.

5 The ancient city of Joppa had its full number of needy people. An important walled city, which had been there for hundreds of years, it had the only natural harbour on that coast for many, many miles. For that reason it was important whether Egyptians or Romans or Jews were in control. Just twelve hours by horse from Jerusalem, it was the port for that city. Through Joppa the timber had come to build King Solomon's temple. From Joppa Jonah set out on his unexpected adventure. The men of the town were seafarers, gaining a reputation for piracy. The many widows needed help, and this was being given by believers in Christ. A lady called Tabitha was leader among them, giving all her time for the work to provide clothing for the needy. The little group of workers could not do without her.

6 It was a great occasion when Paul the Apostle made his visit to Troas (the Troy of the wooden horse story). Years previously Paul and Silas, Luke and Timothy had passed through, but did not stay because Paul was called to move on to Macedonia. Now, ten years later, Paul was here again, bringing Luke with him by sea from Philippi, and

joining up with the rest of the party, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, Trophimus and Timothy. Paul had travelled separately because of threats by nationalist Jews to kill him. He could only stay a week, being anxious to get to Jerusalem. The day before he left all the fellowship gathered in an upstairs room for the meal. Paul spoke to them at length - he had a lot to say, he might never meet the believers at Troas again. He went on and on, all the oil lamps were burning, the room was stuffy, so that one young man found a place sitting in the open window.

Each of these six scenes, two set about 800BC, two in Jesus' time and two just after, have this in common that they were the place of a death. The widow of Zarephath lost her son, so did the rich lady of Shunem. Jairus lost his daughter, as did the widow at Nain lose her son. Tabitha died and her friends sent post haste for Peter, the young man Eutychus at Troas fell three floors from his window and was taken up for dead. And all six were brought to life again. Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, Peter and Paul were those who brought it about.

It is a good exercise to follow the story of each death and revival in the scripture. Take time to read each story. Notice how each death came about. Note the grief of the survivors, and the compassion of each man of faith. Notice how faith was tested. See how their faith in God was vindicated.

The Bible references are:	Zarephath	1 Kings 17.8-24
	Shunem	2 Kings 4.8-37
	Capernaum	Luke 8.40-56
	Nain	Luke 7.11-17
	Joppa	Acts 9.32-42
	Troas	Acts 20.7-12

Four of these miracles were in response to appeals for help, if not necessarily the sort of help that people were expecting? In two cases, the widow of Nain and Eutychus, Jesus and Paul acted spontaneously, one out of compassion, the other in response to an emergency. Action was rapid in every case, always on the same day as the death - the custom in those places was for a very quick burial.

The method employed varied. Elijah, Elisha and Paul stretched themselves out upon the dead person. Jesus simply told the dead person to get up, touching the bier in one case and a hand in the other.

Peter prayed and then spoke, and helped Tabitha to get up when life returned.

There is in scripture a seventh scene which we might have looked at, a village close to Jerusalem, Bethany. This is where they sent for Jesus to come and heal the illness of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha his loving friends. There are some differences here from the pattern of the other six cases, though the outcome was the same.

1. Jesus did not respond at once to the call for help, but waited two days until it was certain he would have to deal not with an illness but a death. We are not told why he waited. But he did go to help, though it meant personal danger and stirring up the opposition which he knew would soon bring about his own death.
 2. He did not go straight to the dead body of his friend, but first spent time with the survivors, Mary and Martha. It was their need which was the most urgent, to build up their faith.
 3. The body had been dead four days and was already buried. There had been time in that hot climate for the process of decay to begin.
 4. Jesus did not touch the body at all, but from a little distance gave the command, 'Lazarus, come out!'
 5. Jesus in his prayer made it explicit that it was his Father's power, which was at work to raise Lazarus from death.
- (John 11.1-44)

The Bible references to all these events were found in a study book under the heading 'resurrection'. It is true that they are all cases of life returning to dead bodies. But they are not comparable with **the** Resurrection, that of Jesus himself. In bringing this about no human being was involved. His body disappeared from the grave. And while he was subsequently able to appear to his friends and disciples in recognisable form, the life to which he rose was wonderful beyond compare to the human life he lived during his ministry. Praise God.

GC

NEW BODIES

Reflections by Joni Eareckson Tada

One day the dream will come true..... "we eagerly await a

Saviour from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21).

Our *lowly bodies ...will be like His glorious body*. Astounding. Like Jesus in His resurrected body, we will have hands and arms, feet and legs.... A promise like this, though, almost raises more questions than answers.... What about sleeping? ...Will we look the same? And if we do, will we recognize each other?

Another thing. What about people who died in the ocean centuries before; whose bodies long ago became fish food? Or people who were blown to smithereens in bomb blasts; or pioneers who perished on the prairies, whose bodies dissolved into dust that was scattered to the four winds? Will God vacuum up the winds, collect and sort everyone's body particles, and divvy out the correct DNA?

These questions became real to me in the summer of 1990 when my ninety-year-old father passed away. He had led a cowboy roughrider life; trading with Indians; riding fast horses, and scaling the highest peaks of the Rockies. So it was not unusual that summer for my family and Ken and me to drive to the top of Pikes Peak to scatter my father's ashes.

We found a private place near the edge of a cliff. Thousands of feet beneath us spread a green valley patchworked in sun and cloud shadows. The icy wind whipped our hair and we held onto our wool hats. An eagle hang glided above our heads. Ken opened *The Book of Common Prayer* and read: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, in his wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our beloved father, John Eareckson, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; awaiting the Resurrection at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming ...the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his own glorious body ..."

Ken closed the book and read a final verse from Romans 8:11, which assured us that "if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." With

that, my mother stepped closer to the edge, took her husband's ashes in her hand, and threw them to the wind. I watched with wet eyes as a gust carried my father's ashes up and beyond the clouds....

Later that afternoon, we talked about how God would resurrect our dad's body. We didn't get into details, but our faith assured us that somehow it would happen. That night in bed, I wondered *how* will it happen? Billions and billions of people have lived on earth and have probably shared the same dust and ashes. For all I know, my father's ashes settled on some field in that green valley, providing fertiliser to feed the next generation. It seems silly, but how will John Eareckson's molecules remain distinct from the rest?

Others have wondered the same. The apostle Paul framed their thoughts in 1 Corinthians 15.35 when he said, "But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?'".... He sketches a few lessons from nature. "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body."

Have you ever seen those nature programmes on television where they put the camera up against a glass to show a dry old bean in the soil? Through time-lapse photography, you watch it shrivel, turn brown, and die. Then, miraculously, the dead shell of that little bean splits open and a tiny leg-like root sprouts out. The old bean is shoved aside against the dirt as the little green plant swells.... Not even a degree in Botany can explain how life comes out of death. But one thing is sure: it's a bean plant. Not a bush of roses or a bunch of bananas.... It has absolute identity. Positively, plain as day, a bean plant. It may come out of the earth different than when it went in, but it's the same

So it is with the resurrection body. We'll have absolute identification with our body that died. I will be able to positively recognise my dad as John Eareckson.... He may come forth from the earth different than when he was buried, but he won't be mistaken for anyone else.

And what about his dust and ashes scattered to the winds? How many of my father's molecules are required to be reassembled before he can be raised?..... God will not have to use every part of your body in order to resurrect it. Anyway, you do not possess today any particle of

your body that you had a few years ago. We learn in biology that human cells are being replaced every three and one half years. The flesh and blood that makes up 'you' today is not the same flesh and blood you had in your teens. Yet, somehow, the particular person that you are carries on.

Obviously, God is not as hung up as we are on DNA. Jesus gives a biology lesson in John 12.24: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." It is no more difficult to believe in the resurrection than it is to believe in the harvest.

From 'Heaven'. Marshall Pickering 1995

THE COMING OF THE KING

The scripture in Matthew 25. 'what you have done to the least of these my brethren, you have done to me' is the basis of various fanciful stories in which someone has served Christ without recognising him. Here is one such story written by Laura Richards at about the turn of the twentieth century, which although fanciful, has a point.

Some children were at play in their play ground one day, when a herald rode through the town, blowing a trumpet, and crying aloud, "The King! The King passes by this road to-day. Make ready for the King! "

The children stopped their play, and looked at one another.

"Did you hear that?" they said. "The King is coming. He may look over the wall and see our playground; who knows? We must put it in order."

The playground was sadly dirty, and in the corners were scraps of paper and broken toys, for these were careless children. But now, one brought a hoe, and another a rake, and a third ran to fetch the wheelbarrow from behind the garden gate. They laboured hard, till at length all was clean and tidy.

"Now it is clean" they said; "but we must make it pretty, too, for kings are used to fine things; maybe he would not notice mere cleanness, for he may have it all the time."

Then one brought sweet rushes and strewed them on the ground; and others made garlands of oak leaves and pine tassels and hung them on the walls; and the littlest one pulled marigold buds and threw

them all about the playground, " to look like gold," he said.

When all was done the playground was so beautiful that the children stood and looked at it, and clapped their hands with pleasure.

"Let us keep it always like this!" said the littlest one; and the others cried, " Yes ! yes ! that is what we will do."

They waited all day for the coming of the King, but he never came; only, towards sunset, a man with travel-worn clothes, and a kind, tired face passed along the road, and stopped to look over the wall.

"What a pleasant place!" said the man. "May I come in and rest, dear children?"

The children brought him in gladly, and set him on the seat that they had made out of an old cask. They had covered it with the old red cloak to make it look like a throne, and it made a very good one.

"It is our playground!" they said. " We made it pretty for the King, but he did not come, and now we mean to keep it so for ourselves." "That is: good ! " said the man. "Because we think pretty and clean is nicer than ugly and dirty ! " said another. " That is better ! " said the man. "And for tired people to rest in ! " said the littlest one. " That is best of all! " said the man.

He sat and rested, and looked at the children with such kind eyes that they came about him, and told him all they knew; about the five puppies in the barn, and the thrush's nest with four blue eggs, and the shore where the gold shells grew; and the man nodded and understood all about it.

By and by he asked for a cup of water, and they brought it to him in the best cup, with the gold sprigs on it. Then he thanked the children, and rose and went on his way; but before he went he laid his hand on their heads for a moment, and the touch went warm to their hearts.

The children stood by the wall and watched the man as he went slowly along. The sun was setting, and the light fell in long slanting rays across the road.

" He looks so tired! " said one of the children.

"But he was so kind! " said another.

"See! " said the littlest one. " How the sun shines on his hair! it looks like a crown of gold."

A PATTERN FOR PRAYER

- *can be used every morning, or at any time*

If you don't feel like praying, prepare your mind by reading a favourite passage of scripture or even a favourite hymn. When desire rises, think first on

ADORATION. Everything depends upon God at the last. Adore Him. He is like Jesus. He is infinitely loving, infinitely wise. Every breath we draw, we draw by His permission. He lends the atheist breath to deny Him. Think how awful it would be if there were no God - or a devil was Lord. Think of God as revealed by Jesus, and just adore Him in your heart..

THANKSGIVING. What a lot you have to be thankful for! Go over your blessings in your mind. Health? (Some health at least.) Love? Home? No great money worries (you make ends meet, don't you?). Children? Grandchildren? Good books? Flowers? Friends. ...?

Heap them together. Most days bring something extra too. Note it for thanksgiving.

DEDICATION. Solemnly give yourself afresh to God every day.

GUIDANCE. Go through your whole day (so far as you can foresee it) slowly with God. (This, that. This, that...)

Meet each foreseeable experience with God before you meet it in reality. You may (with passing time) get little warnings or 'alerts'. Increase your own sensitivity to God's will for you. You do it by exposing yourself more and more to His presence.

INTERCESSION. Don't leave them to the casual recollection of the moment. Have lists. What better use for the back pages of your diary?

PETITION. Is there something you want for yourself? Here is the place for it. Last and least.

W E Sangster The Pattern of Prayer, pp 100-1

Literature BFU have reprinted the following titles:
Good News for All *Watcher in Gethsemane* *A Glimpse of God's Plan*
The Personality of the Devil *The Antiquity of the Books of Moses*
Jesus the Challenge which are available along with other titles on our list

Quiz Answers

1 cB 2 aC 3 bA 4 eF 5 fD 6 dE 7 iH 8 gI 9 jJ 10 hG
11 oL 12 mM 13 IN 14 kO 15 nK 16 rS 17 tR 18 pT
19 qP 20 sQ

DAILY LIFE IN JESUS' TIME

Some details of life in the time of Jesus, but how much has daily life changed in twenty centuries?

Daily life in Jesus' time was very different from life in a modern industrialised society. Was it more like life in the 'third world'? This is not to claim that industrialisation removes all poverty - of course it does not. On the other hand, even the poorest areas today begin to benefit from modern achievements, such as for example the mobile phone.

When we read about daily life in Jesus' time, we cannot avoid making a comparison with the conditions under which people live in our century in different parts of the world. A lot of our information of Jesus' days comes from his habit of telling stories or parables based on the ordinary incidents of life.

Like much of the world today, first-century Palestine was a land of contrasts. This is graphically illustrated by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: *'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores...'* (Luke 16:19-21 NIV). It's no exaggeration. If you were wealthy, you would live in luxury, probably in a town, with servants to look after you. But if, like the majority of the population, you were poor, your income would be far from certain. To what extent have things changed in the twenty-first century?

The more fortunate would have been taught a trade by their father—as Jesus himself seems to have been. Many of those without a steady job would have been casual labourers whose day's wage depended on the whim of those who hired a group of workers each morning (Matt. 20:1-16). Failing this, and in times of misfortune, you might well be reduced to a life of begging or even slavery (Matt. 18:25).

Clothing in the first century was much simpler than it is in our colder lands today. Most garments were made from wool, though linen was also used (made from flax grown in the Jericho area or imported from Egypt). Both men and women would normally wear an ankle-length tunic next to the skin, often held at the waist by a belt (which could also be used as a purse). A cloak could be worn over this,

especially at night or if the weather was cool during the day (see Mat. 24:18). Jewish law required the cloak to have tassels attached to its four corners (Num. 15:37-41). Each tassel was to include a blue cord and was intended as a way of helping people to remember to keep God's Law. In the account of Jesus' crucifixion in John's Gospel, the soldiers divided his clothes between them but because his tunic was 'seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom' (John 19:23), they decided to gamble for it rather than tear it into pieces. For special occasions, a long flowing garment known as the 'stole' was worn. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, this would have been *'the best robe'* (Luke 15:22), brought out to celebrate the younger son's return home. If shoes were worn at all, they would generally have been leather (or perhaps wooden) sandals.

In many places today, the ability to turn on a tap for a plentiful supply of water is something most people are able to take for granted. But for the ordinary citizens of Palestine in New Testament times, an adequate water supply was nothing like as straightforward. Rain was virtually unknown in the summer months and they had to rely on streams, wells and storage cisterns. It's little wonder that one of the central features of the picture presented in the book of Revelation is *'the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city'* (Rev. 22:1-2). The local well would be a natural centre of village life, a fact implied in the way the Samaritan woman in John 4:6-7, perhaps ostracised by her community, had to come to fetch water at mid-day (*'the sixth hour'*), when no-one else would be around.

Though water and milk were drunk, there was always the danger of their being polluted. This problem, together with the answer to it, is reflected in a reference in Paul's first letter to his young friend Timothy: *'Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses'* (1 Tim. 5:23). Juice would have been extracted from the grapes by people trampling on them, a process which perhaps added a certain piquancy! It would then be stored in cool cellars in jars or leather bottles made, usually, from goatskins. A small hole allowed gases to escape while fermentation took place. Fresh juice was put into new skins rather than old ones which, having already stretched, would be liable to split under the pressure exerted by the wine as it matured. Jesus uses this observation to illustrate the

impossibility of seeking to constrain the new wine of his teaching in the old wineskins of conventional Judaism (see Matt. 9:14-17 and parallels).

The range of food was much more limited in New Testament times than it is today. Seasonal vegetables (e.g. beans, onions, lentils, leeks, cucumbers), flavoured with herbs and salt, and bread (made from wheat or barley flour) provided the basis of a staple diet. There would also have been fruit (though not the citrus fruits for which Palestine is known today), together with nuts, honey and cheese. Fish were plentiful, especially around Galilee, and could be preserved by drying and salting. Meat would have been something of a luxury. For the Jew, there were strict regulations about which animals could be eaten and which were regarded as 'unclean'. This raised problems in the mixed community of the early church whose Gentile believers did not share these views. Luke records how the apostle Peter was led to change his mind on this matter (see Acts 10:9-15) and how the church as a whole dealt with the problem (see Acts 15:1-33).

Although life was hard for the ordinary people of Jesus' day, it had its lighter moments. Feasting, singing, story-telling and dancing all had their place as recreational activities. Games, both indoor and outdoor, were also popular. Archaeologists have discovered a number of gaming boards with playing pieces, one particularly well-preserved example coming from what may well have been the Roman garrison in Jerusalem where Jesus was tried before Pilate. We might wonder how would the people alive then have coped with electronic games players? How might they have reacted to the sight of Jesus in real time on their TV, being crucified?

With acknowledgement for first century information from Teach Yourself the New Testament D. Stone

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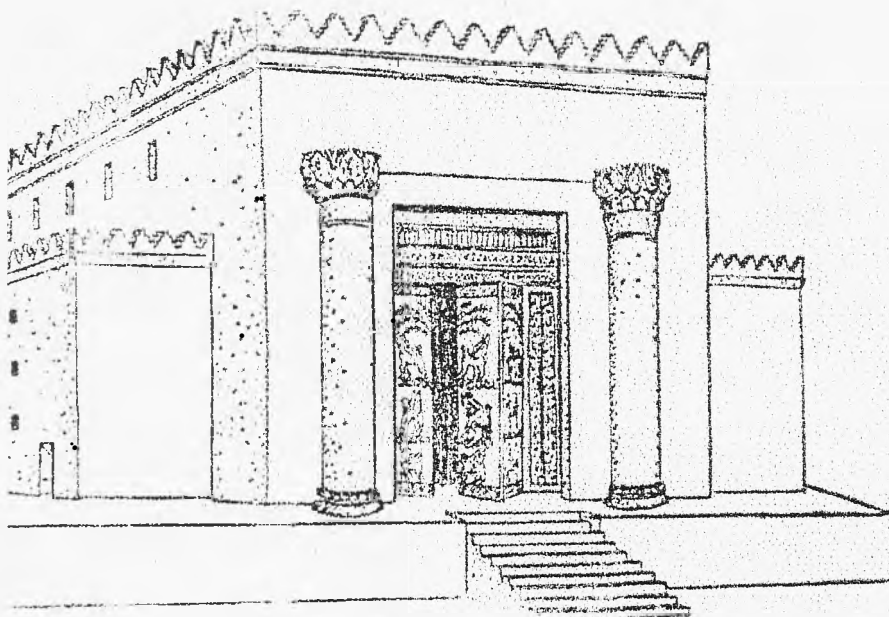
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Ye are the temple of God
1 Corinthians 3.16

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Solomon's Temple

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly, published to promote knowledge of the Bible, 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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LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER

*Thou who art beyond the farthest
Mortal eye can scan,
Can it be that Thou regardest
Songs of sinful man?
Can we know that Thou art near us
And will hear us?
Yes, we can.*

This verse from an old hymn asks a question which has always been relevant whenever people have prayed. God, the maker of heaven and earth, is so infinitely great. How can he possibly pay attention to my prayers, and notice one unworthy person among the millions of human kind?

This difficulty of communicating with God was part of Job's problem. Job was a decent, good-living sort of man who got into trouble which was none of his making. His business, his family and his health were all under threat, and he got little sympathy from his wife. He believed that everything that happens is under God's control,

he wanted to talk to God about it. If what had happened was a personal judgment upon him, he wanted to discuss the case. God is not an unreasonable judge, Job wanted to make it clear that he did not deserve what had happened to him. But God was not available to speak to. *"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"* (Job 23.3). The story ends with God revealing Himself, putting Job in his proper humble place, and showing mercy.

Solomon built his great temple as a means of speaking to God. It was to be the place where the people could speak to God and He would hear. Not, Solomon realised, that God can be confined to a building, but that in His mercy He might choose to be present there in a special way. Solomon made a prayer that when people turned toward the temple, God would hear, forgive, and save. The sort of situations Solomon as king had in mind were: providing justice; and defeat in war, famine, deportation, which things Solomon saw as judgments upon the nation because they had failed to be faithful to their God. But any individual too might turn to the temple: *"whatever prayer... made by any man... knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and stretching out his hands towards this house; then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render to each whose heart thou knowest, according to all his ways (for thou, only, knowest the hearts of the children of men)....."* (2 Chronicles 6.29-30 RSV)

The effectiveness of the temple as a channel of prayer lay in the hearts of the people. Old Testament history shows how, as it turned out, they were not faithful, and their temple was destroyed by one of the great powers and the people were deported to Babylon. Yet the prophet Jeremiah had this to say on God's behalf: when the right time came *"you will call upon me and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart I will be found by you, says the Lord"* (Jer. 29.12-14 RSV).

Jacob, away from home, having left his family, was alone. Above him, the stars. Below him, a stone for a pillow. The future, bleak. Human contact, none. The world around him, empty. And the Lord spoke to him. Afterwards, Jacob awoke from his sleep, and said, *"Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it."* (Gen.28.16)

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose

name is Holy. "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57.15). Speaking to God does not require a building, or to be praying with other people - though these things may help. What is needed is a humble heart and a sincere mind. And then to wait in faith for God's response.

Jesus said, "*he that seeks... finds.*" (Matthew 7.7)

xxx

In the early years of Queen Victoria, a young lady was busy with Christian work. She was involved with writing and Bible classes. (She had once been awarded a prize by the Band of Hope for a poem on kindness to animals!) She must have been greatly impressed by Solomon's great prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8), for she seems to have made it the model for a hymn she wrote.

*God of pity, God of grace,
When we humbly seek Thy face,
Bend from heaven, Thy dwelling-place:
Hear, forgive, and save.*

*When we in Thy temple meet,
Spread our wants before Thy feet,
Pleading at the mercy-seat:
Look from heaven and save.*

*When Thy love our hearts shall fill,
And we long to do Thy will,
Turning to Thy holy hill:
Lord, accept and save.*

*Should we wander from Thy fold,
And our love to Thee grow cold,
With a pitying eye behold:
Lord, forgive and save.*

*Should the hand of sorrow press,
Earthly care and want distress,
May our souls Thy peace possess:
Jesus, hear and save.*

*And whate'er our cry may be,
When we lift our hearts to Thee,
From our burden set us free:
Hear, forgive, and save.*

Eliza Fanny Morris

THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD

Solomon's temple was intended to be impressive. Not that it was simply his own temple, it was God's. Solomon's father, King David, had gathered together the materials, and it fell to Solomon to drive forward the work. It took seven years. In the end there was that magnificent opening ceremony recorded in 1 Kings 8. Amid sacrifices of so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted, the ark of the Lord was installed in the temple, and when the priests came out of the holy place *'a cloud filled the house of the Lord'*. King Solomon declared that he had built for God *'an exalted house for him to dwell in for ever'*. Not that God can be restricted to living in a house, however magnificent (vv.22,23,27). Solomon prayed that when the prayers of the people of Israel were directed toward this temple, God - in heaven his dwelling place - would listen, and forgive, and help them.

For hundreds of years Solomon's temple remained at Jerusalem, until enemies destroyed it and the people were taken away into captivity in Babylon. Then, for more hundreds of years, the second temple associated with Zerubbabel, was the focus of Israel's worship. Then Herod, desiring to outshine even King Solomon, replaced it with his own even more impressive structure, on parts of which work was still continuing when, at Passover time amid the thousands of worshippers and their animal sacrifices, amid the buying and selling and money changing, with the singing of some of a thousand priests in their courses, there came Jesus with his parents to the courts around his Father's house. It was this same place where Paul came to prove

himself a true Israelite - as well as being a follower of Jesus Christ who had a mission to the other races of the world - and at the temple he was half-killed for his pains, to be rescued by the soldiers of the Roman occupation force.

But what did Paul mean, when he told Christian believers that they were 'the temple of the living God'?

There are two Greek words translated 'temple'. One is *hieron*, which would refer to the whole building with its precincts, including the courts of the temple where Christ taught. (The word is also used referring to the place where sacrificing was carried on (1 Cor.9.13), and also to the heathen temple of Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19.27), which was equally a hub of organised worship.) The other word is *naos*, meaning a sanctuary or shrine. Paul explained to the Athenians (Acts 17.24) that God, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in man-made shrines; models of the shrine of Artemis were sold in Ephesus. But the Jewish temples had the *naos* at their centre, the Holy Place where in reverent awe God was worshipped, where He was specially present. We think of Samuel, in the old tabernacle days, keeping watch before the sacred ark (1 Samuel 3.3) when God spoke to him. We think of the dazzling cloud which filled Solomon's temple so that the priests could not stay to minister there (1 Kings 8.10,11). We think of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist burning incense in the *naos*, and failing to emerge as expected because he had had a vision of an angel and was struck dumb. We think of the curtain of the temple, separating off the Most Holy Place, torn in two when Christ died (Luke 23.45). This, the awesome, lofty, silent, holy place where men were privileged to be aware of God's presence, was what Paul had in mind when he shocked Christians by telling them that they themselves were God's *naos*.

Paul said this three times to the believers in Corinth, each time teaching a slightly different lesson.

In 1 Corinthians 6.19, Paul writes "Do you not know that your body is a temple (*naos*) of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God?" This is addressed to each individual believer. One's body is compared to the walls of a temple which form a shrine, a holy place, a sanctuary, inside which God's presence dwells. This verse is part of Paul's teaching about human bodily appetites, particularly food and sex. "Someone will say 'I am allowed to do anything'. Yes; but not everything is good for you. I could say that I am allowed to do

anything, but I am not going to let anything make me its slave.” (v12 GNB). After all, both the food we eat and our bodies themselves are perishable, whereas the Christian is hoping for an imperishable resurrection body. But the bodies we have at present, Paul says, are already shrines of the Holy Spirit, and need to be kept uncontaminated. In this connection, the act of sex is itself significant for who and what you are as a person, and is nothing casual. Use your body for the glory of God, because you belong to Him and His Spirit dwells in you.

In 1 Corinthians 3.16, Paul was concerned with the local Christian community in Corinth, but his teaching is relevant to Christian communities anywhere and at any time. The questions at issue were divisions and disputes due to personalities and personal allegiances. Paul at the first had come to Corinth bringing the good news of Jesus the Messiah. Apollos had come afterwards, bringing strength and leadership to the young church. Subsequently there were rivalries between those who thought of themselves as followers of one or other of the two. Doubtless there were other leaders too, and cliques arose. So Paul compares the Christian community to a field or garden, in which Paul and Apollos both worked, doing different jobs at different times. But the point is that the field belongs to God, not to the workers in it, and it is God who actually gives growth to the plants. So, to the church at Corinth Paul says, you are God’s field. But also, using another metaphor, you are God’s building.

The foundation of the building is Jesus. Christian workers are building on that foundation. In the work of building things can go wrong, and this is the responsibility of the Christian leaders. Do they build in wrong directions? Do they motivate others in ways that are less than Christian? or what are their own motives in their work? Then God’s judgment will show up the failures. Yet even if the builders are humiliated, they themselves will be saved.

The building constructed in this way is of course God’s temple. You are God’s temple. God’s Spirit dwells in you. You spoil God’s temple at your peril. His temple is holy. You are holy. So there is no point in trying to be clever, for our confidence is not based on what movement we belong to or what person we follow: everything belongs to us! The world. Life. Death. The present or the future. Everything. And we, in turn, belong to Jesus Christ. And He belongs to God. (ch.3).

There is a passage in 2 Corinthians, 6.14-7.1. It has no great connection with what goes before or after and is complete in itself, containing the statement "We are the temple of the living God" (6.16). It makes the contrast between the temple of God who is living, and the shrines of dead idols - such as they would see around them in Corinth. The two cannot be mixed together. "Do not try to work together as equals with unbelievers, for it cannot be done" (v14 GNB) This is the picture of a large and a tiny animal sharing one yoke. In what areas of life does this warning apply? Marrying an unbeliever is inadvisable (1 Cor.7.39), though differences in belief are not grounds for a divorce (7.12). To eat meals with unbelievers requires caution but is not forbidden (10.27). But whatever the area of potential contact, Paul points the contrast very firmly: right or wrong, light or darkness. Christ or Belial (the devil, or, possibly, 'a system of impure worship connected with the cult of Aphrodite'). Believer in Christ, or disbeliever. God's shrine or pagan idols. So, says Paul, do not get entangled, and remember that we, the believers, are the place in which the living God dwells! This is a powerful relationship - He is our God, we his people: welcomed by our Father as his sons and daughters. "So then, let us purify ourselves from everything that makes body or soul unclean, and let us be completely holy by living in awe of God" (7.1 GNB).

Paul uses the picture of the *naos* again in Ephesians 2.21. Whereas in Corinthians he had been teaching about conduct worthy of God's Spirit within us, in Ephesians he is deliberately leading up to the 'temple' picture as part of a sustained argument. At this point he is concerned to show that believing Jews and non-Jews are on an equal footing in Christ. He has said that the church are Christ's body (1.23), having been called as part of His wonderful purpose. Then, speaking to the non-Jews, he reminds them they have been saved and restored by means of the cross. "For through him [Christ] we both [Jews and the rest] have access in one Spirit to the Father." (2.18) "So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer, you are now fellow-citizens with God's people and members of the family of God. You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the corner stone being Christ Jesus himself. He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple [naos] dedicated to the Lord. In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit" (19-22 GNB).

Paul is speaking of much more than the local church in Ephesus, or Asia Minor. He is taking the wide sweep of God's calling of a special people - holy and faithful, in Christ - as he puts it at the beginning of his letter. The old rift in Jewish thought between Jews and non-Jews is at the front of his mind, but the thought of all believers being united as part of one 'temple' can be applied wherever there are divisions of race or differences of interpretation or immaturity of outlook. The Lord alone knows exactly who his people are. He has called them. They are one. We are one. Yet we need to remember that the 'building of the temple' is work in progress, as it affects each group or congregation or race or denomination: His work in progress which is being carried on in you and me.

We find that Peter too (1 Peter 2.5) has the thought of a temple that grows. He speaks of 'yourselves as living stones being built a spiritual house' (Nestle, interlinear) - the word is *oikos*, often used referring to the temple). Those Peter is speaking to are described as chosen (according to the foreknowledge of God the Father), in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood (1.2). Then, in chapter 2 they are urged to -

- (1) put away all malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander
- (2) long for pure spiritual milk, to grow by, into salvation (Compare with a mother's milk, 'you have already tasted the Lord's kindness')
- (3) come to him, that living stone (which has been rejected by men, but is chosen and precious in God's sight)
- (4) be built into a spiritual house (like stones, which are living) in order to (a) be a holy priesthood, and (b) offer spiritual sacrifices (which are acceptable to God, not according to the ritual, but through Jesus Christ).

The metaphor keeps changing, from growing by a mother's milk, to being living stones to make a house, to being priests in that house. But the clear theme is growth and service. Grow, by repentance and coming to Christ; grow, by assimilating the simple heart-truths of the Word; and then grow to form a living body, serving God. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (v9 RSV).

This prospect of mission and service, now, and in ages to come, is

set before even the least of those who trust in Jesus. Each half-brick fills its appointed crack or cranny, while the whole building towers up to join into Christ, the corner stone. He is also the foundation of the building, which should not surprise us since He is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. It is in Him, sustained by Him, inspired by Him that we live. And it is with great awe that we, simple people yet part of a universal and historic company, remember the words "We are the temple of the living God."

GC

ISAAC'S FAMILY

Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Rebekah

"Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated". This text occurs in Paul's discussion of predestination in Romans 9.13. The apostle makes it clear that the LORD told their mother that "the older would serve the younger", and that makes Rebekah a prophetess. Sadly, father Isaac appears to have taken no notice of Rebekah in this matter.

Jacob spent his time with his mother about the ancestral home, that is, in the women's tent where Rebekah would do her cooking, and there he learned to make that 'red pottage' or lentil stew, which Esau desperately wanted when he came in from hunting the deer in the hills. But where did he learn to cook that 'game' in the way his father loved?

Was Isaac encouraging Esau to go up into those hills and mix with the foreign peoples - where Esau found a wife who had not been brought up to worship the God of Abraham? Was there no family worship after the first meal of the day when the boys could learn to worship the God of their fathers? Happy the home where children learn early to discover the family altar. *'The family that prays together, stays together.'*

Perhaps after all Rebekah was not to be blamed for the deception of the blind old father by Jacob, but after all was really trying to fulfil the will of God. *Mores* and customs change, and modern moral standards may have meant nothing to the folk of those distant times. It is an interesting picture, the patriarchal home. Rebekah was evidently considerably younger than the husband she had travelled so far to wed.

She could still practise her culinary skills, while her elderly husband could no longer see clearly to distinguish members of the family, and his sense of touch was not very keen in that he could not easily distinguish between a hairy human arm and the fur of a goat's leg. There were few joys left to him but particular favourite food could still be enjoyed. And even then he could not distinguish between home killed goat and wild deer of the hills. This is the story of 'old age', when we might be reminded of Shakespeare's words on the 'seven ages of man'.

But more especially, *'Go thou in life's fair morning, go in the bloom of youth, and buy for thine adorning the precious pearl of truth'.*

DN

THE BIBLE—TELL IT, LIVE IT

We use the Bible in many different ways. Some may read it for the stories it contains. Others may appreciate it as literature. We may choose to meditate upon its verses and take God's words to heart. We may study it to learn what God has done and will do for His world. We may select texts in the Bible to fit our own ideas or we may come to God's word humbly, and learn if we are wrong.

At a recent conference two sessions were devoted to our use of the Bible. One was 'telling the Bible', the other was 'doing the Bible'. 'Telling' the Bible meant communicating the message of the Bible to others. 'Doing' the Bible involved letting the words in the Bible have an effect on our actions each day

God is not limited to the Bible in the way He speaks to us. He may speak through our Christian brothers and sisters, or through our leaders and their teaching and example. He may speak through circumstances, or even through other people who do not share our faith. God's Spirit may speak to us direct in our time of need. But if the teaching and example in the Bible is to profit us, we need to know about it, that it is there. We need to think it over, to 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest'. We need to remember its words, and call them to mind, which may mean we should memorise verses or passages.

What follows is based on some of the thoughts which were shared in the conference sessions.

'Telling' the Bible.

This does not refer to telling people *about* the Bible, though this is something which has to be done, for in many places the Bible is not known, or it is not understood. Telling about the Bible is a subject in itself, but what we are thinking of here is communicating what we find in the Bible.

Of course, people ought to read the Bible for themselves. However, simply reading the Bible may not be enough. The days when in Britain children were taught to read the Bible as part of learning to read have gone. It may not be very practical to give someone a Bible and say 'read this', even if one points out a particular place to read. Some people are not attracted to reading, even if they know how. For them, to hear the Bible read aloud may be a possibility, but this implies attracting someone to the place where the Bible will be read (unless you are reading to him or her personally). There may be the difficulty whether 'Bible language' will be understood. It may be necessary to explain as you go along.

When the Bible is to be 'told' rather than just read, there is the danger of not being faithful to what it actually says. Here are some guidelines for those doing the telling: Telling should be *accurate*, not altering facts, or distorting the context. It should be *authentic*, keeping to the spirit of the original - not, for instance, telling a solemn incident in a jokey manner. And the telling necessarily has to be *accessible*, using language that the hearers will understand and is not 'above their heads'.

Of the various methods of 'telling' the Bible, which one is used will depend on circumstances, and the person or audience being 'told'. Is it a child, or a student, or a workman or a philosopher? Is the objective to tell about Jesus and what he did on earth, or to point out what is the Bible's moral teaching, or to say that God has a plan? In whatever way we approach telling the Bible, we must be clear and understandable, and most of all have a thoughtful love for the person listening.

One method, as just mentioned, is simply to read the Bible aloud,

and let it speak for itself. This would suit well for such passages as Psalm 23, but might not work well for some of Paul's complicated arguments or for any passage which is difficult to understand. If you have to keep on stopping for explanations, you may lose the thread of the passage.

An alternative is to tell the Bible narrative in one's own words. Depending on the hearer, it may be necessary to expand the narrative so as to remove the need for explanations. On the other hand, for children one may need to simplify. Take care not to distort what the Bible is saying.

If the Bible speaks of something which is outside people's experience, it can be helpful to think of something within their experience which may teach the same lesson. For example, a version of the Good Samaritan could be told with a clergyman, a teacher and an immigrant in the roles of the Priest, Levite and Samaritan in Jesus' story. While this method can serve a purpose, take care not to give the impression that one is literally telling the contents of the Bible.

A method which goes one step beyond telling in one's own words, is to use a video or film. In so doing you are telling the Bible through someone else's eyes and ears, and it is particularly important to check out the presentation first before using it, so as to be satisfied that it is accurate to the Bible story or teaching, authentic in its spirit, and will not convey a wrong impression.

Much the same applies to Bible songs. For example, there is a children's song, *"Peter and John went to pray, they met a lame man on the way. He asked for alms and held out his palms, and this is what Peter did say: 'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!' He went walking and leaping and praising God...."* (Acts 3.1-8) This consists entirely of the words of scripture, altered just a little so as to fit a catchy tune, telling just the basic story of the miracle without the subsequent consequences recorded in Acts. So it seems good for the purpose of telling children the Bible story in an easy to remember form.

A different children's song goes like this: *"The Lord told Noah there's gonna be a floody, floody... get those children out of the muddy, muddy... The Lord told Noah to build him an arky, arky, build it out of gopher barky, barky...."* and so on. The animals came in by twosies, it rained and poured for forty daysies and drove the animals crazy, the sun came out and dried up the landy, so everything was fine and dandy... So

"rise and shine and give God the glory, glory, children of the Lord." This song goes with a swing and is great fun to sing - for those who already know the correct Biblical story of the flood. But it glosses over the flood as a fearful destructive event, and it leaves a lot out. (Gen.6,7,8) Bible songs, in their right place, are a great blessing, but beware!

Another method of telling the Bible is by acting a sketch or short play (this is something different from the more extended versions to be seen on TV). A lot of the sketches that one encounters nowadays are rather like the parables that Jesus told, stories, not necessarily factual, that make a particular point. They are based on the Bible, but they 'tell the Bible' in only a general sort of way. Rather different was the attempt over fifty years ago by J B Phillips, the translator, to tell the gospel story in twenty six short plays. [Published 1959 as 'A Man called Jesus'] These were written for the BBC with children in mind. It is interesting to notice how the writer was setting out deliberately to 'tell the Bible', and met the problems involved. There were problems of selection - what stories to include, which to leave out. There were problems of imagination in turning a chapter of the Bible into a play - to put Jesus' sayings into a setting where people said all sorts of things which are not recorded in the scripture, but which they might realistically have said. Understanding character, and reproducing the words people are recorded as saying, but why did they say it, and in what tone of voice? For example, in telling the story of Zacchaeus, the criticism of consorting with him is put into the mouth of Judas *"Master, this man is the biggest swindler of the lot. Surely you're not going to stay with him! Why, people don't even speak to him unless they have to!"* Then the words Jesus used to explain his actions are expanded: *"Remember, all of you, that whatever he has done, Zacchaeus is as truly one of God's people as any one of you. I am entering the house of a man whom you regard as an outsider: and if in your hearts you are criticising me, remember what I have said before: The Son of Man has not come to call the righteous together, but to seek, and to save, the lost."* (Luke 19.1-10) J B Phillips has used a certain dramatic licence, but one feels that his work is accurate so far as it goes, and the picture he gives is authentic, true to the biblical background and the characters of those involved. Whether his plays are as effective in communicating the gospel today as they were fifty years

ago is an interesting question. A contemporary comment on them was 'The great value of these plays is the writer's purpose, namely that children should see and hear and feel for themselves, without prejudice or unreality, the kind of people who played their part in the world into which Jesus came, their response to him, and Jesus himself as he appeared to them and made himself known to them.'

The objective for all of us in telling the Bible must surely be to bring people 'face to face' with Jesus.

GC

'Doing' the Bible

The Bible is there to be acted on. *'Don't just listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says! Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and straight away forgets what he looks like.'* (James 1.22)

The Bible can help us learn how to live. *'All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly prepared for every good work.'* (2 Timothy 3.16) *'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.'* (Colossians 3.16)

God writes his story in the Bible. We read God's story in the Bible. We start putting it into action. God carries on writing his story in our lives.

It is easy to say, 'This is what the Bible says. So do it.' If we are going to obey the Bible just like that, without question, we need to be very sure that the Bible is actually saying what we think it does. We also need to be sure that the words in the Bible do apply to our own situation. It is wise to study very carefully what the Bible is saying.

As an example of careful study, take the example of what it says about being kind. No one would doubt that we should be kind, but by studying the teaching about kindness, we may find this quality growing in us.

There is a lot of kindness about in the story of Boaz, Naomi and Ruth. 'Then Naomi said to her two daughters in law, *"May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to your dead and to me."* (Ruth 1.8) Boaz.... *"The Lord bless him!" Naomi said, "he has*

not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. This man is one of our kinsman redeemers.” (Ruth 2.20) Boaz said to Ruth, “The Lord bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier.” (Ruth 3.10) Seeing the kindness shown in this story is an example to us.

Peter said (Acts 4.8-10) “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are being called to account today for an act of **kindness** to a person who cannot walk, then know this: it is by the name of Jesus that this man stands before you healed.” Showing God’s kindness is more than just being nice!

Paul said (2 Cor. 6.4-10) ‘Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance, in troubles, hardship and distress; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and **kindness**; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing and yet possessing everything’. This for us is a challenging example - kindness when under pressure.

Paul wrote to the Colossians (3.11-14) ‘Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, **kindness**, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these other **virtues**, put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity. v.15, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.’ Kindness is part of a way of life, a set of virtues to develop, a discipline to adopt.

The Bible gives us examples that instruct us and inspire us. It gives us practical advice. It challenges us and sets out to persuade us. It tells us stories which intrigue us and engage our feelings, to think what we would do or how we would feel. It offers us a way of life, a new set of values that help us to work out our salvation. It offers us a new source of motivation, remembering, guidance and strength, the Holy Spirit. It introduces us to Jesus, who calls us to follow Him.

So what one thing are you going to take from what the Bible tells us today?

ACJ

QUIZ July 2013

1. Jesus said the temple was not to be a den of thieves, but what *was* it intended as?
2. Who never left the temple day or night, and worshipped God fasting and praying?
3. Who put all the money she had to live on into the collection at the temple?
4. What did Isaiah see in the year King Uzziah died?
5. Where did Peter and John find a lame man at 3pm?
6. Where does God *not* live?
7. In what direction was the temple curtain torn when Jesus died?
8. How many of the fine temple stones did Jesus say would be kept in place?
9. Where did Jesus teach the people during his last week on earth, and where did he spend the nights?
10. Where did sparrows and swallows make their nests?
11. What was Jesus going to build again in three days?
12. Who saw a temple in heaven open?
13. Where did the first believers in Jesus a) meet as a group?
b) have their meals together?
14. With what materials were the inside walls of Solomon's temple covered?
15. Which psalm with five verses speaks of coming to worship God at the temple with joy?
16. What did Ezekiel see coming from the east and entering his temple?
17. Who burnt down Solomon's temple?
18. What is the name of the temple in the New Jerusalem?
19. Who took away the treasures in the temple in the fifth year of King Rehoboam?
20. What project were Tattenai, Shethar-Bozenai, Haggai, Zechariah, Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes involved in, in different ways?

Answers on page 160

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

"There went out a sower to sow" (Mark 4.3).

So simple a beginning to a story but how full of potential instruction. In the sowing of seed there repose infinite possibilities. On the one hand, arrant failure, if weather is unpropitious and the soil sterile; on the other, continuing growth and fruitage, further seeding, and increase through season after season that may never end. The deserts of the earth are the cemeteries of bygone plants and trees that once flourished but whose seeds eventually perished and failed to reproduce their kind; the lush pastures and thick forests of the earth are the descendants of countless generations of plants that fruited and seeded and brought forth anew year after year because the soil was good, and sun and rain played their part. All this was inherent in the word-picture Jesus drew for the multitude that at this moment was gathered by the lake-side to hear his teaching.

The parable is evidently intended to illustrate the various degrees of receptiveness to the Gospel message displayed by different hearers. Here is the reaction of every man who evinces any appreciation of the Word of God and the appeal of Jesus Christ whatever. Here are the varied results of the lodgment of the seed of righteousness in the hearts of men. This parable is fulfilled over and over again as generation succeeds generation, in all the years that have elapsed since Pentecost to the present. It is not, like some of the parables, a picture of some aspect of the end of this Age or the characteristics of the coming Kingdom of God. It is not a dispensational parable. It is the story of the impact of the Gospel upon the mind and heart of every one who gives heed, if only for a moment, to its message, and the ultimate consequence of the impact.

"There went out a sower to sow". A simple approach, but how direct! The vision is flashed as in a moment on the screen, and we see the wide, ploughed field awaiting the seed, the pathway skirting its borders, the line of rocky boulders and large pebbles, cleared from the field, lining the pathway in rugged profusion, and the sower himself, striding along the narrow track, his hand already in the capacious bag of seed slung across his shoulders. *"There went out a sower to sow."* His methods were not as the methods of to-day. To and fro across the field

he must needs walk, scatter the seed handful after handful, trusting to wind and rain to spread it evenly and bed it down into the soft ground. No drills to turn up the ground and soften it to receive the seed; no great wheeled machines to accomplish the task in a fraction of the time human hands would require to do it. No mechanical aids at all; the seed was simply broadcast over the waiting ground and found lodgment where conditions were favourable. So it is with the message of Jesus; it succeeds best when it is sown without the artificial assistance of man's devising, publicity schemes and organised pressure groups and the like. As with Paul, who knew nothing among the Corinthians "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" following the relative failure of his more intellectual approach to the philosophers of Athens, so with all who would be efficient "sowers". The simplicity of the Gospel is its greatest recommendation.

But as the sower walked along the edge of the field the winds carried the seed across the hard, beaten pathway he had just left, and there it lay, bleaching in the sun. He went on his way, and the flocks of birds, watching from a safe distance, swooped down quickly on that pathway and quickly-devoured every visible shining grain before the return of the sower caused them rapidly to take flight and settle on the trees bordering the field, watching. There was nothing he could do about it. The seed had to be sown broadcast so that at least every piece of good ground received its quota, and in the process it was inevitable that some should fall on ground that was completely unreceptive. Perhaps in another season of sowing that same ground, softened by rain and broken up by man's labour, might receive the seed again and this time allow it to germinate and bear fruit. God does not limit his offer of salvation to one opportunity only; it is open for so long as there is any chance or possibility of response, and hearts that may at the first be hard and unyielding may eventually by the circumstances of life or the persuasiveness of God become soft and receptive and at the last produce the fruit of the good ground. But in the meantime, the word of God falls on the ears but leaves no lasting impression. Idle it lies, finding no real lodgment, no vibrating chord, until Satan, the arch-deceiver, by one of the many means at his disposal obliterates the transient impression which had been made and it is as if the word had never been spoken at all. Like Israel in the days of Ezekiel "*Thou art unto them a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and that*

can play well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not". The word spoken has vanished as surely as did the seed on the pathway after the birds had swooped.

Now he was coming back, a little farther from the path this time, but even so, much of the seed fell among the piles of rocks and boulders which separated path from field. It was safe enough there in the nooks and crannies; the birds were unable to reach it and there was a certain amount of soil and moisture which allowed the seed to germinate and grow. But later on, as the green stems began to show above the pieces of rock, the fierce heat of the sun dried up what moisture there was and the tender green shrivelled up and vanished away, for there was nothing in which the roots could spread and find sustenance. The seed was, after all, only seed. It had within itself the power of life but must take to itself the constituents of growth, the soil, moisture and air necessary to enshroud that life in a material entity which would ultimately play its part in the economy of the world. So often it happens that there is a conversion inspired by the enthusiasm of the moment, engendered perhaps by the emotional atmosphere of a revival meeting or the apparent attraction of finding a life of peace and satisfaction "in Jesus" without realising that such a life is going to involve more than just taking the word from him without doing anything about it or beginning to "grow up in him". Such will receive the word with every manifestation of appreciation and gladness. "This is what we were looking for" say they, and for a while they are very vocal in their expressions of joy and appreciation. But presently there is difficulty, opposition or persecution. Perchance they become disappointed or impatient. Things are not as they expected; the test of time finds them out; the life of consecration to God's service is too narrow, too onerous. It involves giving up things they do not wish to give up. They are like the man who having put his hands to the plough, looked back, and so manifested his unfitness for the Kingdom of God. These, then, like the seed falling upon the rocks, endure for a time, but when the sun's heat beats upon them, they wilt and vanish away.

Turning the corner of the field, the sower trampled over a patch of weeds and thorny scrub. Unheedingly, he scattered his seed over that patch and it germinated and grew, strong and healthy at first. But the weeds and thorns grew too, and faster and stronger than the wheat, and

soon there could be seen only a few pallid fruitless stalks half-hidden among the fast spreading thorns. Discouraging for the sower; the weeds and thorns had only been incipient and barely noticeable when he scattered the seed. Later on, after he had left the field for sun and rain to do their work, they grew so strongly and quickly that the stems and leaves resulting from the good seed became eclipsed and ultimately completely submerged. The nature of the ground may have had something to do with it; weeds normally grow in poor ground, soil that has become deficient in the essential constituents required to make good plants. Perhaps prolonged fertilising was what was wanted here, and a clearing away of weeds and thorns so that in another season seed might be sown that would have a better chance of maturing. At any rate God has provided a future Age for such a re-fertilising and elimination of all that offends so that the seed may be sown again in ground that then may be found more responsive. But this does not appear in the parable, for Jesus was talking about the Gospel as it is preached in this Age, the Age in which it is possible for the *"cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in"* to *"choke the word"*. So here must be seen those who attain a more advanced position at first. More resolute, more determined, they are not easily turned aside by opposition or persecution. They ride over the disappointments and disillusionments and become pillars of strength in the Christian community, and as the years pass by it seems impossible that they could ever fall away. Yet they do fall away. Some meet with success in business and become wealthy in the riches of this world; some attain high honour among men; some have their attention distracted by other aims and pursuits and interests. Imperceptibly at first, but none the less surely, their progress in the things of the Spirit slows, and stops, and so they become progressively surrounded and hidden by those interests of this world upon which their hearts have become set, and at last, they are seen no more.

And now the sower is well into the field, his strong hands flinging handful after handful of seed over the soft, yielding soil, where it will lie and germinate, and grow stronger and taller, receiving nourishment from the soil along with the benefit of sun and rain, until at last it stands, proudly erect, a golden glory awaiting the coming of the reaper. This is the kind of labour and reward that every witness for the truth as it is in Jesus desires to experience and receive. *"Lift up your eyes, and*

look on the fields" He said "for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal". That is the vision which inspires every one of the sowers as he goes out like that worker in the parable, ardently scattering the seed on ground which he knows to be good, and because he has that knowledge already sees in his mind's eye the harvest that will surely come. Despite the wayside, the stony ground, the weeds and thorns, there are still those who not only hear the Word and receive it into sincere hearts, and allow the Spirit to do its great work, but throughout life, be it short or long, remain faithful to their covenant with God, in steadfast faith looking unto Jesus who is not only the Author but also the Finisher of their faith. These survive all the vicissitudes of storm and tempest, the gales of wind and the crushing hail, by virtue of their strong roots penetrating far down into the good soil and taking firm hold thereof, their long, shapely leaves reaching up into the air to receive the sun and rain which is God's gift, attaining at the last that full-fruited maturity which the Apostle Paul in Ephesians calls "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4.13).

To the end this parable talks of individuals, and the response of individuals to the message of the Gospel. Although it is true that the sowing in good ground eventually produces a company of dedicated and tried and approved believers associated together in one Church which is the Body of Christ, a means in his hand for the reconciliation to God of "whosoever will" in the Messianic Age, there is no reference to this or trace of it here. The sown seed comes to maturity because it was sown in good ground but there is no intimation of the ultimate purpose for which it was sown or the use to which the crop will be put. That belongs to a different sphere of thought. There is no question of reaping or harvest here. The end is reached when the sown grain has reached the stage of bringing forth fruit, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold, it matters not. After the full cycle of development has been traversed, the sowing of the seed of the Word has brought forth its fruit in the life of the individual, and that individual is ready for God's purpose.

AOH

A PATTERN

In the days of my youth, when students were learning to use a typewriter, there was one special sentence that they had to practise: 'A quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'. This sentence had the merit of containing all 26 letters of the alphabet, so typing it over and over again made the student's fingers familiar with the whereabouts of every alphabetic key on the machine. I do not know if this sentence is ever used nowadays. The layout of a computer keyboard is much the same as the old typewriters, but there must be some more sophisticated method of learning to use it. 'Quick brown foxes' do not sound very much in keeping with the requirements of technology.

The ancient Greeks of New Testament times had a more basic system. A boy learning to write would be given a shallow tray spread with soft wax, and a stylus, pointed at one end to write his letters in the wax, flat at the other end to smooth away what he had written so that he could use the space again. His teacher would mark the wax in the tray with lines, to help him keep straight, and across the top would be written the sentence he had to copy. This might be any sentence, but there did exist sentences, not necessarily meaningful, which contained all the letters of the Greek alphabet. Such as: *marpte sphigx klOps zbuchthEdon*. The name for this sentence written across the top and to be copied was the *hupogrammos*.

This word is used only once in the New Testament, by Peter in 1 Peter 2.21, meaning an example, a pattern to be copied. Jesus left us a *hupogrammos* that we should follow in his steps. 'Just as the schoolboy learns to write by following the perfect copper-plate example, so we are scholars in the school of life, and we can only learn by copying the perfect pattern of life which Jesus gave to us.' (Barclay) This explanation is very good, and covers every aspect of Christian life, but what was it that prompted Peter to speak of Jesus as our pattern?

He had been saying, 'Respect everyone, love your fellow-believers, honour God and respect the Emperor (v.17 GNB). Then he went on to deal with the particular case of house servants. He told them they should submit to their masters and show them complete respect, 'in all fear'. There was a possibility they might not do so - Peter was probably concerned for the reputation of Christian servants. They might get beaten for nothing. They might tell lies, answer their masters

back, threaten revenge. Peter said they were to show proper respect even to masters who were not kind and considerate, even when they were punished for doing what was right. In this they would be following the pattern that Jesus set.

Jesus did not sin, told no lies, did not give back insult for insult. When treated wrongfully, his hope was in God, the righteous judge. (Peter knew, he had been there.) He carried our sins in his body onto the cross with the purpose that our sins might wither away and leave us living rightly. We were like straying animals, on the loose. What He did was to round us up, and put us back in the care of the Shepherd who would take charge of us.

There is a further analogy in thinking of Jesus as our *hupogrammos*. The Greek teacher might not simply set the student work to copy. He would place his hand over the student's hand as he worked, and guide his stylus in the right direction. When the letters had been formed in this way, then the student on his own could trace the shapes that they jointly had cut. "Jesus does not give us an example and leave it at that; an example can be the most discouraging thing on earth.... He does more.... as the master's hand guided the scholar's first fumbling efforts, so he guides us... he left us not only a dauntingly perfect *hupogrammos* - He constantly helps us to follow it." (Barclay)

And his *hupogrammos* covers every letter in the alphabet of life.

GC

With acknowledgment to William Barclay, *New Testament Words*

CALL TO HOLINESS

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pet. 2.9).

Peter had been in darkness until Jesus came. He was a Galilean and Matthew wrote... *"Galilee of the Gentiles - the people living in darkness have seen a great light."* (Matt. 4.16, Isa. 9.1-2). No matter how well Peter tried to keep the Law as a Jew, he needed to be called out of darkness. It was a darkness of human prejudice, of meanness of spirit and of unwillingness to see any possible goodness in the peoples

of the nations around him. It took Peter a long time to be totally rid of that darkness. Nor was he alone, for the barriers which people erect around their own little group take a long time to be demolished by the Spirit of God. Labels which are stuck on to other people take a great deal of removal.

When Peter heard the Lord talking about clean and unclean practices and what goes into the mouth and what comes out of it, (Mark 7) he could never have imagined the possibilities of those words. A few years later he was sitting on the roof of a house in Joppa when he had a vision. It might have reminded him of the words of our Lord by Galilee. Peter traditionally was at Mark's elbow when the younger man wrote his gospel. In Mark 7.19 there is a brief word of explanation by the writer - "*in saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean*".

Peter was praying on the flat roof in the seaport of Joppa. Out at sea he might have seen the billowing sails of the ships. He saw in his vision, let down in a kind of sail cloth, all kinds of animals, some 'clean' and some 'unclean'. A voice told him to kill and eat but he refused. He recognised the voice of the Lord, yet twice more he refused saying that he had never eaten anything that was 'unclean'. The unclean condition had nothing to do with hygiene. These were animals which were pronounced by the Law as unholy, unfit for God's service as food.

The light which flooded Galilee and Judea from the son of God must shine into the hearts and lives of the Gentiles. It was Peter who was once more to launch forth into the deep. Until the day when Peter visited Cornelius at Caesarea, he regarded Gentiles as unclean and unholy and unfit for the presence of God (Acts 10). Peter had been on a journey visiting early Christian believers in Judea between Jerusalem and the Great Sea coast. He stopped at Lydda and healed a man called Aeneas. Then he went on to Joppa and raised Tabitha from the dead. Finally, he stopped at the house of Simon who was a tanner by trade. (Acts 9). It was quite something for any respectable Jew to stay in the house of a man who earned his living from handling animal carcasses. After the vision he went a step further and invited some Gentiles to sleep under the same roof. Next he went up country with these men to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. Jews did not enter the Roman city if they could help it. They certainly did not enter the house of a pagan to stay and eat there. When he arrived back in Jerusalem eventually, the Christian church there was aghast at the thought that he actually ate

with those uncircumcised heathen (Acts 11).

Peter made it clear to the brethren in Jerusalem that not only did he have fellowship with these Gentiles and declare the Gospel to them but the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them, just as it had been on the first disciples in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Later Peter was to write *"...chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for the obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood"* (1 Pet. 1.2).

The language that Peter uses in his letter shows he had discovered that the privileges which had been the prerogative of Jewish priesthood were now for all disciples of the Lord Jesus. Privileges which once belonged only to Israel now could be enjoyed by all of any nation who would accept Jesus as their Saviour and give their hearts to him. The writer to the Hebrews takes our minds back to the tabernacle ritual and the consecration of the High Priest who alone was allowed to enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies. Here the greater High Priest had entered the Most Holy with his own blood and produced a real atonement for the sin of the people.

Now all priests were allowed to enter the sanctuary and stand before the presence of God. *"...brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water"* (Heb. 10. 19-21).

In a sense the picture is carried a stage further by Paul's words at the beginning of chapter 12 in his letter to the Romans. Paul uses very serious language relating to the priestly service. It is the presentation of our bodies as a holy sacrifice. Yet although those bodies are accepted as holy, in the next verse the apostle goes on to exhort the brethren *"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity"* (Phillips). These words of Paul clearly define two phases of sanctification. The first is the consecration of the life by God which makes it immediately acceptable to him. The second is the slow and sometime painful cleansing process, God does in

our human lives.

Writing to the church at Ephesus (5.25-26) Paul says *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word"*. The word 'cleansed' in this text is similar to the Greek word used in John 15.3 where Jesus speaks of branches being pruned or purged. The cleansing agent for members of the Church which are the branches in the vine is the Word of God. By an intelligent reading of the Bible and resolute application of its teachings in the life, the Word of God does cleanse slowly but surely, those things which are 'spots and wrinkles' and cause us so much pain. That they are in our flesh there can be no denial (1 John 1.8) and to do so would be self-deception. But the previous verse makes it clear that we may be cleansed through Jesus' blood. The word, retained in our memories through the Holy Spirit, is ready for use to combat the enemies within. To change the analogy it is like the probing scalpel of a surgeon or High Priest.

The ultimate picture of holiness is given in the chapters in the Corinthian letter where this study began (2 Cor. 6.16). *"For we are the temple of the living God."* Paul is contrasting the possibility of becoming the temple of idols. The world worships the things that it most prizes. These cannot be allowed dominance in the minds of God's people. They can be a polluting influence. Modern media in press and television carry many things which Jesus would not approve of were He sitting beside us. If they are allowed to remain in the innermost recesses of our mind, controlling our thinking and thence our speech and actions, they will be the moulding force in our lives to shape us according to their pattern and not the "pattern seen in the holy mount"-that of Jesus Christ the holy one of God.

We are stewards of God's dwelling place. It is vital, as we read the Word of God and consider the things which occupy our attention, that we remove that which clutters up God's Temple. Rigorous treatment is demanded, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to repair and restore God's work in our lives. This is not just a matter of worldly activities or reading. Sometimes they would have been more spiritually healthy than the tortuous and bitter arguments of former days within the Church. There have been meetings and services among the Lord's people since the days of the Corinthian church, until this day, which have not been holy.

The purest and loveliest souls among the Lord's people have followed their Master into the poorest homes and chatted with those considered to be the worst in the social order. Jesus was filled with the Spirit, not with the wine of his hosts. He was spiritually strong and could not be pulled down, but He lifted many up. Before we can reach such souls, we too must broken at the foot of the Cross.

We are only fit as the dwelling place of the Most High if we permanently recognise our need of him in lowliness of heart. We need to accept God's discipline, for it is by that means we share his holiness (Heb. 12. 10). That discipline is often given by the experiences of life which are too easily resented. It may be by the word of a brother or sister in the Lord, it may be by a colleague or acquaintance; but we must beware of resenting God's hand of discipline. "*...without holiness no one will see the Lord.*" (v. 14). The word 'purity' of Matt. 5.8 "*Blessed are the pure in heart*", and the cleansing of John 15.2 "*and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes*" are connected with that characteristic which Jesus so much admired, "*without hypocrisy*", a character without guile. Only contrition before the Lord can reach that standard. We must allow his searching love to root out every kind of bitterness which would spoil our fellowship with him. He only wants the best for us. This is not the case of an Old Testament High Priest, nor a law court judge, not even a twentieth century 'big brother' looking over our shoulder to see what we are doing wrong. Jesus is our Saviour who loved us so much that He died for us. He is our bridegroom who loves more than any earthly spouse. When Peter committed the sin of denying the Lord there is no record of Jesus' recriminations over the event; no record that He spent an hour "tearing strips" off the fallen disciple to humiliate him. Jesus looked at Simon and the strong fisherman melted into tears. We need to do just that sometimes.

In nearly all of Paul's letters he writes to the 'saints'. For the apostle it was another way of addressing all the believers in Christ Jesus. All who have given their hearts to the Lord and accepted him as their Saviour, whose lives have been consecrated by God for his service in the 'perfecting' of the Lord's disciples, they are the saints, the Holy Ones of God. These are not special disciples. They have no particular recognition from the Church. They are those in whom God lives. First impressions of such may be rather misleading. They may appear to be very ordinary folk and quite unprepossessing by the world's standards

of 'goodness'. Paul once wrote "*The Lord knows those who are his*" (2 Tim. 2.19). They are words which probably go far back into the history of God's people, perhaps so far as Israel's wanderings in the desert. They are words which give everlasting comfort to those who seek to bear the holy image of the Master. They are words which ignore the boundaries and barriers of human invention which divide and separate God's people. They are words which carry a responsibility too for those that are Christ's must bear the pure light of his face to a dark world. These are the ones described as "Blessed and holy" and who will be priests of God and of Christ (Rev. 20.6).

Earlier in that same second letter to the Corinthians, Paul had described how it was possible for the unholy children of men to reach that sublime condition in God's presence. In this present time they "reflect the Lord's glory. .. being transformed into his likeness". When plants such as vines grow and produce fruit they soak up the sunshine. We must not allow any cloud or shadow to come between us and the Sun of Righteousness. Then we shall live in true holiness.

DN

SECOND JOHN

The Second Epistle of John is thought to have been written at Ephesus, following the writing of the First Epistle (eight of its thirteen verses are to be found in the First Epistle also) and to have been addressed to a sister in Christ otherwise unknown to history. It is this question of the Epistle's purpose that has given rise to the most disputed point in its short length of only thirteen verses. "*The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth*" is how he opens the epistle. Some commentators and scholars, reluctant perhaps to give the honour of an entire New Testament epistle to a woman, however saintly, especially to one who is not identified in any other extant writing, have suggested that under that pseudonym John intended the church at Ephesus, or perhaps the entire church on earth, to be understood. It is not a convincing suggestion; the fact that the elect lady

has children who are associated with her in the greeting, and moreover has a sister who in turn also has children (verse 13) makes the supposition practically impossible of serious consideration. It seems virtually certain that John was writing to an actual person of his acquaintance, one whom he esteemed very highly "in the Lord" and the only question is, who was she?

There is not much likelihood of that question being answered, this side of the Veil. Some have hazarded the view that Mary the mother of Jesus is the one to whom the Epistle was written. That is hardly likely; Mary must almost certainly have died many years before this date. Mary's children - James, Joses, Jude, Simeon, Salome, would have been well advanced in years themselves, almost John's own age. It has to be concluded that we have no clue to this sister's identity.

The word "lady" in verses 1 and 5 is *Kyria* which was a Greek woman's name, the equivalent of the Hebrew "*Martha*" and also a Greek term of respect roughly equivalent to our English word 'madam'. John would be no more likely to use 'madam' in preference to the more intimate term 'sister' than would we toward one who is well known to us and highly esteemed as a sister in Christ. The most reasonable conclusion then is that the sister's name was in fact *Kyria*, and that the Apostle knew her sufficiently well to address her habitually by her "Christian" name. She was evidently a convert, perhaps Jewess, more likely Greek, probably middle-aged and with a family of children, teenagers as we would say, living in one of the Greek towns of Asia where there were brethren, perhaps Colosse or Laodicea or Smyrna, within reach of the Apostle's travelling abilities. She had a sister, whose children at least apparently lived in Ephesus itself so that when the Apostle wrote this letter to his friend *Kyria* he would quite naturally add the words of greeting from those children with which the Epistle is ended.

The entire letter therefore is just a little personal word, a gem of Christian correspondence, somewhat akin to Paul's similar letter to his friend Philemon of Colosse, preserved in the New Testament as an example to us of how the believers in that day felt towards each other. John's solicitude for the spiritual welfare of his friend and sister in Christ comes out very prominently in these few words.

His reference in verse 1, to himself as "the elder" may be equally well a reference to his age or his office. The word "presbyter" may be

understood either way and is normally interpreted in harmony with the context. John must certainly have been one of the oldest brothers in the Faith at the time - probably not far short of a century of years had passed over his head. It is true, moreover, that all the other Apostles had long since gone to their rest, and it may well be that John in humility had ceased calling himself by the name of Apostle since he was now the only Apostle living, and contented himself with the title of "elder" in its sense of a pastor in the church, perhaps referring to himself as *"the Elder"* as indicative of his realisation that the office of leader or chief shepherd of the flock on earth had now devolved upon him as the sole survivor of those who once walked and talked with Jesus, having known him in the flesh. John was the only one left on earth to have heard the memorable words *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation"*.

There is a world of meaning in verse 2 which we can well take to ourselves in these latter difficult days. *"For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever."* So many have become apathetic and indifferent, having lost their first zeal and left their first love, often because of disappointment with some one or other aspect of the faith in which they had placed great trust and which did not turn out as they expected. Some have built their faith on chronology, and when the arrival of the set date and non-fulfilment of the expected event has proved their hopes ill-founded, have given up the Faith in despair and disappointment. We need always to remember that if we do properly and completely appreciate the Truth and allow it to take root in us, giving ourselves in complete and unreserved consecration to God, not to a date nor to work nor on a the basis of a doctrine, then the Truth that is in us will remain with us for ever, and neither the failure of the date or the work or the doctrine will make any difference to that. Even though the work and labour of a life-time disintegrate in ruins about us, all that we have constructed and supported and administered come to an end like the things in the Epistle to the Hebrews that, having decayed and waxed old, are ready to banish away, we can stand up freed from all the obligations and responsibilities that those things have laid upon us and say "Lord, what wilt thou have me do next?" God will never have us idle, neither will disappointment have any place in our lives, whilst we can so profit by our experiences that the Truth remains in us for ever.

Verse 3 is a wonderful greeting. *"Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love."* Here in this text we have the ideal expression of the relationship subsisting between the Father and the Son. Spoken of separately, the two are one in the bestowal of these wondrous blessings of favour, mercy and peace. We cannot say these things come from the Father more than the Son, nor yet from the Son more than the Father. John has no use here for the later "Dark Ages" idea that the Son in his mercy stands between a wrathful Father and a condemned world to save that world from the Father's vengeance. Here we have the Father and Son in perfect unison and perfect oneness extending heavenly blessings upon those in this world who are in the right attitude of heart to receive those blessings. Here we have assurance that in the Age to come the Shepherd who goes out to seek and save the lost sheep and the Father who goes out to meet the returning prodigal are working together in the closest harmony, so that, as Jesus himself said. *"I and my Father are one"*. To these blessings sent from heaven there are conjoined the twin earthly blessings of truth and love. Neither is very much use to us without the other. Together, they yield us all that we need to make our calling and election sure. Truth regulates our intellectual faculties and love regulates our emotional faculties. Neglect either, and we become unbalanced Christians, either all heart and no head, or all head and no heart. In either case we shall not be of those who will need both heart and head for the onerous work of the next Age. This does not mean that we have to excel in the accomplishments both of heart and head before we can be acceptable to God, as though in one ordinary, everyday person are combined all the attributes of Francis of Assisi and Augustine. It is not given to many to reach up to the stature of great men. What is really needed is a due balance, so that the heart does not run away with the head nor the head stifle the impulses of the heart. Each of us needs to pay attention to both attributes, to truth and to love, in our lives.

It is in verses 4 to 6 that John impresses this point with a practical and personal application. *"I rejoiced greatly,"* he says to the unknown sister Kyria, *"that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, Kyria, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is*

love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, that, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it". Here are truth and love again associated, and this time brought into contact with the commandment and so with our Christian walk, which is a practical application indeed. He finds Kyria's children walking in truth, and he rejoices greatly on that account. That is the Father's commandment and he is glad to find them so. Now he beseeches that they walk in Love, which is also God's commandment. He makes haste to affirm that he knows this is not a new commandment - even though Jesus himself had called it such. *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another"*. To John and his disciples it was no longer a new commandment; they had heard it expounded and commended to them every day of their Christian lives. But it was still necessary to re-affirm that commandment more constantly and more fervently than the other. Even in those early days it was easier to follow the law of intellectual knowledge than the law of brotherly love.

So it is with us to-day. Too often is love despised as a weak emotional thing of no real value in the Christian conflict, and knowledge extolled as the be-all and end-all of Christian endeavours. Too easily we forget St. Paul's immortal dictum. *"Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge... and have not love, I am nothing"* (1 Cor. 13.2). Here in this Second Epistle John remains resolutely set upon the theme which appears so prominently in his First, that the Truth of God can only be effectually manifested against a background built up of intellectual appreciation based on absolute sincerity in the quest for Divine Truth, and a heartfelt love for the brethren and for all mankind that is an accurate reflection of the love that God himself bears toward all his creatures. Kyria had evidently brought her children up "in the nurture and fear of the Lord" to understand well these things, and John, knowing that thus they had been taught "from the beginning" has no fonder desire than that they might continue so to walk to the end of their days, living witnesses to the truth that dwelt in them and should remain with them for ever.

AOH

(To be concluded)

THE TEMPLE GROWS

In building Solomon's temple, only blocks of stone prepared at the quarry were used, and no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.

*Stone upon stone, the temple rises,
quiet, no sound, but all parts fit.
God's temple grows at the master's word,
His is the plan,
And all the pieces we could not understand
Make a glorious temple.*

*We are his workmen
He is putting it together by our hands
We are his people
We are putting it together all our lives.*

King Solomon called all the chief men of Israel together to bring the Ark of God into the temple. The priests consecrated themselves, and brought in the Ark. The people made sacrifices of many animals. The priests played on their cymbals, harps and lyres, and a hundred and twenty trumpets. They sang to the Lord: He is good. His love endures for ever.

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Worship God in his temple.
This is for You, Lord, this is for You. We have made it for You.
We give ourselves to You, O Lord, we will serve You for You are holy.
The Lord, He is good, His love is for ever!*

When the Ark of God had been placed in the temple, the temple was filled with a cloud, the shining cloud of God's glory. Solomon knelt with his arms outstretched, and prayed to God.

*O Lord God,
there is no God like You,
in earth or in the depths of space.*

*You keep your promise to love your servants
Who follow your way with all their hearts.*

*How can You make your home with men?
The universe is too small to be your home.*

*O live with us, Lord, accept our praise
and listen to our prayer.*

The glory of the mighty Lord filled the temple, his light and power, the Lord was there.

From 'A House for God' 1990

THE FATHER'S HOUSE AND MANY MANSIONS *John 14: 2-6*

This was an illustration our Lord employed while still in conversation with His own, in those final and intimate hours before He passed to His Cross. He referred to His going, and told them quite plainly, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." That statement of our Lord led to discussion. Only four men spoke, and our Lord answered them: Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Jude. In the course of His replies this symbolic illustration occurs.

These words are like a parable, and they were intended to illustrate. "In My Father's house are many mansions." We must bear in mind that it was a strangely perplexing hour for the disciples, as shown in the things they said to Him when He told them He was going. They could not understand "Where I am going, you cannot come." We are familiar with what happened. Peter said, "Where are You going?" Thomas said, "We do not know where You are going, how can we know the way?" Philip said, "Show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jude said, "How can it be that You will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" Their perplexity is self-evident.

All these questions were concerned with spiritual matters. Peter knew that Jesus was going to death. He had been told that again and again for six months. Now they knew perfectly well His enemies were waiting for Him, and that He was going to death. When Peter said, "Where are You going?" he was peering out into the unknown mysterious spaces. Jesus answered him, and in the course of that answer He employed the words we are looking at.

If Peter was trying to visualize a destination, Thomas, not knowing the destination, was perplexed about the way. How can we know the way, if we do not know where You are going? Jesus replied to him.

Then Philip, that quiet, unobtrusive soul, who thought great and profound things, and did not talk much about them, blurted out the whole of the need of humanity, "Show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

Then Jude, facing the practical present, asked his question. He looked round about the world again, and faced the practical issue of it all.

Let us recognize that their immediate trouble was earthly. They were losing Him. After three and a half years in His close company, travelling here and there; watching Him, listening to Him; now He is going; they are going to be left. That was their trouble.

Yet it was quite evident from everything that He had been saying to them He was going forward with majesty. There was no cringing. He told them He was going to suffer. He told them He was going to death. He told them He was going to resurrection. They never seem to have grasped the fact of the resurrection.

To Peter He said, "Where I am going, you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow afterwards." Peter then replied, "Lord, why cannot I follow You even now? I will lay down my life for You." He never said a finer thing, and he meant it. Our Lord replied, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Verily, verily, I say to you, the cock shall not crow, till you have denied Me three times.... Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions." That is where He was going. "If it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and

prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself."

In these words He was illuminating their whole thinking. They were in the presence of ineffable sorrow at His departure. They would be here in the world wondering. They would not be able to talk to Him, and to watch His deeds. He will be gone, where to? It was in answer to that wonder that He used this illustration.

The figure of speech He employed was "In My Father's house are many mansions." 'House' is the simple word for a dwelling-place, a place of abode. It was the word *oikos*, house. They all lived in houses. 'Mansions' - the word has unfortunate connotations. Some people think the house is a villa residence. Some people have sung about the mansions over yonder. The word is *mone*, which means simply an abode. It only occurs in the New Testament here and in one other place, in verse twenty-three; both times from the lips of Jesus. "In My Father's house are many *mansions*"; "We will come. ..and make Our *abode* with him."

We see at once that the term 'house' is inclusive. I prefer to use for that the word 'dwelling-place,' and for the word 'mansions,' 'abiding-places'. "In My Father's dwelling-place there are many abiding-places." The dwelling-place is greater than the abiding-places. All the abiding-places are in the dwelling-place.

Twice in the course of the ministry of our Lord He made use of that phrase, "My Father's house." The first is in the second chapter of this Gospel. When He was cleansing the temple, He said "My Father's house." There He was referring to the temple. He said it here, "In My Father's house are many mansions."

The figure is that of the temple itself. He referred to the temple as "the house of God" on other occasions. He called it the house of God in Matthew (12. 4). He spoke of it as His own house, assuming the place of God. At the terrible end He referred to the temple not as My Father's house, or My house, but "your house is left unto you desolate." His references were all to the temple. He was familiar with it, and often went into it. We have accounts of His having been in three parts of the temple. At the feast of tabernacles He was in the treasury. At the feast of dedication He was in Solomon's porch. In the case of the widow He was over against the treasury, sitting there.

The temple has often been described as it existed then. It was in

process of building. It was not finished until ten years after the crucifixion of Jesus. There it was, a wonderful building. A quotation from *Jerusalem* by George Adam Smith may help us to see it. "Herod's temple consisted of a house divided like its predecessor into the Holy of Holies, and the Holy Place; a porch; an immediate forecourt with an altar of burnt offering; a Court of Israel; in front of this a Court of Women; and round the whole of the preceding a Court of the Gentiles." Again, "Chambers for officials, and a meeting-place for the Sanhedrin. Against the walls were built side-chambers, about thirty-eight in all." The temple was a house. There were many abiding-places in it. I believe that that temple, as a figure of speech and symbol, was in the mind of our Lord when He said, "In My Father's house there are many abiding-places."

But it is equally certain that He saw the temple in its true significance, and understood its symbolism. Go back to the first words about the construction of that temple, in Exodus. "And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." He saw it as the house of God.

The temple was patterned after things in the heavens. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." When you read that next do not think merely of that wonderful stretch of sky some night when the moon is at the full, and the stars are out, a more wonderful sight than in the day; but all the ultimate beauty is seen in the heavens. That temple, like the tabernacle, and all the account of it is there, is according to the copy of things in the heavens; and it was called the house of God. It had many parts, many sections, many places, all having their value, all having their place. "In my Father's house are many mansions." As though He had said, 'You go up to the temple, and you go into many parts and divisions and rooms. There are many abiding-places in the house'.

Then of what was He talking to them? What was the meaning of it all to those men questing after the beyond, and yet earthbound in their vision and thinking? He was going. They said, 'When He is gone we have lost Him'. He gave them the universe in a flash, "My Father's house." In that whole universe there are many abiding-places. This earth is one, but it is not the only one. All the symbolism of the tabernacle is inadequate to represent the vastness of the universe. There are many abiding-places, and He was showing them that He was merely leaving

one abiding-place in the house to go to another. They could not go then, but they should go; and He was going to another abiding-place within the house. What for? To prepare a place for them.

What a wonderful expression that is, "To prepare a place for you." Somewhere out in the house of God, that vastness that baffles us, somewhere, that we cannot understand, He is going there to get a place fully furnished for you. How does He do it? By being there. As though He said to them, 'You will come presently, and when you come you will be at home because you will find Me there, somewhere in the Father's house'. He did not tell them the locality. He did not tell them what they wanted to know, some description of locality. He said, It is all in the Father's house. There are many abiding places. He was going to prepare a place for them, and He would come again and receive them.

Abridged from G. Campbell Morgan. *The Parables and Metaphors of our Lord*

Our training.....

Do you feel uncomfortable when people give easy answers, tell half-truths, do not take life seriously? This is God's blessing. Cherish the truth within your heart.

Do you feel angry when people are exploited or oppressed? Your anger is God's blessing. Work for their freedom in justice and peace.

Do you weep for those who are hurt and hungry, rejected by their neighbours, their lives destroyed by war? Your tears are God's blessing. Reach out your hand to comfort them, to turn their pain into joy.

Do you feel helpless in this world because the problems are too great? Your urge to be of help is God's blessing. Have faith that you can at least make some small difference in the place where you are.

Based upon an old Franciscan blessing

The pain of longing and striving for God's will to be done in the here and now prepares His children for their service in the coming age.

Quiz Answers

1. A house of prayer Matt.21.13
2. Anna the prophetess Luke 2.36-7
3. A poor widow Mark 12.41-4
4. A vision of the Lord on his throne in the temple Isaiah 6.1
5. At the Beautiful Gate of the temple Acts 3.1,2
6. In man-made temples Acts 17.24
7. From top to bottom Matt. 27.51
8. None Luke 21.5,6
9. In the temple and on the Mount of Olives Luke 21.37
10. At (near) God's altars in the temple Psalm 84.3
11. The temple of his body John 2.19,20
12. John (in the Revelation) Rev.15.5
13. a. At the temple b. In their homes Acts 2.46
14. Boards (panels) of cedar, and gold 1 Kings 6.15,22
15. Psalm 100
16. The glory of the God of Israel (dazzling light of his presence)
Ezek.43.2
17. The King of the Chaldeans (Babylon) 2 Chron.36.17-19
18. There is no such building, God and the Lamb are its temple
Rev.21.22
19. Shishak, King of Egypt 1 Kings 14.25,26
20. Rebuilding the temple of God Ezra 6.13,14

Bible Students Fellowship 2013 Conference **High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon EN11 8SG** **Tuesday 13—Sunday 18 August 2013**

Theme text: 2 Peter 3.11,12

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They shall not hurt or destroy in
all my holy mountain ; for the
earth shall be full of the
knowledge of the Lord as the
waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11.9



The lion shall lie down with the lamb

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly, published to promote knowledge of the Bible, 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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THE PEACEFUL KINGDOM

They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Is.11.9 NRSV

The picture of the lion and the lamb at peace together is not exactly based on a text of scripture. It is in the spirit of Isaiah 11.6, which gives the picture of a wolf living with a lamb, a leopard lying down with a kid goat, and the lion together with the young cattle - and a child herding these assorted creatures, domestic or dangerous. The following verses describe non-carnivorous bears and lions, and snakes that are harmless to unsuspecting little children. We may or may not want to take this as a literal prophecy to do with the world of nature, but certainly it points to a time when human beings stop behaving like wild animals. When the prophecy is fulfilled they will be governed by ideas of what is right and fair, they will know what God requires, and they will be ruled by the Son of David in his peaceful kingdom.

One particular son of David is the subject of a prayer in Psalm 72, which may have been written for Solomon by his father David:

God, give your own justice to the king,

*your own righteousness to the royal son,
so that he may rule your people rightly
and your poor with justice.*

*Let the mountains and hills
bring a message of peace for the people.
Uprightly he will defend the poorest,
he will save the children of those in need,
and crush their oppressors.*

*Like sun and moon he will endure,
age after age,
welcome as rain that falls on the pasture,
and showers to thirsty soil.*

*In his days virtue will flourish,
a universal peace till the moon is no more;
his empire shall stretch from sea to sea,
from the river to the ends of the earth.*

*The wild desert tribes will cower before him
and his enemies grovel in the dust;
the kings of Tarshish and of the islands
will pay him tribute.*

*The kings of Sheba and Seba
will offer gifts;
all kings will do him homage,
all nations become his servants.*

*He will free the poor man who calls to him,
and those who need help,
he will have pity on the poor and feeble,
and save the lives of those in need;*

he will redeem their lives from exploitation and outrage,

*their lives will be precious in his sight.
(Long may he live, may gold from Sheba be given him!)
Prayer will be offered for him constantly,
blessings invoked on him all day long.*

*Grain everywhere in the country,
even on the mountain tops,
abundant as Lebanon its harvest,
luxuriant as common grass!*

*Blessed be his name for ever,
enduring as long as the sun!
May every race in the world be blessed in him,
and all the nations call him blessed!*

Jerusalem Bible

Besides being a prophecy, this psalm is a picture of what a king could be, what a king ought to be, in Solomon's time. It is a scene centred in the land of Israel, extending out to Arabia and Ethiopia and from the River Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, even to Spain. All the kings of these lands give tribute to this ideal righteous king, a great king above all other kings. It was a picture which Solomon found it hard to live up to, great as was his wealth and his wisdom.

Today, three thousand years on in human history, the qualities and requirements of a modern ruler are not very different. Modern rulers are judged on their ability to provide justice in a peaceful stable society. Their regime needs to be permanent, one in which good behaviour is rewarded, the poor are protected from exploitation and outrage, and economic and agricultural prosperity can be achieved. Hostile powers will show a proper respect, and funds will be found for a system of international peace. This is what world society requires. As Paul says, Christian people should pray *'for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity'* (1 Timothy 2.2).

In our time not every national ruler is a 'king', he (or she) might be President, Prime Minister, Head of Government, whatever. But every ruler, however he is called, has a regime, with layers of officials high and low, a police force and a standing army. In this he is much like

the ancient kings, but today there are the added factors of modern weaponry, aerial transport, technology - which can be used to issue orders or spy on dissidents. The basis of stable society is that the people, as in the old times, must accept being controlled, perhaps through fear, or they may accept that the government knows best and that is the reason why they should be obeyed.

The ruler prophesied in Isaiah 11 has wisdom and understanding. This is needed in governing a nation, or in controlling a world. He also has counsel and might - might to enforce his will, and counsel to have a good strategy. Thirdly, he has knowledge and fear of the Lord: modern rulers have access to an astonishing amount of knowledge on every subject, but are they equipped to give moral leadership? The ruler prophesied does not judge by appearances, but enforces what is right, according to God-given insight.

When Jesus Christ first appeared on earth, he had all these qualities. But he did not choose to use his power, except to give signs of who he was, and what sort of person the Israelites were dealing with. He refused to become their king. They would not have had him anyway, as the people in the parable said, 'We will not have this man to rule over us'. So His peaceful kingdom awaits his coming again.

The 'lion' and the 'lamb' cannot live peaceably together, yet. We have not learned, or been taught, the art. On one day recently the news reports told of: daily bloodshed in Syria; a trial for gang rape in India; accidents to planes and trains in the U.S. and Canada; floods, fires and dust storms which may be due to human activity; racially motivated disturbances... and meanwhile millions go short of their daily bread, and it was a surprise to learn that there is one small island in the world where the authorities do not take bribes. All this may not yet amount to the 'World Chaos' which some have been telling us about for a hundred years and more, but the world does need strong control. A king. Our king, who is already ruling in our own hearts and lives, if we let him.

Magazine Content

What is published is believed to have a wide interest,
but everything printed may not necessarily be
the opinion of the editor and his colleagues.

A RICH YOUNG RULER

The Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19.16-30, Mark 10.17-31, Luke 18.18-30) is one of the failures of the New Testament. Those who comment on the story find a lot against him. It does not help that he was affluent and privileged. Jesus said, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6.24) as contrasted to those who are poor, hungry or weeping, and would be blessed. Later on, Jesus' half-brother James had some hard things to say against the rich (James 1.9-11, 5.1-6).

This young man, when he first spoke with Jesus and called him 'Good Teacher', seemed to be rebuked for using the word good to refer to anyone but God. Was he perhaps too free in giving out compliments, and pleasing his listeners by praising them without much discrimination?

One commentator describes this man as 'over-pious'. He made the easy claim that he had always kept the commandments. Was he one of those who are so busy keeping the rules that they miss out on sympathy and understanding for others? Someone describes him as 'bumptious' - assertively conceited, too pleased with himself. "Oh, the commandments. Yes, I've kept all those."

The crowning failure was that when he was offered the golden opportunity to become one of Jesus' circle of disciples, he failed to take it. He rejected Jesus. He was one of those whose lives were full of the cares of this world and the lure of wealth. How disappointing that so promising a young man should miss out on a great opportunity.

So much may be said against this young man. In his favour it must be said that when Jesus looked keenly full into his eyes, Jesus loved him. What did Jesus see in him?

First, enthusiasm. When Jesus and his disciples were just setting out, this young fellow had come running, so as not to miss Jesus. He bowed down before Jesus to give him due honour and respect. He recognised that Jesus was truly good - he may have heard Jesus teach, or witnessed a miracle - and (theology apart) recognised that He was no ordinary person, and a cut above all the other rabbis.

Though he was well brought up in the Jewish faith and enjoyed God-given prosperity, he could see there was something more in life that he was missing. He desired eternal life. Was there some great

thing he could do to earn it?

And when questioned, had he kept the commandments, he could answer yes with a clear conscience. With bright eyes he looked at Jesus. Of course he had kept them, he knew his duty. And it was a joy to be faithful to the God of his fathers. He may have been a little naive, perhaps - it is not the way of young people to look too closely at their own actions or motives. But the enthusiasm, the keenness, the straightforward zeal to do what it takes to be acceptable to God, was all there. Looking at him, Jesus loved him.

What was Jesus expecting this young man to do when He made his offer, "You want to be perfect? Well, sell your possessions, give to the poor, come and be a disciple with me. You will have riches where it counts, in heaven." Was it a genuine offer, or a test? We can hardly imagine it was not a genuine offer. Jesus would not ask of him something that was impossible, Jesus loved this young man, and he was obviously good disciple material. "Come and join me!" But it was also a test, which the young man failed, and was sad. In failing it he learned a lot. He learned his own limitations. He learned that eternal life is not something you can earn by good deeds. He learned that to follow Jesus in consecrated living is a supremely serious matter.

We do not know what happened afterwards. This young fellow had lost the chance of a great vocation (though the terms and conditions of that vocation would change at Calvary). Did he afterwards, by God's grace, have other opportunities? Did he realise that to have riches is a responsibility, and they can be used rightly? Did the call by Jesus, that he had been unable to respond to, remain in his mind, influencing his future life, and waiting to be answered in a new way?

We are told in scripture of a rich man who did sell his possessions and come and join the Christian community. His name was Barnabas, and some have speculated that this was the same person as the rich young ruler, obeying the call belatedly. Be that as it may (and it is only speculation) the young man would never forget what he saw in Jesus' eyes when he looked at him, and loved him.

This is something to remember if we ourselves are aware of having failed, or we know someone who has failed. There is no limit to Jesus' love, and eternal life is in His gift.

GC

BE PATIENT AND STAND FIRM

(James 5.8)

transcribed from the tape of a talk by Robert Clipsham, High Leigh 1977

There is the story of a minister who was walking up and down in his study, very agitated, and when he was asked the reason for his agitation he replied that his trouble was that he was in a hurry but God did not appear to be in a hurry. It seems to me that James in chapter 5 was spelling out some of the world's injustices and exhorts his brethren not to lose patience if the day when things would be put right seemed to be delayed, saying, 'Be patient brethren, stablish your hearts till the Lord comes'. He was probably writing to some who were of similar mind to our brother minister. They were in a hurry but the Lord it seemed to them was not in a hurry.

The words are just as relevant to us today, for we also long for the coming of the Lord and we tend to become impatient and cry out 'How long, O Lord, how long?' especially after some sadness either of a cosmic nature or of a personal nature strikes us. Who is there who has not had this thought? 'How long, O Lord, how long?' But while this eternal cry rises involuntarily to our lips, the faith of the Christian is that time is an essential factor in God's government as well as faith. When the minister said God was not in a hurry, he unwittingly gave witness to the fundamental truth of God's universal administration, that God is never in a hurry. He knows the end from the beginning, and He works all things according to his own purpose and will. He never needs to be in a hurry.

The whole course of man's history is in God's mind, but this is not kept just secret there. He declares and He tells it. It is not merely God's thought, but His intimate concern. All His dealings with man are under the control of His divine counsel, his intentions and his purposes. This is the sure and only foundation, on which every Christian hope is built, that God knows what He is doing. As James says, He is the Father of lights in whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning. The lights of sun, moon and stars, they change and vary. He who created them never changes.

So James can with full confidence appeal to all to be patient, fully assured that what has been promised will be fulfilled by Him who declares 'I am God, there is none else, declaring from ancient times the

things that are not yet seen. My counsel shall stand, I will do all my pleasure.'

Furthermore, let us try to grasp something of the vast and the mighty scale on which our God works. For our sake, and all creation's sake, He will never allow himself to be hurried by our fretfulness, our impatience. I think of John Henry Newman's lovely little prayer, '*Lord who Thy thousand years dost wait to work a thousandth part of Thy vast plan, for us create, with zeal, a patient heart.*' That is what we want, what we need. Not just a passive, resigned patience, but a patience burning with zeal and gratitude and expectation as we pray 'Come, Lord Jesus, come... thy kingdom come.' It is because God is so good as to count a thousand years as one day and one day as a thousand years, that we are able to have with zeal a patient heart. If he was anything less, brethren, with the years patience would weary. But because we know nothing is haphazard in the Divine purpose but all mapped out from beginning to end 'according to the dispensation of the fulness of times' we wait with eager patience for his good end and his time.

When I was young, we had an illuminated text, it showed a small branch of a horse chestnut tree with a very prickly green unopened chestnut, whilst further along there was one that was opened, showing a lovely brown chestnut, when we were boys we called them conkers. Scattered about the picture there were hazel nuts, some opened, some still in their prickly covering. Then, beautifully inscribed were these words, 'Be patient brethren, in due time' These three words have remained with me over the years. They are the three vital words which have governed the outworking of everything of God's purpose in the past and they still remain as the expression of what is still to be accomplished and brought to completion *in the dispensation of the fulness of times* - one translator translates that lovely phrase, that wondrous phrase, this way: 'the divine programme of history', and he emphasised that the Greek word used of times there speaks, not of any old time, but decisive times in the fulfilment of God's purposes.

In due time, Christ died, says Paul. To him this was not just one episode among others taking place simply because chance would have it so. It was an event in time, but it was at God's time. It was at the most decisive time of all events in history. Christ died for us. At the first advent it was in the fulness of time that God sent forth his Son. A

Greek scholar points out that it would have been quite inadequate to say that time had fully come, for the word 'the' is strongly emphasised in the Greek, and it was only when *the* fulness of time had come that the long anticipated coming of the Son of God was revealed and he was then sent forth. It was God's own moment, long awaited in patience. It was the vindication of God's own word and promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head.

Even in the life of our Lord the principle is the same. His words were so often, 'My time has not yet come', but when it *had* come he said 'The hour has come'. All is in accordance with the divine timetable, and though at times to us God's time seems slow, let us ever remember that He is preparing and working not for a few weeks and not for a few months. He is working for eternity.

One old saint said, 'Though He tarry past our time, he will not tarry past the due time'. Behind all the events of history, the eternal purpose of God is being worked out day by day and that purpose is to restore the whole creation to find its one head in Christ (as Weymouth puts it), while the NEB says 'His purpose is that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ'. I was thrilled to read what a Christian writer says about this very verse. 'God is at work throughout the entire universe, drawing together not only his church but drawing together the entire human family, and not only the entire human family but every throbbing element of all creation has been drawn together by God in his eternal purpose.' This is God who has planned, staggering to our finite minds.

James exhorts us to be patient for the fulfilment of the next stage of God's purpose. That is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, urging us to be patient, 'Stablish your heart for the coming of the Lord draws nigh.' While James cites the patience of the farmer arising from his past experience, so the Christian's past experience of the sureness of the Lord's promise gives him patience that his promise that he will come again will be fulfilled. When General Booth lay dying he whispered to his son Bramwell, 'Bramwell, the promises...' Then with great effort he raised himself and said. 'The promises, the promises of God are sure. They're sure, Bramwell, if you will only believe.' They are sure. Whether we believe or whether we don't believe, God's promises will never fail. The Psalmist says they are like silver purified seven times in

the furnace, flawless, unmarred by inability or unwillingness to fulfil, as so many of our promises are. His promises are the sure promise of the future, of our promises it is only certain ones which can be delivered in the light of its fulfilment. Men's promises. How many promises we get from our governments. I don't blame them, they promise and can't fulfil. God promises and He will fulfil. And his word will not fail. There is the moment which He alone knows, when he will again send Jesus Christ to complete the work of deliverance and salvation commenced at Calvary. This is the moment all creation is waiting for on tiptoe of eager anticipation, for the universe, not just this earth, but for the universe, all things in heaven and in earth to be freed from the shackles of change and decay. Such a vision brings the involuntary cry as we look around us and we experience the pain and sorrow which Paul speaks of as a groaning creation. How long, O Lord, how long? But God waits patiently for the moment which his unerring wisdom of love has fixed from the beginning. Running right through life and time and space, history and experience, is the one incomparable power of God's will, and nothing can stop it. Our portion, as it was with the Lord at the crisis of his life, to worship and in his words say, 'Thy will be done'.

A beautiful hymn expresses the thought which suggests patience, *'God holds the key to all unknown, and I am glad; if other hands would hold the key, or if he trusted it to me, I might be sad'*. We would indeed be sad, for our ways are ways of expediency and of change and they lead to disastrous results. I think of the naturalist who told of his impatience. He came upon a wonderful emperor moth, struggling wildly to force its way through the narrow neck of the cocoon. It was a wonderful and lovely specimen, and thinking it a pity it should be subjected to such an ordeal, he took his lancet and slit the cocoon. The moth came out but its glorious colour never developed, its wings never expanded, the hues and tints that should have adorned them never appeared. It crept about, and died. The struggle was nature's way of developing wings and colours until every particle would have blushed with beauty. The naturalist never forgot the lesson. He had saved the little creature from the struggle but he had ruined it and slain it in the process. Man's impatience always ends in disaster. God's way is perfect, and however long it may seem, the power of his patience will ensure the glorious climax of his purpose and his will. Sorrow may and does come in the night brethren, but joy

will come in the morning. It will be the morning of the coming of Christ.

No impatience is allowed to mar God's work but all will come about according to the times and the dates which the Father has set within his own control and his own power. He is patiently waiting for each age to progress towards the climax of his vast divine purpose and plan. James speaks of Job as an example of patience but to the Christian it is God the Father who is the supreme example and indeed the very essence of patience.

Both Paul and Peter speak of God's patience, both with us, and in his working out of his purposes in the world. They use words of gratitude and praise as the God of all patience and consolation, who is very patient towards us and allows us all the time we need to be prepared for when the day of the Lord comes. In our own personal experience dear brethren we know that he has been very gracious and very great in his patience toward us. He has not dealt with us after our failures, he has not dealt with us after our sins, our weaknesses, our faithlessnesses, but according to his longsuffering kindness and patience. With Martin Luther we cannot do ought but marvel at the patience of God in the face of our fickleness. I remember brethren, at the end of the Second World War even Winston Churchill had something of this in mind when he said in one of his perorations, he asked that God would grant mankind his continued patience for them to mend their ways. The patience is granted by God, but not through man's intervention but according to his ultimate gracious eternal will.

I was reading the other day of a very lovely expression by Augustine. It was in Latin, and I had to ask one of our friends who knew Latin to explain it to me. He said - he didn't know what I was wanting it for - 'This means that God is patient because he is eternal'. Or, he thought it might be, 'God is eternally patient'. Those are wonderful thoughts. If our Father in heaven, the great God of the universe is patient, who are we to be impatient? But let us take hold of this great privilege we have in all humility and gratitude and be patient with the patience of God himself. With Jeremiah we can say that it is good to both hope and to quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.

James tells us to be like the farmer, but we are different to the farmer, in that whilst he can more or less determine the date of harvest, the Christian cannot determine the time of his Lord's coming again.

But whilst Jesus told us no man knows the day nor the hour he did give us signs indicating conditions which point towards the climax of the ages. It is precisely ignorance of the set times which lends power to the repeated words, 'to be ready'. Mr Moody used to say, 'If Christ had said I will not come back for two thousand years, none would have begun to watch till then'. But the Christian is to be looking for his Lord always, and so we are not told when Christ is to come, but we are told to watch. James urges us to establish our hearts, for it is while we watch the passage of time that the test comes. The thought is of 'establish your hearts', 'strengthen', or as one translator puts it, 'put iron into your hearts'. Phillips has a lovely paraphrase of this, which appeals to me much. He says, 'Be patient. Rest your heart on the ultimate certainty of the Lord's coming.'

If in any matter of concern to us we know beyond doubt of the successful issue, however long it may be, the burden of anxiety will be shed. Similarly because the coming of the Lord is beyond doubt, the Christian heart is strengthened and at rest because we know, whether we are taken before He comes - and who knows when - or whether we are taken when He comes, the ultimate issue will be one of full salvation and deliverance into his presence. This is fulness of deliverance, fulness of salvation from present conditions into the fulness of life. Whichever way it is, his coming and our salvation is nearer than when we first believed, and day by day and moment by moment the time becomes shorter. Shorter for us to show our zeal and our love, shorter for the work of purifying our hearts our minds to be accomplished.

I hear now and again a message from the Pacific Mission in Chicago. This has been open for over a hundred years day and night, and the number of people who have been brought to Christ runs into thousands. Someone said to the man who was in charge of it many many years ago, 'Why don't you go away and take some rest. You're killing yourself by sticking so close to that mission. Take a vacation.' 'I would never do that' he said. 'Every time I go down to the mission I think it may be the last time and the Lord will come. I would not miss being at my post for anything in the world. When Jesus comes I want to be right there where he expects me to be.' Brethren, when the moment of death comes to us, whether the Lord has come or whether he has not come, is not the same principle involved, being where he would expect us to be? Because for all of us our time is short, our

attitude should be a similar one. As the Russian Christian wrote, *'O Lord, with our hearts and ears open, awaiting thy shout would we be, the summons that calls us to heaven, for ever to be Lord with Thee. The word of thy patience we're keeping, Thy radiancy draws us apart, a beacon us heavenward beckoning, to meet Thee the hope of our heart.'* Brethren, this is the glorious and glowing apostolic hope and coming for which the church has patiently waited and longed for well nigh two thousand years. All have known and loved and lived under the power and influence of the expectation of the Lord's coming.

The truth has been and continues to be that 'the Lord draweth nigh'. Time is short, says Paul. Today this is intensified, brethren by the significance of the increasing signs which he gave which would precede his coming. But let us ever remember the three essential elements of the Christian's faith. He has already come once. He is already beside us and we have his glorious companionship day by day. And He is coming again in glory. All are equally precious and wonderful, and these are the decisive factors which alone can establish our hearts so that they can never be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Because Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever, and He will never fail us, never disappoint those who love him and love his appearing.

When we are waiting at any time it makes all the difference who we're waiting for, and what it is we wait for, whether it is with patience, with anxiety, or in anticipation. The crowds recently waited patiently long hours day and night to catch a glimpse of our queen. It was for a few brief moments, and then she was gone. The Christian looks for the Lord from heaven, King of kings and Lord of lords; the one who loved us even to the extent of dying for us. Dying for us on the cruel cross. We cannot remind ourselves too often of whom it is we wait for at his coming. It is this same Jesus — the men in white said — who will come again 'as ye have seen him go'. The same Jesus who brought to us the knowledge and the love and the light of God and his purpose. Whose words continue to us today to be life and spirit, meat and drink. Who though deserted by his friends loved them to the end. Who healed and befriended those in need, and to whom none came without response. Who blessed and had time for little children. Who rode humbly into Jerusalem on a donkey. Who washed his disciples' feet. And who bore at Calvary in sorrow and in pain our sins and the

sins of all mankind. And yet He loved so greatly, so wholly, so fully that he found an excuse, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' It is this same Lord Jesus for whom we wait, brethren, and though he now comes in victory, he will still be the same gracious Lord, full of grace and truth. Still our shepherd, saviour, friend, our prophet, priest and king. He who has so patiently put up with us in all our ups and our downs, our faithlessness and our wanderings. He is the one to whom we have so often gone and he has never failed us or turned us away. He patiently endured the cross for us, and now he patiently endures with us. The same yesterday, today and for ever.

The father of a little boy had been promoted to a very high post. He looked at his father and said, 'Do you think he will still let me call him Daddy?' The Lord Jesus is the same Jesus who will come, but he will come in glory. The writer to the Hebrews says, 'Let us consider him lest we be wearied and faint' - or as Beck puts it, 'Think of what he did. It will keep you, it will help you not to get tired and give up'. Think of what he did. Think of who he was. 'It will help you not to get tired and give up.' We wait for this same Jesus and it is precisely brethren because he is the same Jesus whom not having seen we love, that we ask not whether he is worth patiently waiting for, but whether we are worthy to know and to wait for his coming. The crucial and final question for every one of us is not our assessment of our Lord Jesus Christ, but his assessment of us.

I think of the old negro lady who was dying and how she reacted to the suggestion of her friends who gathered round her bed and said 'The angels will soon come for you'. 'Oh no', she said, 'Not the angels'. The Lord himself shall descend from heaven and the dead in Christ shall rise first. The Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And there was a Scottish covenanter who, three hundred years ago, was condemned to the scaffold and was given four days to live. As he was led back to prison he cried out to the crowds who were weeping, 'Trust God, Trust God'. Then, catching sight of a friend, he called out, 'Good news, Good news', with a shining face and eyes. 'I am within four days journey of enjoying the sight of Jesus Christ.' For most of us, brethren, it is not the scaffold, but our experience is as it was for the Thessalonians. It is to turn from the idols of self and the world and to serve the living God and to wait for the coming of his Son from heaven. The young covenanter had four days to live, but his uppermost thought in his mind was to enjoy the sight of Jesus Christ.

This was his hope, and in this hope he strengthened his conviction and his patience. As oxygen is to the lungs so is hope to patience. When we have hope we walk not to darkness but to light, not to the night but to the dawn. It is what Paul speaks of as 'the patience of hope' in our Lord Jesus Christ. Because our hope is in him it becomes not only hope but certainty.

In the early days of persecution of the church, a Christian was taken before the judges. He told them that nothing could shake him because he believed that if he was true to God, God would be true to him. 'Do you think' asked the judge 'that the likes of you will go to God in his glory?' 'I do not think' replied the humble Christian man, 'I know'. It is the certainty of this hope which becomes the power in the life of every one of us who have seen, and know, the face of Jesus Christ here. It is the power to patiently wait so that when the Lord comes we may be made like him and see him as he is, and enjoy the sight of Jesus Christ our Lord.

At the present brethren we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see him face to face. Here there is always the veil of sense and of time but when he comes 'the rending veil shall thee reveal, all glorious as thou art'. *'I have seen the face of Jesus'*, writes the hymn writer, *'Tell me nothing more beside. I have heard the voice of Jesus, all my soul is satisfied. In the radiance of thy glory first I saw his blessed face, and forever shall that glory be my home, my dwelling place.'* That shining face our brother thought in four days to enjoy - the sight of Jesus Christ. How many days are left to us? Brethren, we know not. But whether it is today or many many days, we know it will be the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul says in that wonderful letter to Timothy, 'God's own right time will show who is the blessed and only ruler - potentate - the King of kings and Lord of lords'

It will be at his own right time. Because this is so, Paul urges us to be patient, stablish our hearts, rest our hearts on the ultimate certainty of the coming of the Lord, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Be not weary in well doing, for *in his due time* we shall reap if we faint not. Is this harvest of our patience and hope worth waiting for, brethren? Is it? To enjoy seeing the sight of Jesus Christ. 'To whom shall we go?' asked Peter. And our reply is that there is none other lamb, none other name, none other hope in heaven, in earth or on the sea, but Jesus Christ the hope of our lives. May we all be patient until the coming of the Lord. Amen.

THE EXODUS EXPERIENCE

The people of Israel had spent a long time in Egypt, hundreds of years, so they had become culturally accustomed to that land and the customs, ideas, power of the Egyptians. So the Exodus meant a cultural shift. They had entered Egypt as an immigrant population of asylum seekers and had become slaves when the Egyptian regime changed.

In the Exodus under Moses' leadership God gave them two new things, freedom, and an inheritance - the promised land. They needed to enter into these things. They had to learn how to be a people with a culture of freedom. They had to learn what it meant to be possessors of an inheritance instead of people with no rights and no property other than what they could carry. Freedom meant they could no longer sit back and wait to be told what to do. Someone had to lead, and the people had to choose to follow their leaders. They had to learn a new way of relying upon God, and how to relate to one another in freedom, respecting the freedom that each other had. Hence Jethro's suggestion of Moses delegating his authority in smaller matters to leaders who were appointed among the people. Hence the system of laws to guide their relationships.

Their culture required to change, from that of slavery to that of liberty. As slaves they were bursting to be free, but they did not know how to handle the responsibilities and rigours of a free life (Ex.16.3). In liberty they needed to develop the mindset of enjoying their freedom and accepting its responsibilities.

They needed to stop whingeing (Numbers 16.12-). They needed to gain faith, not acting as slaves dependent on the will of their masters, but believing the promises of God.

They expected defeat, as seen in the reports of the spies sent before them into Canaan (Numbers 13.26-). They needed to expect victory, needing a Caleb mentality which did not assume they would always be defeated.

They needed to change their focus from thinking first of their physical wants to thinking first of God's ability to provide. Doubtless filling their stomachs was a pressing need, but their thoughts were of the need rather than the the answer to it. Moses taught them to expect that God would provide, a culture of faith.

They had to change from being grasping to being trusting. Some

of them tried to keep the manna (Ex. 16.20), rather like an animal which bolts down its food as if there were no tomorrow. What they needed was to develop the trust that God would provide, even if they could not see how, to concentrate on the spiritual rather than the physical world.

As God's people we too may need to consider what is our culture, how we are looking to the grace and effective kindness of God. It is a matter of how we live our lives - the way we do things, the words we use, the values we live by, the priorities we have, the things that unite us, what we believe, how we express ourselves, the attitudes which underlie all our behaviour. In all these things, we can mature into Christ, and therefore become more like Him (Eph.4.13, Col.1.28).

Selected

THE GREEN BIBLE

There are so many different Bibles that are published these days, not only different translations but also Bibles incorporating various comments, helps and study guides. This is not something new. Even before the King James Bible was produced, one of the reasons the English authorities did not like the 'Geneva Bible' was because of the explanatory comments and footnotes. In our time, buying a King James Bible (AV) might mean obtaining a smart looking white Bible to be carried at a wedding, with no notes or helps and print too small to read. Or it might mean a book with Scofield notes, or a Thompson Chain Bible. Even a perfectly ordinary black Bible, with a leather cover and reasonably large print and published by Oxford University Press might be found to have a system of references, a concordance, a subject index, maps, and a tiny summary at the head of each chapter to say what it was about (if you could agree with what the reverend editor was saying). Children's Bibles range from picture Bibles with the stories simply retold and whole chunks left out, to the 'Kid's Life Application Bible' which is a complete text with comments and questions intended to provoke young people into serious thought about what having faith means to them. So, in this day of environmental concerns, it was not really a surprise to come upon the Green Bible (*published HarperCollins, 2008*).

The 'Green Bible' is similar in one way to the 'Red Letter' Bible, which has been about for a long time. The red letter Bible highlights the actual words of Jesus by printing them in red, so that they stand out. The Green Bible aims to pick out passages of scripture relevant to the environment, and prints them in green. Unfortunately green ink does not stand out like red ink, and so the passages 'highlighted' are, for those with failing eyesight, more difficult to read than the ordinary black print. A further problem is that, while it is fairly easy for editors of the red letter Bible to identify Jesus' actual words in the New Testament (apart from some passages in John's gospel where it is difficult to decide where Jesus' reported words end and John's comment begins), to decide which passages should be highlighted because of relevance to 'green' issues is far more difficult. It is a matter of personal judgment, and one can imagine some very interesting discussions among the editorial team when the text was being prepared for publication.

There are in fact four criteria which they have applied. A text may have been selected because it shows (i) how God and Jesus interact with all creation and care for it and are intimately involved, or (ii) how all the elements of creation, land, water, air, plants, animals, human beings, are interdependent, or (iii) how nature responds to God, or (iv) how we are called to care for creation.

How successful the editors are in their choice a reader must decide. It is sometimes difficult to see why certain texts are included and others omitted. For example, the Lord's Prayer as recorded in Luke 11 is not given green status at all, but when it appears in Matthew 6, there is green print for '*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.*' In Romans 8 it is reassuring to find the words highlighted:

'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while

we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.'

It takes a little more thought to see why, among all the rest of that marvellous chapter, it is only verse 9 that is selected as specially 'green': *'But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.'* Perhaps the underlying 'green' thought is that a renewed earth needs renewed men and women to care for it?

The version of Scripture used in the Green Bible is the NRSV (1989), which has a good reputation among scholars. As for 'helps', as well as a normal concordance there is a 'Green Subject Index' - this might be more helpful than the highlighting itself in the study of environmental themes in scripture. The 'Green Bible Trail' is an outline with questions on selected scriptures, especially suitable for group study, in six sections, and incorporating suggestions for green behaviour in daily life.

The volume begins with a collection of essays. The topics are: Reading the Bible through a Green Lens; Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation; Why I am Green; Creation Theology— a Jewish perspective; Knowing our Place on Earth - learning our responsibility from the Old Testament; Jesus is Coming - plant a Tree!; The Dominion of Love; Loving the Earth is Loving the Poor; Teachings on Creation through the Ages. This list gives an idea of what is covered, not that everyone will want to study these essays.

At a time when the environment and climate change is a subject of wide concern, it is good, through this publication, to be reminded of God's will and purpose for the earth. While we look to the future and pray 'Thy kingdom come', we who believe are already living in the spirit of that kingdom and so we do good to all men as we have opportunity.

RESURRECTION SURPRISE

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Christians who lived at Tyari, a small town in Kurdistan, had an interesting way of treating lunatics. They would bury them alive, with a full church burial service, but leaving a small hole through which the patient could breathe. After twenty-four hours they would disinter the lunatic. Sometimes the nervous shock would have had beneficial results!

The Rev. Wigram was an Anglican minister resident in the district. He wrote a book, "The cradle of Mankind, Life in Eastern Kurdistan". He writes of one such case that came to his notice. "The man was buried all right, and in due time his friends came to disinter him. As soon as the stones were removed, he sprang up, crying 'I am risen! I am risen! It is the Last Day!'

Then, looking round upon the men who had come to resurrect him, he exclaimed disgustedly, 'But who would have expected to see *you* at the Resurrection of the Just?'"

So many of us are inclined to limit the scope of Divine salvation to a narrow circle of our fellow-believers, or consign to Divine disfavour those who may not agree with us on the interpretation of the Scriptures or the practice of the Christian life. Maybe our Master, seeing deeper than we do, does not attach over-much importance to these little eccentricities of ours. But it is good for us to realise that He is quietly choosing his own from every part of the "field", and that we do not well to condemn other earnest souls as unworthy of the Kingdom because in some fashion or another they do not measure up to our own conception of the Divine calling.

HYMN AND SCRIPTURE - A QUIZ

Many of our hymns are closely based on scripture. Some, like 'The Lord's my Shepherd' are an exact paraphrase of a psalm (Ps.23 in this case). Others start off from a scriptural text, and then go on with thoughts, feelings, other scriptures as the writer is inspired. This custom began when the Bible in English became widely known. It was useful for a congregation, when many of them perhaps could not read, to have scripture in verse form, something that was easy to remember, and could be set to music. The Psalms themselves are of course poems, but of a different kind from the metrical versions composed in English during the last four hundred years.

In our quiz, we have taken verses of well known hymns, and the task is to match each one with the verse of scripture on which it is based. To make it easy, we print the scripture verses (in jumbled order) but you might also wish to exercise your brains by finding the references.

Match each hymn to a scripture, and find where it is in the Bible.

Hymns

With capitals and punctuation as in Hymns and Psalms

- 1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.
- 2 O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast
And our eternal home.
- 3 Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne;
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one.
- 4 I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend his cause,
Maintain the honour of his word,
The glory of his cross.
- 5 God is the refuge of his saints,
When storms of sharp distress invade;
Ere we can offer our complaints,
Behold him present with his aid!
- 6 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing.
- 7 When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
- 8 Sweet is the work, my God, my King,
To praise thy name, give thanks and sing;
To show thy love by morning light,
And talk of all thy truth at night.
- 9 Awake, our souls; away, our fears;
Let every trembling thought be gone;
Awake, and run the heavenly race,
And put a cheerful courage on.

10 Blest be the everlasting God,
 The Father of our Lord!
 Be his abounding mercy praised,
 His majesty adored!

Scriptures

A God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

B But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

C Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

D Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

E He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

F They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations....He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.

G And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.

H Make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King....Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: the world, and they that dwell therein..... for he cometh to judge the earth.

I For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

J It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord... to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.

Answers on page 186

It so happens that all the above ten hymns are the work of Isaac Watts (1674-1748). They are only a small sample of his work, he is credited with 750 hymns.

Isaac Watts is a prime example of someone whose natural gifts are used to the glory of God. When he was a child, and in trouble for keeping his eyes open during the prayers, he wrote "*A little mouse, for want of stairs Ran up a rope to say its prayers.*" You can just imagine a boy watching a mouse in church when he should have been praying! It was the same person, in his maturity, who wrote 'When I survey the wondrous cross...'

Watts was born in Southampton during the reign of King Charles II. His father, also called Isaac, was twice imprisoned because of his non-conformist beliefs. Isaac, because he was not Church of England, was not able to take up an opportunity to go to Oxford University, but instead went in 1690 to the dissenting academy at Stoke Newington (London). He was expert in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, Logic and Theology. He was for a time a private tutor, and became minister of an independent chapel in London.

It is said of his hymns that they made the scriptures personal to the singer - 'invested the text with personal spirituality', while keeping close to the original - 'emotional subjectivity, doctrinal objectivity'. He took his teaching duties seriously, and many children and young people in the following century must have been affected by his song 'Against Idleness and Mischief' in the publication 'Divine and Moral Songs for the use of children'.

SECOND JOHN

The Second Epistle - Part Two

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." (vs. 7.)

These words are virtually a repetition of those in the early part of chapter 4 of John's First Epistle.

There were many theories abroad in John's own day which

would, as we would say, "deny the Ransom". They were directed toward doing away with the reality of Jesus' earthly life, denying that the "Man Jesus Christ" was in actual fact the Son of God sent down from heaven, trying to find some doctrinal philosophy which would do away with the necessity of believing that Jesus did indeed die on the Cross, descend into the grave, and rise again on the third day. So they supposed, variously, that the visible man Jesus of Nazareth was an ordinary man of Adam's race in whom the Divine Spirit Jesus dwelt for three and a half years, from Jordan to Calvary, taking his departure at the moment the human man died on the Cross; or, another theory, that the whole appearance of Jesus on earth was a phantom, a kind of optical illusion, the Divine Spirit being himself invisible but manifesting himself through an appearance like unto a man having no reality. All such theories deny the very basis of the Atonement as we understand it and as John understood it. To him, as to us, the Word was made flesh, born of a virgin, and lived on earth a Man amongst men, experiencing the joys and sufferings common to men. His death on the Cross was a real death and for that short time in Joseph's tomb He was truly dead. His resurrection on the third day was a true resurrection and from thence He sat on the right hand of God, "from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead". All this was essential doctrine to John and it is essential doctrine to us. We cannot maintain Christian faith without it and we cannot "profess and call ourselves Christians" unless we believe it. Hence John is by no means extreme or fanatical when he brands all who refuse thus to confess that Jesus came in the flesh as deceivers and antichrists.

We must note here that the creeds of Christendom themselves claim that Jesus came in the flesh: Christian churches in general do hold to the reality of our Lord's humanity. The old gnostic and other theories of John's day no longer have any influence among responsible Christian people. Certain small groups of "mystics" who try to create synthetic religions compounded partly of Christian ethics and partly of Hindu or other Eastern philosophies do propound views somewhat akin to these First Century heresies but such groups are manifestly far removed from practical Christianity. It is true to-day, as it was in that of John, that the real test by which professing Christians should be tried is the one that is before us here. "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?" It is true that not many have a really accurate understanding of the manner in

which He laid aside the glory He had with the Father before the world was, and became Man, but if at any rate it is believed that He did in fact come to the world as Man, and did literally die on the Cross, and was truly resurrected then at least there is no ground for the charge of being an antichrist.

"Look to yourselves, that ye lose not those things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward." (vs. 8.)

The A. V. has "we" in this verse, but it should really be "ye". John is exhorting his friend and sister in Christ to continued zeal and faithfulness. Like the Apostle Paul thirty years previously, Sister Kyria had fought a good fight and kept the faith, and now a crown of righteousness was laid up for her "against that day" - the day when all who should "sleep in Jesus" throughout the Age were to receive the things for which they hoped and prayed. But even at this point there is danger of backsliding and consequent loss. That was made clear in John's First Epistle and it is made clear again here. This verse has been a constant warning and exhortation through all time since John first inscribed the words upon his sheet of papyrus. To-day it is used as a word of greeting, a message sent from one to another, valued because of its combined assurance of glory to come and warning against losing that glory by carelessness when it is almost as it were within our reach. The very language reminds us that if we do fail of gaining the prize it will not be because God has been unfaithful but because we have been. We are not bidden to look to God lest we lose things, as though He would deprive us of them if we are not diligent in holding him to the compact. We are bidden to look to ourselves, lest we lose. That is where the danger lies. He ever abideth faithful; He will not let go our hands. We may insist on being unfaithful; then it is we who separate ourselves from him and go our own way alone. So we need very carefully to watch ourselves, that we maintain our confidence and faith steadfast to the end.

AOH

To be concluded

Hymn Quiz Answers

These are just the first verses of hymns, and only single verses of scripture, but if you have the opportunity to study, you will find that in many cases the whole hymn is based on the longer passage of scripture

which includes the given verse.

- 1 F Psalm 72.5,8 (and verses 5-19)
- 2 D Psalm 90.1 (vv 1-5)
- 3 G Revelation 5.11-13
- 4 I Romans 1.16 (see also 2 Timothy 1.12)
- 5 A Psalm 46.1
- 6 H Psalm 98.6-9
- 7 B Galatians 6.14
- 8 J Psalm 92.1,2
- 9 E Isaiah 40.29 (vv 28-31)
- 10 C 1 Peter 1.3 (vv 3-5)

THE FUTURE WORK OF GOD'S PEOPLE

What bearing do our hopes for a future kingdom have on concern for the environment? The following thoughts were found in a very much longer article dealing with this subject.

Not just 'going to heaven' but serving in the Kingdom

The Nicene Creed (325AD) declares that Jesus Christ 'will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end'. But neither mainline Catholic nor mainline Protestant theology has explored very much what exactly we mean by all that. Instead, we have embraced the belief that the ultimate destiny of God's people is 'heaven', seen as somewhat detached from 'earth'. So the aim of Christianity as a whole, and of conversion, justification, sanctification, and salvation itself, is seen in terms of leaving 'earth' behind and going 'home' to a place called 'heaven'.

This is simply not how the earliest Christians saw things. For early Christians the resurrection of Jesus launched God's new creation upon the world, beginning the fulfilment of the prayer that Jesus taught his followers in which God's kingdom would come 'on earth as in heaven' promised by Isaiah and promised again in the New Testament... They were not very interested, as our world has been interested, in what happens to people immediately after they die. Instead, they were extremely interested in a topic which many Western Christians today have forgotten about altogether, namely, the final new creation, new heavens and new earth joined together, and the

resurrection of the body, which will create new human beings to live in that new world.

The glory of God's will for creation to be revealed

Paul in Romans 8.19-23 speaks about the glory to be revealed to us. The whole creation, the entire cosmos, is on tiptoe for God's glory to be revealed to his children. Glory is not simply a kind of luminescence, as though the point of salvation were that we should eventually shine like electric light bulbs. 'Glory' means, among other things, rule and power and authority. Part of the point of God saving his people is that they are destined, not merely to enjoy a relaxing endless holiday in a place called 'heaven', but that they are designed to be God's stewards ruling over the whole creation, with healing and restorative justice and love. The creation itself will be set free from the slavery of moral and physical corruption when God's children are glorified. When God's redeemed people are finally rescued and we are given our resurrection bodies, then we will be set in 'glory' and, as God's image-bearing children, have sovereign rule over all creation. Then, God's project will be where it was supposed to be going right at the start when God created humankind in his own image, to be fruitful and to look after the garden. When humans are put right, creation will be put right. That is the ultimate point, the glorious full sweep of Paul's doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ.

New-creation people

The resurrection, God's recreation of his wonderful world, which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God's people live in the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last, and be enhanced, in God's new world. I have no idea what precisely this means. I do not know how the painting an artist paints today in prayer and wisdom will find a place in God's new world. I don't know what musical instruments we shall have to play, though I'm sure Bach's music will be there. I don't know how my planting a tree today will relate to the wonderful trees that will be in God's recreated world. I don't know how my work for justice for the poor and for remission of global debt will reappear in that new world.

But I know that God's new world of justice and joy, of hope for

the whole earth, was launched when Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter morning. I know he calls me and you to live in him and by the power of his Spirit to be new-creation people here and now, bringing signs and symbols of the kingdom to birth on earth as in heaven. The resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit mean that we are called to bring real and effective signs of God's renewed creation to birth even in the midst of the present age....

This doesn't mean that we are called to build the kingdom by our own efforts or even with the help of the Spirit. The final kingdom, when it comes, will always remain the free gift of God, a massive act of grace and new creation. But we are called to build *for* the kingdom. Like craftsmen working on a great cathedral, we have been given instructions about the particular stone we are to spend our lives carving, without knowing or being able to guess where it will take its place within the grand eventual design. What we are assured, by the words of Paul and by the fact of Jesus' resurrection, is that the work we do is *not in vain*.

Extracts from an essay by N T Wright in The Green Bible

CHRIST'S FUTURE KINGDOM

a reprint from 'God's Eternal Purpose' 1951

Following the establishment in power of the Millennial reign in which Christ is manifestly Lord of all, and in effective control, the promised resurrection of all the dead will be next in order. But not all at once. A partially wrecked world containing several thousand millions of partially or almost wholly wrecked human beings will take a good deal of hard work to get on its feet again, and before there can be talk of adding to earth's millions from the ranks of the dead there is the matter of food and housing, and presumably clothing, to consider. There will therefore be a great setting of people to work, in the restoration of the earth, the reclamation of waste land, the irrigation of deserts, the preparation of homes not only for those then living who need homes but for those who are to come. All this will be an important part of the education that every man must have, but concurrently with this will be his spiritual instruction, his being made aware of the deeper principles that underlie his existence, the purpose for which God created him and the means by which that purpose is to be achieved. It is for the imparting of

this instruction that God will have made ready the "Church".

With the ending of the old Age, - this present Age in which we live - the company of Christian disciples which began in the upper room at Pentecost and concluded its earthly career in the troubles that end the Age is gathered as a united company into the spiritual world, made like the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle John said "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3. 2). Being thus raised to participation in that spiritual realm, the powers and attributes appertaining to these are infinitely greater than anything known to man; but what is of first importance in the immediate connection is that these who have thus attained personal association with Christ are to become the servants of mankind for their instruction in the higher things of life. It comes strange at first to think of those of whom John said "They lived and reigned with Christ" (Rev. 20. 4) and Paul "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6. 2) as being servants to men, but it was Jesus who explained the seeming paradox when He said "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20. 27). Hence the outcome of a Christian life lived to-day in patience and integrity, in doing good and speaking the thing that is right, in emulating Jesus in all things, in suffering grief or wrong in consequence of a firm stand for right principles, is the honour of serving mankind in spiritual instruction and turning the hearts of men to Christ that they may at last see the error of their ways and come fully into line with God's purpose.

It will not be an easy task. The mending of men's bodies and the improvement of their outward environment will be child's play compared with that inward regeneration which is necessary if they are to be delivered from death and confirmed in life, reclaimed from Satan and reconciled to God. It will only be because the members of the Church have passed through that same experience themselves in their past lives that they will be able to speak and teach and urge with authority and with conviction. The work of Christ in the hearts of men in the Millennial Age will be effected by these, working on the minds of men, counselling, teaching, urging, converting men to Christ and leading them to reconciliation with God.

There will thus be a two-fold work in progress, the rehabilitation of men's bodies proceeding in step with the renewing of their minds. There is not much doubt that the latter will exercise a powerful effect

upon the former; that in proportion as a man seeks intelligently and willingly to come into alignment with righteousness and yield himself more to the service of Christ, his physical organism will progress toward that perfection which empowers him to live everlastingly. The world will therefore already be a much fairer place, and mankind already happier and living measurably at peace, when the general resurrection of the dead commences. "All that are in their graves," said Jesus, "shall hear his voice" (that of Jesus) "and shall come forth" (John 5.28). Some of those dead breathed their last thousands of years ago and not one atom of their earthly bodies survives in its original form; but God who formed the bodies of the first human beings and arranged the processes of Nature to build the bodies of all who have lived since, is able to provide bodies for these resurrected ones, even in a moment of time, if need be. There can be no doubt about this; the dead shall return. "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust," cries Isaiah the prophet in ecstasy, "for the earth shall cast out the dead." (Isa. 26. 19).

The usual objection to the literal acceptance of these plain statements of Scripture is that the earth could not support the multitudes of men and women that have lived. It is not generally realised that only in the last few centuries has this planet housed any considerable number of human beings. At the beginning of the twentieth century the population of the globe was only half of what it is now, and a century earlier it was only one quarter. Professor Julian Huxley has estimated that in the days of the Roman Empire, two thousand years ago, there were less than one hundred millions inhabiting the earth. From what is known of the subject it can be confidently stated that even if man has been upon earth for as long as eight or even ten thousand years - which is the longest period allowed by responsible anthropologists aside from the "missing link" enthusiasts, who still talk in terms of millions of years - all the men and women who have ever been born would, if they were raised from the dead at once, find the existing land surface of nearly sixty million square miles afford adequate space for life and sustenance, especially when it is remembered that the earth is to be made far more fruitful and productive than it is at present. It does follow, of course, that the further propagation of the human species will cease: the purpose of God in endowing human beings with procreative powers is revealed in the Book of Genesis to be for the adequate peopling of the earth, and when that object has been achieved it is but

reasonable to expect that those powers will atrophy and disappear. The force of God's original declaration "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help (companion) meet (fitting) for him" (Gen. 2. 18), and his subsequent ordaining of the marriage relation to be the normal condition of perfect, ideal human life is not invalidated by the fact that children will no longer be born. The story of Eden enshrines the principles of Divinely ordained human society, and the ultimate completion of God's purpose will surely witness the ideal companionship instituted in Eden restored in its fullness, not again to be disturbed.

By the time that the earth is ready to receive its dead back to life and to feed and shelter those who have been sleeping in the grave, men in general will have got much more accustomed to the idea. In all probability it will not be necessary to ask, as did the Apostle Paul on a certain historic occasion (Acts 26. 8) "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?". There will have been so many signal manifestations of Divine power at work in the world that there will no longer be any denial of the possibility of such things. And without doubt there will be a great many who will have given themselves wholeheartedly over to the furthering of the interests of this new Kingdom upon earth, who will enthusiastically prepare for and receive the newcomers from the grave as they return, furnishing them with food and clothing, explaining to them the meaning of their re-awakening, that the long nightmare of sin and death is past and God now calls all men to righteousness and life. Every family, every individual, will have loved ones, relatives and friends, over whose death they have mourned or grieved in the past; it may well be that the resurrection will be in the reverse order to that of death, and that the coming back of individuals will be largely in response to the prayers of those living, so that the newcomers to the "Millennial" earth will find familiar faces to welcome them on their awaking to conscious existence, and well-remembered voices to explain to them the meaning of the new conditions in which they will find themselves. Even this sunlit Age has its shadows. Sin will have been dethroned but not yet overthrown. God will have showered his abundant blessings upon men, removed the immoral systems that have oppressed them for so long, banished the spectre of fear, caused men to dwell in peace and security, taught them to control and utilise the earth so that it brings forth abundance for all,

given them intellectual and spiritual instruction so that they can, if they will, make the utmost possible use of the life that is theirs. But with all this they will not necessarily have renounced sin, not necessarily have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, acknowledged that all they have and are is due to him, and become reconciled to God through faith in him. And none of the blessings they enjoy can continue if they remain thus unreconciled; nay, they will not even attain to the fulness of Millennial blessings unless their hearts have been made right with God. The law pronounced so a long time ago, "the wages of sin is death" stands as an immutable principle which can never be abrogated. The very basis upon which God's universe is built demands that righteousness and only righteousness shall endure eternally. That which is evil, sinful, basically opposed to the Divine principles that govern continuing life, must, even although it endure uneasily for a time, eventually pass out of existence. No power in all creation can preserve it. It follows therefore that the man whose heart is sinful, who deliberately sets himself against the forces that are making for righteousness in God's new world, must himself suffer the fate that was expressed by the prophet Ezekiel half a millennium before the Christian era: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18. 4).

A little thought will suffice to convince that the man who deliberately refuses to take his place as a citizen of the world, to discharge his due obligations and assume his share of the world's work, fulfilling the Divine injunction to love his neighbour as himself, acknowledging his Creator and God as the One in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being (Acts 17. 28) can be a source of happiness neither to himself nor others. Such a man, exercising to the last the inalienable right of free will with which his Maker has endowed him, can resist God to the end, and turn resolutely away from every endeavour God makes for his conversion. We may be quite sure that not one such individual - if such there be - will be left to incur the logical sequel to his elected course until God has, as it were, exhausted every persuasive influence within his power to win the obdurate one from the error of his way. But if God at last turns aside, it can only be because the case is hopeless; He will not coerce the will and condemn the unhappy man to an eternal life from which he cannot escape and the conditions of which he resents and cannot endure. God, who holds in his

hand the breath of every living thing (Job 12. 10) will - sadly, we may be sure allow sin to bear its final fruitage in that man's life, the exquisite mind and wonderful organism to falter and fail, and the shades of eternal sleep to close round him.

It is hard to think that, with all the incentive to righteousness characteristic of the Millennial Age, there will be many such. Time will prove, but that the Scripture states the principles upon which alone everlasting life may be attained there can be no question, and that eternal death must inevitably be the portion of all who, after full and fair opportunity, refuse to accept the Lord Jesus and conform to the Divine laws, the Scriptures are equally emphatic.

So, with the passing of the last of sinners, there comes the end of sin. Men will have been so fully tested and confirmed in their allegiance to God by their long experience, of sin in the first life and righteousness in the second, that there need be no fear that sin will raise its ugly head again. Satan, the arch-enemy of God and man, will trouble humanity no more. The last book of the Bible, in one of its parabolic utterances, speaks of a final attempt to deceive the nations at the end of the Millennial Age. It is an obscure little passage but it is clear upon one thing; that the sequel to the attempt is the destruction of the last traces of evil in the earth. From that time and forward all things, on earth as in Heaven, are "holy unto the Lord". The prospect before men will be one of progressive and never-ending increase in knowledge and experience and intense joy in the continuance of everyday life under conditions of idyllic happiness.

So will the centuries pass, whilst the earth grows ever fairer and more beautiful and mankind attains to a better and more complete understanding of the message of Jesus Christ and the goodness of God. The days of evil will slip away into the background-never forgotten, an imperishable recollection of the terrible consequences of sin, but no longer having power to hurt and destroy. The song of the angels at Christ's birth - "peace on earth, goodwill among men" - will be realised in fact at last. Human beings will look upon each other, fair of form, virile of body, magnificent examples of the creative power of God. Conscious of the eternity of supremely happy life that is before them, they will rise at every dawn to prosecute with unflurried minds the occupations and pursuits to which they have set themselves. The world's work will continue - men will till the soil and reap the fruits of their

labours; they will foregather together for the study and practice of arts and sciences which will always have something new to reveal; they will travel the world and rejoice in the varied glories of Nature and live their lives in absolute peace and harmony with one another and with God.

Is it just wishful thinking? Is all this but a kind of mental sop, a beautiful dream, wherewith to dull the senses to the harsh realities of to-day, a means of refusal to face the grim inevitable destiny against which heart and mind cries out in impotent despair? By no means! *These things shall be!* God has been silent, screened from the vision and the sense of men, approachable only by those who have sincerely desired to know him and have been prepared to devote their lives to his service and to die for the sake of his ways if need be; but He has nevertheless been working ceaselessly and tirelessly for the ultimate good of all men. The record of his work as well of his plans is to be found in the Bible, but here again, only the sincere and earnest of heart will be able to read its pages aright and understand them. God is calling all such now to-day, to give themselves to him through the channel of faith in, and acceptance of, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Leader, and He will then assign them some position and work in the execution of his fulfilling purpose. It was in the realisation of that call that the Apostle Paul entreated "I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice... and be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". (Rom. 12. 1-2.) That is the call still.

The End

AOH

A SIGN AND FORETASTE OF THE KINGDOM

Christians have always longed for Christ's kingdom to come straight away, and many have worked to try and bring it about. What has been achieved is only partial, and flawed, in practice just a foretaste and a sign of the kingdom to come. But such efforts receive a blessing. The account which follows dates from the 1930s, the time of the economic slump in Britain.

Men fall back upon primitive faith in times of distress and despair, and the years of economic collapse have seen a number of

undertakings launched. We may look upon them as small scale efforts to show society what might be done if Christ were called in to deal with its modern problems. As might have been expected, South Wales, with unparalleled unemployment and religion mine-deep in its very soil, has been fruitful ground for those experiments. Consider the story of one of them. The Rhondda Valley cannot support its present population. It could not do it, even if the Welsh coal trade were to regain its former prosperity. Failing the unlikely creation of new industries, therefore, it becomes a question of developing those which have life in them and at the same time promoting migration on an extensive scale. This is not easy at any time; it is doubly difficult when, as is here the case, the surplus men have been bred to one trade (and that a crippled one) while the youths have done no work at all. Allotment gardening and industrial training suggest themselves as palliatives, and they have been encouraged as much as possible, but their limits are painfully obvious. Industrial training, in particular, is of little value unless a way of absorption can be discovered for the trainees. Now a goodwill network, with meshes all over the country, might go a long way to meet this need, and the League of Goodwill conceived a plan whereby unemployed lads in the Rhondda could be taught such trades as would give them a chance of securing work with members in less distressed areas. Building, carpentry, pig and poultry farming, boot and shoe repairing and general agriculture were among the vocations chosen. There was this slight snag at the outset: a training centre was plainly needed, and the League possessed neither site nor funds.

But two workless men had a vision. They saw some ragged, derelict land, up in the hills beyond Penygraig (hard by Trealaw and Tonypandy, with their streets of riotous memory). It was a wilderness of a place, littered with stone, tufted with coarse grass, foul with the refuse of a disused mine; but to them it was a fruitful field, tilled by hands which had long been idle. They passed the word on, and its echoes reached London. Somebody rang up Peter Rawlings and asked him to join in praying for forty acres. Rather a startling request, you may think, and certainly something out of the usual. But Peter, barely a fortnight later, was down on those acres, planting. He planted the first of a grove of trees at a house which is called the House O' the Trees, and

that house with forty-three acres of land, had come in instant answer to prayer. Once the home of a colliery manager it had been empty since the pit closed down, and its dependent buildings, including a farm, were fast falling into decay. By ways astonishingly smoothed, the League obtained a short lease, and the sum of money involved (it was almost ridiculously small) was promised at once, anonymously. Teams of lads were picked from surrounding townships to come to the centre for training by expert instructors, and a start was made with forty or so. Although it was frankly a venture of faith, a gauntlet thrown down to unbelievers, no sort of religious bias was shown when it came to selecting the venturers. There were two or three youths who were Communists, and whose first idea was to make trouble. They were not debarred, because those in charge of the undertaking knew that the very best thing for Communists was a taste of communal effort.

They were to have no wages, and they were to sleep in their own homes, but they would be given good meals and ample opportunities for recreation. When the land was put under cultivation and the training centre was paying its way, the lads themselves would have a voice in the disposition of any profits. Meantime, those who were entitled to the 'dole' would not suffer any prejudice to their rights, inasmuch as they were genuinely seeking work; and they would be able to earn small sums of pocket money by extra work in the evenings.

The "such as I have, give I" spirit was laid under contribution, and a flow of supplies at once set in. When anything lacked, God was asked to make good the deficiency, and very soon even the doubting Thomases were being thrilled at the ways in which prayer was granted. Everything came that was needed - seeds, implements, stock, transport, and all manner of raw material. One team broke up the land, another started a poultry farm, another devoted itself to pigs (beginning with one named "Lavender") and yet another to building. The mountain farmers began to sit up and take notice. These youngsters were learning so well from their expert tutors (lent free of charge by various authorities) that older hands asked to join their classes and carried the blessing of knowledge farther afield. Crops began to make their appearance, and the first of them, full in the ear, was Hope.

Hope sprang up on ground which had given no promise of any such harvest. It came, for instance, to a lonely tribe of cottagers, who lived within sight of the House O' the Trees, but out of the eyes and the

mind, as it seemed, of all the rest of the world. Nearly all were miners, now without expectation of work, shrunken of muscle in body and soul, existing mainly on what they could grow in their gardens and caring little for aught beside. They watched the taming of the wild land with new interest. Chance conversations took root, contacts were made, visits exchanged, and before very long there were signs of an awakening, meetings for prayer in cottage parlours, songs of praise over converts, plans for a house of worship. The building team got busy, and a Bethel grew on the hillside. It was a wonderful night when they sang " Cwm Rhondda " together there:

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land !

A night of gladness in solitary places, with a blossoming desert round about, and streams breaking out in the wilderness. A night when the guidance of God was made very certain, and the Highway gleamed white in the darkness.

The first missionaries have since gone out from that place: by the time these words are bound in a book they will be sowing in barren lands elsewhere, strong in the faith that has come from deep personal experience. The first lads, too, have gone out into ordinary employment and are making good. The grove of trees is extending, for as each lad leaves the House, upright and full of vitality, he plants a tree as the symbol of his new self. With this very end in view, the House O' the Trees was given its name :

That they might be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord,
That He might be glorified.

The centre is doing better than merely paying its way. It has found good markets; its teams have been carrying off prizes; it has been able to help a second centre in another part of the Rhondda. Not in spite, but because, of the fact that it had no help or hope save God, it has proved, with unqualified success, that faith like George Muller's, being based on immutable law, must always produce the same results.

Admittedly, however, the House O' the Trees is a model and little more. Forty acres of hope, grown upon waste Welsh soil, is something for Christians to ponder. It is for you and me, when we utter the words "Thy Kingdom come," to pray that we may have faith and courage to play our parts in its coming. The step-by-step teaching of Jesus is that

we should first make this our will, and then subject our will to God, so that it may be accomplished in His way. Now this, quite certainly, involves re-birth. Nothing less can give us the un-selfed mind and spirit. Nothing less can give us the childlike belief. Nothing less, as Jesus told Nicodemus, can bring the Kingdom before our sight. Unless we receive the Kingdom as little children, we shall not enter therein.

For some it is a hard doctrine, as it was to the Jewish ruler. But for those to whom Jesus is real, it is gloriously easy of understanding. All things are possible to him that believeth. Our Father has delivered us from the power of darkness and "translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son." It is here, at hand, within us. Wherever Jesus is *realised*, the Kingdom has come already.

Taken from Kingdom Come Hugh Redwood 1934

BEAUTIES OF CREATION

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of the earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers. We praise you for these good gifts and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honour and glory of your name, now and forever.

The Book of Common Prayer 1549

There's not a plant or flower below but makes Thy glories known,
And clouds arise, and tempests blow by order from Thy throne;
While all that borrows life from Thee is ever in Thy care;
And everywhere that we can be, Thou, God, art present there.

Isaac Watts 1674-1748 Divine and Moral Songs for Children

All that is sweet, delightful, and amiable in this world, in the serenity of the air, the fineness of seasons, the joy of light, the melody of sounds, the beauty of colours, the fragrancy of smells, the splendour of precious stones, is nothing else but Heaven breaking through the veil of this

world.

William Law 1686-1761 Rules for Living a Holy Life

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours.
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

William Wordsworth 1770-1850 The world is too much with us

This is my Father's world: He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him pass, He speaks to me everywhere.

Maltbie D Babcock (1858-1901) This is my Father's world

I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station through
which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.

George Washington Carver 1864-1943

We need to find God, but we cannot find him in noise or in excitement.
See how nature, the trees, the flowers, the grass grow in deep silence.
See how the stars, the moon and the sun all move in silence.

Mother Teresa 1910-1997

The same God who commanded us to love one another also commands
us to work and take care of the garden. Here, humans find that God has
delegated to them authority and responsibility to protect and preserve
what we do not own, what belongs to God. God did not abdicate
ownership. Rather, God appointed a steward, a caretaker. Justice
demands that the steward faithfully execute the assigned responsibility.

George D McKinney, Jr 1931-

God intends our care of creation to reflect our love for the Creator.

John Stott 1921-

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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Of the increase of his
government and
peace there shall be
no end.
Isa. 9.7

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

The Bible Study Monthly, published to promote knowledge of the Bible, 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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Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

A SEASONAL THOUGHT

The Festive season can be a time for rejoicing, although it is not the correct time for the birth of the Lord Jesus. Jesus would have been born in the autumn, would have started his three and a half year ministry in the autumn to die in the springtime in line with the Passover.

According to several websites including history.com, it was in 336 A.D. that early Christian bishops in Rome decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus on the 25th of December, probably because it was already the date of an established pagan festival.

The 25th is four days after the winter solstice and the days had begun to get a little longer. Therefore pagan Romans celebrated the rebirth of the Unconquered Sun on that day.

Perhaps the early Christians thought if they could celebrate the birth of Christ, then they could take part in a festival at the same time as the pagan festival.

The pagan Romans also celebrated a festival called Saturnalia in honour of their god Saturn. During this time people exchanged gifts and indulged in all sorts of fun. Somehow it seems the two pagan festivals merged with those of Christmas to make the event what it is today.

Nevertheless it is a very heartening time to sing hymns about Jesus' birth and remind ourselves of how this birth was foretold in prophecy and

which often end with the blessings which are still yet future, such as 'As in gladness men of old'.

However for some it is hard to see so much celebration. For some it is the first festive season since the death of a loved one, others become more aware of their loneliness and some it is poignant yearly reminder of some distressing event that happened many seasons ago.

We can, though, all rejoice in the "good news of great joy for all the people " (Luke 2.10 NRSV) that was brought at that time.

NAC

Prospect of Peace (Isaiah 19.23-25)

"In that day there shall be a highway out of Egypt into Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. 19.23-25)

A wonderful conclusion to the chapter; a picture of universal peace! Throughout Israel's history Assyria and Egypt were alternatively at warfare with the nations around Israel, or with each other, marching and counter-marching across the fair lands of Judah and Israel and ravaging wherever they went. The picture of a highway between the territories of these two great empires with the citizens of both passing and repassing upon their lawful business, must have seemed a very unlikely one, especially in the days of Isaiah, when Assyria and Egypt were locked in a death-grip which had to end with the crushing of one. But that is what Isaiah saw, a day when the contending factions of mankind would have resolved all their enmity and jealousy into that calm and quiet fraternity which is to be the hallmark of the next Age. The highways of that day will be the highways of peace, and war and violence will be no more.

AOH

Gone from us

Gordon Chilvers (Chapel End)

Alan Seddon (Warrington)

A SON IS GIVEN

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder." (Isa. 9.6)

Long centuries before Jesus was born, and Christmas became a Christian festival, the peoples of Bible lands—Assyria, Babylonia, Canaan—made the end of December a time of celebration and rejoicing. It marked the change of shortening days and the turning of the sun to climb higher in the heavens; it gave promise of ripening crops and the joys of harvest. The ancient Babylonians used to drag their Yule logs into their homes on what corresponds to our Christmas Eve and consume them by fire; the following morning they decked with gifts the Tree of Life which they pretended in symbol had grown from the ashes of the dead log—the prototype of our "Christmas tree"—thus, said they, would life come out of death, in due time, by the favour of the gods.

Where did they get the tradition from, tradition so strangely true to fact? Was there some lingering memory of the true faith once held and taught by their common father Noah, their racial ancestors Shem, Ham and Japheth, the patriarchs of their Families like Peleg and Heber? It would almost seem so! For it is true that out of the ashes of death will come new life; that after the destruction of the dead wood of this world there will arise a Tree of Life whose fruit shall be for food to mankind and whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations, rich gifts indeed for the sons of men, in that greatest of all Christmas festivals when the Kingdom of light and life has succeeded upon the ending of this world of darkness and death.

Isaiah had something of this in mind when he saw the vision of the Great Light. Like so many of the prophets' revelations, he viewed this representation of things to come against the background of his own day. There is a temptation to read the thrilling passage "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," as though it were a completely disjointed piece of revelation sandwiched unthinkingly into a passage dealing with the local troubles of Israel in the prophet's own day having nothing to do with the subject of the Kingdom. That is not so; chapters 7 to 12 of Isaiah's prophecy comprise one complete and harmonious presentation of Millennial truth in which the vision of the Everlasting Father finds its proper place. And in order to understand the full harmony that exists

between these wonderful chapters we must endeavour to put ourselves in the prophet's place and look at them through his eyes.

The story starts with Isaiah's seventh chapter. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel the "ten-tribe" kingdom, have joined together to attack Judah, the "two-tribe" kingdom of which Ahaz was the apostate king. They have besieged Jerusalem, but the Lord has not yet suffered them to take it. The people of Judah are nevertheless greatly afraid, for they have long since abandoned their faith in God and they know not where to turn for help.

This is Isaiah's opportunity. At the bidding of the Lord he goes forth to meet Ahaz and give him an assurance that the Lord is going to defend Jerusalem—for his own Name's sake; certainly not on account of any piety or faith on the part of the wicked king. But Ahaz does not believe; he does not want to believe. "*If ye will not believe,*" says Isaiah, "*surely ye shall not be established*". Therefore a second word came to Ahaz. "*Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God*" commands Isaiah. But Ahaz said, "*I will not ask, neither will I prove the Lord*". His rebellion is deliberate and calculated; it cannot be excused. Therefore the message of condemnation, already given to the ten-tribe kingdom. A young woman shall bear a son, and call his name Immanuel. That son is the sign; before that child has grown to youthful maturity, Assyria shall have desolated Samaria and ravaged Judah. Ten-tribes, and some from among the two-tribes, shall have gone into captivity for their sins. The seventh and eighth chapters trace the sad history of that terrible time of the invading Assyrian hosts; the people, said Isaiah, would finally look unto the earth, "*and behold trouble and darkness, dimness and anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness*".

Now these were not just empty words, spoken by the prophet after the manner of a gramophone record. Isaiah, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit, was *seeing* these things, future though they were, and he described what he saw. His prophetic vision showed him the grim Assyrian warriors marching through the land, and fleeing multitudes pressing on brokenly before them. He saw the deeds of violence, the slaughter of helpless captives, the brutal treatment of women and children, the burning villages, the desolated vineyards and pastures, the clear Judean skies clouded and darkened by drifting smoke. As he gazed upon that dread scene his prophetic vision sharpened, and in the spirit of his mind he was carried over nigh on three thousand years of time, to see the

events which this Syrian invasion in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah pictured. He saw the last great onslaught of the forces of darkness, the hosts which we call the armies of Gog and Magog, descending upon God's ancient people at the end of this age. Isaiah still beheld Assyrian soldiers, he still identified the people and the villages and the scenery of the land he knew, but with that mysterious certainty that is sometimes our own experience in dreams he knew that he was looking now at a scene representing the end of this Age and the time of the greatest deliverance of all; and as he looked, straining to see into the murky blackness which all but shrouded the vagueness of the moving figures, men, women and children writhing under the terror that had come upon them, he saw something else, something which caused him to look up and break into the tremendous declaration that commences at verse 2 of chapter 9.

"The people that walk in darkness," he cried in exultation, "have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

Away there on the horizon, beyond the tops of the eastern mountains, above the darkness of the present terror, the glorious radiance of coming day was racing up the sky. The time of light, the time of life, was come, and the darkness would soon be overpast. The Lord was coming as it were from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran, his glory covering the heavens, and his brightness as the light of day, as the sun. Isaiah saw the Assyrian soldiers cower and flee before that terrible radiance, the arrows of Heaven's artillery raining upon them, and all their armies put to flight. The Lord had risen up to the defence and deliverance of his people, and from behind the hills there came into sight the rising of the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings. And the people, so lately bound in the darkness and in the shadow of death, rejoiced in this great appearance which had delivered them from the kingdom of darkness and brought them forth into the kingdom of light. That is what Isaiah saw, and for the moment all thought of his countrymen's present troubles and dangers was forgotten, the while his eyes drank in their fill of those resplendent glories symbolising earth's Millennial day.

This is the Christmas vision indeed, the turning of the old, darksome, dying year into the new, lightening, living age of light and life for all men. Here is at hand the time of promise and of gifts unto men, the prospect of harvest and all the joys that come with harvest, the toil of ploughing and harrowing but a memory. Here in very truth is the day for

which Isaiah so long had looked, and concerning which he was yet to preach and teach persistently and consistently through many dark years. But for the present the vision was leading him onward into a glory of revelation.

"Thou hast multiplied the nation; thou hast increased the joy." So the Margolis version has it, and Rotherham confirms with *"Thou hast increased the exultation; thou hast made great the joy."* (The "not" in verse 3 of the A.V. is an incorrect rendering). *"They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."* Here is a picture of mankind, freed at last from the fear of evil things and evil men, from death and all that death implies, "multiplied" upon the fair Millennial earth, destined to be the home of resurrected hosts. Isaiah sees here the beginning of the Millennial kingdom; perhaps he saw, or thought he saw, the promised multiplication of his own nation, Abraham's seed, "as the sands by the seashore" but it is just as correct to apply his prophetic outburst to the greater increase of all men, the entire human family, in that day. He had just seen the great light burst upon a world of evil and put the darkness to flight; now he sees the consequent increase of men and the increase of their joy. *"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."*

Why do they thus rejoice? The next verse supplies the answer. *"For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian."* The rout of the Midianites in the days of Gideon was one of Israel's greatest victories. The brave three hundred, having nothing but lights concealed in earthen pitchers, by that means and that alone defeated the enemy host. Did the Holy Spirit suggest that defeat of Midian to Isaiah with set intent? Is it not true that this coming greater defeat of the powers of greater evil at the end of this Age is going to be because another "three hundred" will have had their inner light revealed by the breaking of their earthen pitchers? *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father!"* (Matt. 13.43).

"For every boot stamped with fierceness, and every cloak rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire." Thus runs the Margolis rendering, and other translators agree with the thought, not easily discernible in the Authorised Version, that the rejoicing is on account of

the implements of warfare, the armour and clothing of the soldiery, and the grim relics of war, being all consumed in the fire. *"He maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth."* War is no more; the time of peace has come, and the devouring fire has consumed all the institutions of unrighteousness.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder." Was it that Isaiah heard, eight hundred years before it floated over Judea's quiet fields, the angels' song of Bethlehem? Did the Holy Spirit in some wonderful manner convey to his attentive mind those strains that later fell upon the ears of the shepherds? It reads almost like a song. *"Unto us a child is born. . . . unto us a son is given . . ."* Mysterious, sweet cadences, rising and falling on the calmness that has succeeded the vision of slaughter. *"Unto us a child is born . . . a child is born!"* That surely must be the fulfilment of Divine promise, the birth of earth's new King, come to rule in righteousness. *"Unto us a son is given!"* The truest son of Israel that Israel would ever know, a prophet like unto Moses, a king like unto David, a priest like unto—Melchisedek; yes, a priest upon his throne. *"A child is born! . . . a son is given!"* So the music must have gone on as Isaiah listened. *"Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...Unto us a child is born...a son is given... and the government shall be upon his shoulder!"*

The heavenly song fades away—perhaps the vision passes from his sight also, but the inspiration of the Spirit is strong upon Isaiah and he opens his mouth, only partially comprehending the significance of his words, yet knowing that they have to do with that coming Day for which he looks.

"His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor." The comma ought not to be there. The expression is a combined one. The word for "wonderful" possesses the meaning of exceptionally singular or unique, something as it were beyond the understanding of mere man. When Manoah asked his celestial guest his name, and the angel told him it was "secret" the same word is used (Judges 13. 18). The word "counsellor" is one that is used of royalty's closest confidants and advisers (as King David's counsellor in 2 Sam. 15. 12). Our coming King is, then, in the first place, the Wonderful Counsellor. Of whom is He the confidant? Surely of his Father and our Father, who will do nothing without revealing his purposes to the beloved Son in whom his

plans are centred and by whom they are executed. In the visions of Revelation one like unto a slain Lamb takes the sealed book from the hand of the Deity upon the Throne and reveals what is therein written. We do not know, we cannot visualise, the intimacy of fellowship and oneness of understanding that must exist between the Father and the Son, giving such depth of meaning to Jesus' own words, during his earthly life, *"I and my Father are one"*. Surely He indeed is the One who *"was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him"* (Prov. 8. 30). Yea, indeed, his name is "Wonderful Counsellor".

But it is also *"the Mighty God"*. Not *El Elyon*—"The Most High". Not *"El Shaddai"*—"The Almighty". Not *"Jehovah"*—"The Eternal One". The Hebrew is *"Gibbor El"*. *Gibbor* is the word for giantlike, powerful, mighty, and the giants and mighty men of the Old Testament are *"gibborim"* (the plural form of *gibbor*). But *El* itself means "mighty one". The plural form, *elohim*, refers to God himself or to the heathen gods, or to angelic or supernatural beings, or even to mighty men, as in Psa. 82.6 (*"I have said, ye are gods, and all of you children of the Most High"*) so this name *"the mighty God"* really means *"the mightiest mighty one"*. Is not that a fitting name for the One to whom is committed all power in heaven and earth? Is not that a fitting name for the One to whom every knee in heaven as well as on earth, is to bow, and every tongue, angelic and earthly, confess? *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death."* There is a wonderful passage in the Apocryphal *"Gospel of Nicodemus"* in which the risen Lord is pictured as storming the gates of hell and rescuing its hopeless inhabitants. *"When the prince of hell heard"* (that Jesus was coming) *"he said"* (to Satan) *"I adjure thee by the powers which belong to thee and me that thou bring him not to me. For when I heard of the power of his word, I trembled for fear, and all my impious company were disturbed . . . And while Satan and the prince of hell were discoursing thus to each other, on a sudden there was a voice as of thunder and the rushing of winds, saying . . . Lift up your gates, O ye princes: and be ye lifted up, ye gates of hell, and the King of Glory will enter in . . . And the mighty Lord appeared in the form of a man, and enlightened those places which had ever before been in darkness; and broke asunder the fetters which before could not be broken; and with his invincible power visited those who sat in the deep darkness by iniquity,*

and the shadow of death by sin." This is assuredly our Mighty One, to whom has been given all power in heaven and in earth, and will exercise that power to overcome death and all evil and establish the reign of everlasting righteousness.

What then of his third title—*Everlasting Father*? Does He here usurp the prerogative of the One upon the Throne of Creation, the God and Father of us all? We know at the outset that such a thing can never be. At the close of the Millennial Age, when Christ the King will have subdued evil and vanquished death, when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and all power that opposes his benevolent and life-giving sway (1 Cor. 15.24), when mankind are, at long length, reconciled to God, and in full perfection of life have entered upon their eternal inheritance, " *then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.*" (1 Cor. 15.28). The thought in this title is that given by Rotherham; the "*Father of Futurity*" or the Father of the Coming Age. It is Jesus who has redeemed and purchased the entire human race by means of his own death on the cross; it is Jesus who receives them back to life in the Millennial Age soon to begin, and becomes their Mediator—the mediator between God and man during the remaining period of man's insufficiency. It is Jesus who gives them life; who by means of his priestly and kingly work will so influence the hearts and minds of men that all in whom is any possibility of reclamation will eventually repent and be converted, and come to Jesus, the Lord of Life, that they may have life. He will be the world's great Life-giver, the world's Father, during that Age and the life that men will receive they will receive at his hands. As it is in Adam that men die, so it in Christ that men will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15.22).

In so many ways He will be a father to redeemed humanity. "*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd*" sings Isaiah "*and gently lead those that are with young.*" There will be such infinite patience and understanding in that day. No longer will there be the hard, unyielding iron of the law, demanding its "pound of flesh", its demands against the sinners. There will be instead the wise, loving albeit firm discipline of the understanding parent, and a growing up into maturity, "whosoever will", under that paternal rule. The wilful sinner, if he will not repent, must remain a sinner still, but at the end he finds himself shut out of the Holy City, for he has rejected life, and without life he cannot enter (Rev. 21).

27) . But he that overcometh will be presented at the end before the Father Himself and experience the glorious liberty of the Sons of God.

The Prince of Peace! There is no mistaking the meaning of that name! It brings to the mind at once all that is fondest in the dreams of men, in the hopes and beliefs of those who today are the Lord's disciples. "Peace on earth; goodwill to men." So many have given up hope that it will come; but we know differently. *"In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth."* (Psa.72.7-8). "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven." (Psa. 85. 10-11). *"And the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever"*.(Isa.32. 17).

Not only is He the prince of that peace which is to be man's inward possession, peace of heart, of mind, of soul, that peace with God which is the result of justification in his sight ("Therefore being justified by faith, we have *peace with God*" (Rom. 5. 1), that peace which comes with the realisation of human perfection and possession of everlasting life. He is also the Prince of that outward peace which will be characteristic of human society in that blessed day. The same passage in Isa. 32 tells of that. "My people shall dwell in a *peaceable* habitation, and in *sure* dwellings, and in *quiet* resting-places" (vs. 18). What a contrast to this present day of distress and trouble, strife and tumult! *"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid."* (Micah 4. 4). In every picture of the future day that we have, this thought of peace is prominent and predominant. *"I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like a flowing stream."*

This is our King! This is earth's King, disesteemed as yet by those who will, one day, many of them and most of them, become his devoted and adoring subjects. *"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice even for ever."*

AOH

GREEN

There are five outstanding sacred colours indicated in the Scriptures—gold, blue, red, purple and white. These are eloquent emblems of God's purposes relative to His creatures. There are also other colours which afford helpful meditation, among which is green, which signifies hope and hope's fruition. The colour is made up of blue and yellow. Blue implying faithfulness, and yellow divinity, for it reflects the central portion of the spectrum like gold. Thus we observe that green signifies that all who are faithful to the Lord will possess the living hope of life eternal. True hope implies a joyful anticipation, as well as sincere desire. The Lord looks for this very thing pulsating in our hearts, even as the Apostle reminds us that "*we are saved by hope*" (Rom. 8.24).

In the song of the Bridegroom and Bride we read the words, "*our bed is green*" (Song of Solomon 1.16). This indicates a hope which accompanies rest of faith. Psalm 23 tells us of *green pastures*, and suggests spiritual *Food* of the best kind. The greenness of plant life is caused by chlorophyll, which is its active life principle. We read in Psalm 52.8 "*I am a green olive tree in the house of my God.*" This evidences the hope of life eternal which is based upon the possession of the Holy Spirit as signified by the olive (Exodus 30.24-25).

There is a false hope due either to wrong teaching or hypocrisy. Such a hope will wither, as indicated in Job 8.11-16 and Luke 23.31, where the colour is mentioned in this respect.

In Revelation 4.1-3 our Lord is shown as sitting upon the governmental throne, surrounded by a rainbow, "in sight like unto an emerald." This pictures the glorious fruition of faith, hope and love, which will mean the blessing of all the peoples of the earth by the glorified Messiah.

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SECOND JOHN

The Second Epistle—Part 3

"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.." (vs. 9.)

This word "transgresseth" does not mean a mere departure from the right way or path. It does not indicate a lapse into some erroneous or inaccurate understanding of some element of the faith. The Greek means to go forward or beyond or in advance. The reference is to those who claim to be entering into a state of "advanced" doctrine so far forward of what has been revealed by the Holy Spirit that they are in fact running in front of God. He grants "meat in due season for the household of faith" and allows the veil obscuring further understanding of Divine truth to be drawn aside more and more as fast as his people are able to comprehend that further understanding. It is good and praiseworthy for any of us to seek the being always watchful in following that enlargement of understanding whenever the Spirit leads. But we also have to remember that for each of us individually as well as for the Church as a whole there must be the times of halting to assimilate the new truths revealed and to consolidate the ground gained. Progress in Divine truth is always characterised by this alternate advance into new light and then the halting while that new light is fitted into the fabric of Christian life and belief. Now the Apostle is not denouncing that kind of advancing neither is he branding as transgressors those who thus seek to know ever more clearly what the Lord is revealing. He is talking rather of those who in their eagerness to find something "new" or something "different" wherewith to "shine" before their fellows, would go beyond what God is opening up and themselves add to the revealed Word. That is how the 20th Century translation puts it, in words that seem accurately to represent John's thought. "Who goes beyond the limits of the teaching of Christ has failed to find God." In modern parlance, the man has over-reached himself. Rather than rest content with the rate of progress in Divine Truth which the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit affords him, he would force his own way forward and blaze his own trail through the unknown, putting his own imaginations for doctrines and his own words for God's. It is not

surprising that in such case, to use the words of the 20th Century, he "fails to find God".

" If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (vs. 10-11) .

This needs thinking about. It is true that many believers are so dogmatic about their own doctrinal outlook that a text such as this is very gladly and literally received and all who do not subscribe to their own outline of doctrine and agree with them in every matter of Christian belief are unhesitatingly relegated to this category and cut off from fellowship. The thoughtful Christian knows, however, that this cannot possibly be the meaning of John's exhortation here. It is quite absurd and illogical to expect all of Christ's disciples to view every doctrinal teaching in just the same light. Differences of viewpoint arise for a multitude of reasons, many of them quite outside our own control. There is not a shadow of justification for suggesting that failure to agree on some aspects of Scripture teaching, whether it be in connection with the time or manner or object of the Second Advent, the relation between the symbols of spiritual truths themselves, details of prophetic interpretation, or any other such matter, justifies the application of this verse to any fellow-believer with whom we may have such a difference. John is talking, not about these secondary doctrines, but about the fundamental basis, the primary doctrine, of our faith, "What think ye of Christ?" It is the one who denies the humanity of Jesus Christ while upon earth who is to be excluded from the benefits of fellowship, the one who refuses to accept the basic Scriptural truth that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners".

It is the one who denies that we stand in need of salvation and without Christ and his atoning sacrifice can never receive salvation that must not go on his way with the sound of "God speed" ringing in his ears.

In this our day such people fall into two classes. There are those who find no place in their theology for the Fall of man, the condemnation to death, the necessity for the coming of Jesus in the flesh to give his life a ransom for all, and in his resurrection to become Lord of all, of the one class. There are the modernists, materially-minded believers who disown the same things and disclaim belief in the miraculous

clement in Scripture, who likewise have no place for a suffering Christ. In both cases the particular theology of the group may have much to commend it; there is usually a high appreciation of the ethical value of the teachings of Christ and a great reverence for him as a Teacher, but that is all. Human salvation is to come by a conscious and deliberate conformity of one's self to the example of Christ, by one's own power. There is no admission that fallen man is quite unable to do such a thing unaided. Like Israel of old the cry is "all that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient" and, again like Israel, no realisation at all that the thing is impossible.

So these are they whom we are not to receive into our houses nor bid them God speed. The injunction is not to be held to apply to the ordinary conventions of politeness and courtesy, but to the closer circle of Christian fellowship in the Church. Such are not to be granted the privileges of the brotherhood, the spiritual communion of fraternal intercourse of the *ecclesia* (church). " *What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*" (2 Cor.6. 15). The basis of our fellowship is the ransom for all given by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That Ransom, and the doctrines upon which it depends and which are indissolubly associated with it—Fall, Condemnation, Repentance, Justification, Reconciliation, Resurrection—are the fundamental doctrines upon which we must be agreed and without which we cannot have fellowship. Other doctrines are secondary and there is room for difference of thought provided we respect our brother's views and display tolerance in the expression of same, and there is no excuse for divisions on that account. We all would surely do as well to re-examine our own position in these matters and see to it that in contending earnestly for the faith we do choose the fundamental doctrines about which to contend.

The word "God speed" here is a translation of a Greek salutation which had the significance of wishing prosperity and success and was used in correspondence in much the same way as we begin our own letters with "Greetings" and perhaps close them with "all good wishes". Acts 15. 23 is an example of Christian usage of the word: "*The Apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles*" and so is Jas. 1.1 " *James...to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting*" . Such good wishes, insofar as the practice and service of the Christian faith is concerned,

should not be extended toward those who come under the ban of the Apostle in verses 7-10 of this Epistle.

John has a great deal more to say, but for reasons unexplained he preferred to finish his Epistle at this point. The rest was to be said by word of mouth. " *Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with pen and ink—but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full*" (vs. 12). The 20th Century says " I would rather not trust it to pen and ink". The shadow of persecution was still dark over the Church; perhaps there were matters to be talked about, truths to be taught, that in the then suspicious attitude of the civil powers were best not committed to paper. John expected to see his sister-in-the-faith Kyria at some future time and promised that all the rest would be said then, to their mutual edification and joy. And so with his usual thoughtfulness he closes this brief letter with the final greetings from those who were with him "*The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen*". (vs. 13.) A little homely touch, these young people in the Truth taking advantage of this opportunity to send their personal greetings to their aunt according to the flesh, their sister according to the Spirit, in the faraway city, and in so doing attaining for themselves an immortality that they never for one moment suspected. We will not know their names, until the great assembly beyond the Vail. But we know them to be our brethren and sisters in the Lord also, and we reach hands back to them over the span of two thousand years and see in them some of the great army of unnamed ones who have preceded us in the Christian walk and been faithful unto death. Perhaps this is the most encouraging thought we can take in concluding our consideration of this short Epistle. In all the ages of the Church's history there have been unnamed ones, quietly pursuing their allotted tasks and treading their allotted paths, known only to their Saviour and Master, but brought safely home by him at the last. So it can be with us; we may never have done anything spectacular or stood in any prominent position or been known by any but the tiniest circle of brethren, but Jesus knows our names and watches our course in life, and will welcome us just as warmly as the more well-known ones, when we reach Home.

The End

AOH

AS WITH GLADNESS MEN OF OLD

This hymn was written by William C. Dix (1837-1898) in 1859 when recovering from illness. He was unusual for hymn writers at that time because he was not a clergyman, but actually worked in the maritime business. The hymn was first published in 1860 in A.H. Ward's Hymns for Public Worship and Private Devotion.

The first three stanzas of the hymn are taken from the first eleven verses of Matthew chapter two. They state the record of the wise men who came from the east to worship the king, whose star they had seen bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The fourth stanza has been attributed to Revelation 21.23 and Revelation 22.5 with an obvious reference to Matthew 7.14, which talks about the narrow way that we tread during this present age, but which leads to the heavenly home.

As with gladness men of old,
Did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly manger-bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom Heaven and earth adore,
So may we, with willing feet,
Ever seek the mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare;
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our glorious King.

Holy Saviour, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

The hymn very quickly became used in nearly every new hymn book in the 19th Century in the English language to become the hymn we know so well today.

(The tune most well known for this is called 'Dix', although it was composed by a German, Conrad Kocher and was arranged by William Henry Monks. Monks was a Londoner, who was a well-known arranger, as well as being an organist and choirmaster, during the 19th century.)

.....
Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7.14)

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.....

.....And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 21.23—22.5)

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THE STORY OF THE SHEPHERDS

A reflection on events of the first Christmas

" And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them" (Luke 2. 8-9).

Favoured men, the first to gaze upon the Lord's Christ! The wise men from the East came with their gifts, but the shepherds were there first with their homage, and for ever afterwards those Judean shepherds glorified and praised God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it had been told unto them.

It would seem that the Wise Men came much later, probably a year or more. The shepherds heard the wonderful news the same day that it happened; the angel had said *" unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"*. Perhaps even whilst he was speaking Mary was experiencing the never-to-be-forgotten wonder of taking her child into her arms for the first time. When the Wise Men ascended the steps of Herod's palace their question was *" Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East and are come to worship him"* (Matt. 2.2). Then there had to be a conference of chief priests and scribes to agree upon an answer to Herod's question that would afford the monarch the information he wanted without giving offence to his royal dignity. Even after the reply had been given, and doubtless further discussions, which have not been recorded, held between king and priests, the Wise Men were called again into the royal presence and in receiving instructions to go to Bethlehem, were admonished to bring Herod word again. The king's command to slay all the infants of two years old and under is an indication of the time that elapsed before the visit of the Wise Men.

Long prior to all this, Mary remained at Bethlehem forty days, the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses (Luke 2. 22) and then Joseph took her, and her child, to the Temple in Jerusalem to present him before the Lord. There was no fear of Herod as yet. There, in the Temple court, the aged Simeon took the child into his arms and praised God that, according to his word, he had set his eyes upon the One who was to be a light to lighten the nations, and the glory of his people Israel. Likewise Anna, coming in at that moment, gave thanks

also, and spake of him to all who looked for deliverance in Jerusalem. Herod's palace was only just across the valley from the Temple, but the proud king knew nothing of all this; evidently even then, forty days after the birth of Jesus there was no question of the Wise Men's arrival.

What a striking contrast there is in the manner of this revelation to the Wise Men and that to the shepherds! Those were guided by a star, but these were visited by an angel! The nature of that star which led the three travellers from the East has never been satisfactorily determined. All kinds of theories have been hazarded, but no one really knows. One thing is certain; the star was of this material creation, one of the worlds of light that God set in space in the dim faraway, ages before this world was, one of the "things that are made". The shepherds received greater honour, a personal visit from a special messenger of the Most High, a heavenly angel speaking with them and thrilling their hearts with the gladsome news. Once again God had reserved his choicest favour for the meek and lowly of heart.

Was it Gabriel, the archangel, who visited the shepherds that night? We cannot say for certain, but it is almost a foregone conclusion that he was the one sent. That expression "the angel of the Lord" in Luke 2. 9 seems to imply that the visitor was of exceptional rank in the heavenly realm, and the thought is supported by the coming of a "multitude" of angels to join him after he, alone, had delivered the message. He seems to have been a leader amongst them. There is no reason to think that the shepherds looked up and beheld angels flying in the heavens above their heads in the manner suggested by so many medieval paintings and representations of this event. It is almost certain that they made themselves manifest in the fashion already so familiar to the people of Old Testament times, as men, standing upon the earth, glorious in shining raiment, assuredly, and quite certainly manifesting in their countenances evidence of their heavenly origin. The shepherds must have lifted up their eyes and seen the hillside around them crowded with the serried ranks of those resplendent beings, the radiance of their concourse turning night into day, the music of their voices rising and falling upon the still air like that of a vast choir, as they sang of glory to God in the highest, and peace upon earth to men. Then the radiance began to fade, the outline of those beautiful forms become misty and shadowy, the hills and rocks and

trees slowly to show up again, and the darkness settle upon the scene as the golden voices died away and were still. The angels had gone away into heaven; but those shepherds knew that what they had seen had been no fantasy; it was solid fact, and so with one accord they rose up to go without delay into Bethlehem to see for themselves this thing that had come to pass.

Why were these particular men singled out for this honour? Did God arbitrarily pick out a group of shepherds who just happened to be in the vicinity in order to vouchsafe to someone this marvellous revelation? Surely not! These men were the first human beings to greet earth's rightful king! They were privileged to extend earth's welcome to the One who had come from above. On behalf of the entire human race whom Jesus had come to save, they made obeisance. We are so accustomed to the words of John "*he came unto his own, and his own received him not*" that we forget that the first men to see Jesus in the flesh did receive him, and talked about him for the rest of their lives. The conclusion is that these men were men of God, waiting in hope and faith and expectancy for the promised Messiah, and—who knows?—probably of that band which "*looked for deliverance in Jerusalem*" (Luke 2. 38). What more appropriate than that the Most High should apprise the "Watchers" of that day of the fact that the One for whom they looked had come at last?

"*And this shall be a sign unto thee*"—a wonder. Surely it was a wonder to men trained to expect Messiah as a great military leader and powerful King, overawing and destroying all the enemies of Israel and restoring the kingdom's former glories! "*Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*" But their faith did not stagger; there is nothing in any part of the account to suggest that they even questioned the apparent strangeness of this Messianic Advent, so different from all that they had been taught and led to expect. They came, they saw, and they worshipped, and went away to spread the glad news that the King had come.

Thirty years were to roll by before anything more was known of this strange happening. It is unlikely that many of the shepherds ever heard again of the babe whom they had been thus led to visit and adore. They were rural Judeans, and probably never left the vicinity of Bethlehem for the rest of their lives. The babe was taken away by his parents within a few weeks. Thirty years is a long time; it may be that

some of the younger ones among them, grown into old age, began to hear of the prophet who had risen in Galilee, and of his baptism in Jordan, and connected the tidings with the scene they had witnessed a generation previously. At first they must have talked about their amazing experience often as they lay around their camp fires at night or drove their flocks together through the day, but as the years went by perhaps some, at least, of them, began to wonder a little . . .

The next Passover, or perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles, and Joseph with his wife was back at Bethlehem in readiness to keep the Feast at Jerusalem. The Wise Men had come, and presented their gifts, and departed. Herod was alerted. The sojourn at Bethlehem was ended; Joseph, warned of God in a dream, made preparations for a hurried flight into Egypt. Herod's soldiers would very shortly be on the scene, searching for the young child. Perhaps the shepherds had visited the Holy Family again. They would hardly have been likely to make no further attempt to offer worship to the Saviour of the world, their Messiah. Perhaps, seeing him like that, and believing, they glimpsed something of the truth which the disciples of Jesus thirty years later found it so very difficult to accept, the necessity of a Coming in humiliation before there could be a Coming in power. They may have learned some things from Mary, and Mary in turn may have learned much from them, for we are told that she " *kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*".

So one day Bethlehem was left behind, and the young husband and wife, bearing their precious treasure with them, set out for Egypt and safety. Herod could not pursue them there, for Egypt lay outside his sphere of jurisdiction. And when, apparently only a few months later, Herod died and they returned, they passed by Bethlehem and settled sixty miles to the north, in Galilee, there to remain until the day of Jesus' showing to Israel.

Luke says nothing of the flight into Egypt; only Matthew records that. From Luke's account it would seem as if they went straight from Bethlehem to Nazareth. Why did he omit the part of the history relating to the flight? The obvious difference in the two narratives has given occasion for the assertion that one or the other account is unreliable, or even both, and that the historical value of both Gospels must be discounted accordingly. As with the majority of

such statements, investigation usually reveals that the apparently contradictory stories can be reasonably well harmonised.

It is thought that Luke drew the materials for his Gospel largely from Mary the mother of Jesus. It is quite possible for Luke to have known her. Who knows but that the girl-wife, horrified and grieved at the massacre of the Innocents and the anguish of their mothers, and knowing that this calamity had come upon them because of her own child, had put the evil memory far from her, and in after days either did not tell the details to Luke or would not have them included in the gospel which he was preparing? Matthew, of course, would have had it from Jesus himself, and it may be that the overruling power of the Holy Spirit thus respected Mary's reticence whilst taking care that the account should be preserved in one of the Gospels. It is not wise to be dogmatic, but the explanation may lie along this line. It may be noted also in passing that the true date of Jesus' birth was early October and not December 25, but this is irrelevant to what is being said here as to the human factors in the situation.

So passed the first Christmas, a season fraught with great joy and great sorrow. None of the principal characters in the drama knew of the tremendous consequences that were to arise from the happenings of those few weeks. None of them knew how many more Christmas seasons were to come and go before the song of the angels could become an accomplished fact. Today, peace on earth and goodwill among men seems farther off than ever. But it will come.

Perhaps, as we enter into another Christmas season we may take time to think awhile of those simple Judean shepherds, who, one dark night, saw a great light, and in the power and inspiration of that light became changed men. They came to see and to worship; they returned glorifying and praising God for the things that they had learned and witnessed. We come to the Lord Jesus in like manner, but we see more than a babe in a manger. We see the King, resplendent in his power, taking to himself the sceptre of authority, bringing this evil world order to an end that He might set up in its place his own everlasting Kingdom of peace. To the age-old angels' song there is added a new stanza: "*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall*

come in" . Like those simple Judeans of old, we must needs return glorifying and praising God for the evidence of the coming Kingdom that we have seen and telling of that Kingdom with such zeal, such certitude, such forthrightness, that, like the people of Bethlehem and the country round about at the time of that first Christmas, "*all they that heard it wondered of those things which were told them*" . The people of today sadly need such a message; the time is at hand, the angelic vision has appeared to us; our eyes have seen the King in his beauty. What else can we do but go on in the power and wonder of that peerless vision, talking to each other about it, telling our neighbours and friends the tremendous story, looking in faith for the fulfilment of the promise, waiting, watching, hoping, praying, until the angels come again, this time to raise the strains of a song that never shall die away so long as the earth endures.

AOH

65 YEARS OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The State of Israel was formed on 15 May 1948. Later in the year this magazine commenting on the 'Progress in Palestine', recorded that there were 750,000 Jews and 700,000 Arabs living there. Moshe Shapiro, a member of the Israeli cabinet, said at an Israeli State Council in 1948, that he expected about 225,000 immigrants a year would come to Israel. The magazine predicted that in a few years the population would be 3 to 4 million.

The total population of Israel on 31 March 2013 was recorded at 8,012,400, of which 6,037,700 were Jews. This means the population is over 8 times the number as recorded in 1948.

The economy there is doing well. It was forecasted that the Israeli economy would grow by 3.6%, despite the problems in Syria, as opposed to 1.6% in the US. The CBI forecasted growth as 1.2% in the UK.

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JACOB'S TROUBLE

A.O. Hudson

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HOW BLEST WE ARE

A look through Hebrew 11 takes one through the courageous men of faith in the Old Testament. The last two verses say, "and these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect". These men of old did not and could not receive the reward, the reward that is in store for us. WOW! The thought, that we could be a people that God chooses to give His grace and His spirit of understanding to. To live in this world according to His will. How blest we are.

God loves us and like any other father; he is interested in us and wants the best for us, like our earthly mothers and fathers do. He disciplines us as we grow, which is an act of love. He also teaches us during our lives by things we experience and we can gauge how close we are to God by our reactions to these experiences.

He provides brothers and sisters during our walk with Him. We are one in purpose and are sanctified together. How blest we are. We must love one another as it says in Hebrews 13.1 "let brotherly love continue". 1 John 3.13-24 tells us all about loving our brethren. Our brotherly love should be evident to all.

Romans 5.1-2 talks about grace and the glory of God. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God." God's grace gives us a real hope of regeneration because of his love for us and the whole human race.

God's grace gives freedom from sin. Remember God's word that says we are dead in our sins (Romans 6.11) and also the end of that verse which says we are 'alive to God in Christ' which gives us the sense of being born again to a new life. How blest we are. (Romans 6.1-14).

We have the opportunity to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who works in us (Phil. 2.12-13). We can be free from the world and all its trappings. How blest we are.

We eat of the finest food of God as we come to his table, he feeds us with food much more precious than gold or silver. How blest we are.

Therefore let us not keep eating of this world's food, as it is rubbish.

We are blest to be able to put on the full armour of God, so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. We have the belt of truth, the sword of the spirit and more (Eph.6. 11-17). We need to keep his word close to our hearts as, after all, as students of the Bible, we know that Satan is the prince of this world (John 12.31) and we are at war.

God is in control so let us not ignore his pushes and prods. He, who is trying to get us to see how it is right to live our lives, and remember (2 Cor. 4.4) that God has blinded the eyes of some, at this present time. Do not ignore the mirror to see what God wants you to see. How blest we are when we can see.

RM

THEN AND NOW ... 2 PETER 3

First, a little about Peter. Peter was, of course, one of the original disciples—a fisherman. He was very close to Jesus, being with Him at the Transfiguration and in the Garden on the night before the Crucifixion. Second Peter contains his last words for he knew he would soon die. ... In John 21:18 & 19, Jesus told Peter that he would die when he was old and that he would be taken where he did not wish to go. In the event, history tells us, he went to Rome, (at about the same time as Paul) where both were martyred.

2 Peter 1:12-15 was written to remind us of certain truths. Not only does our Heavenly Father teach us new truths, but He must remind us also of the things we already know. My goodness, Peter also seemed to know how WE need reminders—reminders for virtually everything! There he writes: "And so I will always remind you of these things, even though you already know them and are firmly grounded in the truth. I think it only right for me to stir up your memory of these matters as long as I am still alive. For I know that I will soon put off this mortal body, as our Lord Jesus Christ plainly told me. I will do my best, then, to

provide a way for you to remember these matters at all times after my death" (2 Pet 1:12 - 15 GNB). It seems here Peter was aware he did not have long to live and wanted to make this, his last message, as forceful as possible.

So what are "these things" to which Peter refers? It is the "THEN and NOW" of our title. "THEN" referring to things of the future and "NOW" to the present. It is our objective to remind ourselves, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of some of these important factors.

The "Day of the Lord" is a very forward-looking series of events comprising: 70th week of Daniel, our Lord's return, the millennium period, the new heavens and a new earth—all leading to eternity for which there is no end! Peter (in 2 Peter 3 as we have read) gives a grand summary of these events from creation to the new heavens and a new earth.

How was Peter so qualified to write about these important events? Remember He was among Jesus' closest trio of disciples: along with James and John. They must have discussed much together such as the Transfiguration when on Mount Hermon, the destruction of Jerusalem which Jesus spoke about on the Mount of Olives and the "how, why and when" of His return. They questioned Jesus almost like in a court of law:

- "How will you come?" Answer: ≡ "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory". (Luke 21:27 NIV)
- Next question: ≡ "Who will see Him?" - " Answer: ≡ "People will look at Him whom they pierced". (John 19:37 GNB).
- Next one: ≡ "What will be seen and heard at this great event?" - "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess. 4:16- 17).
- Another question: ≡ "Will this be a secret sign to a few?" Jesus answer: ≡ "No! For as lightning that comes from the East is visible even in the West, so will be the coming of the Son of

Man". (Matt 24:27 NIV)

- "When will these things happen?" The disciples again questioned. Jesus did not give a definitive answer. We cannot give an answer like a date on the calendar but we can give a couple of scripture quotations: "You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night". (1 Thess. 5:2, NIV). Or "... keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt 25:13. NIV).

These quotations all feature in our reading from 2 Peter 3.

It follows that Peter, as one of Jesus' closest disciples, remembered practically everything our Saviour told him and was able to present it to us, today, 2 000 years later. The vision Peter presents is glorious! One could liken it to taking a walk early on a summer's day, before the sun has risen. The dew is fresh on the field through which we walk. The silence extreme. We walk slowly uphill and see the top of a mountain ahead. Then the bright light of the rising sun spreading across the horizon, and finally the glimpse of the sun itself eventually becomes so bright that we cannot view it without being dazzled. Thrilling in reality—much better than what we have narrated.

This is the glorious vision we Christians have before us. ...It is "THEN" - future. There are many events that occur from now until the Day of the Lord and its culmination in the creation of a new heaven and new earth. Peter jumps from earth's beginning to its end to place emphasis on a question he poses in the middle of verse 11. Having reminded them of the doctrine of the second coming, Peter asks: "*... If all these things happen ... What kind of people should you be?*" (GNB) or to quote King James: "*... What manner of persons ought you to be ...?*" his refers to the 'NOW' of our text.

How do we answer this question?

Peter provides the first response immediately: "*You ought to live holy and godly lives*". Why? He has just been describing the temporary nature of this earth—reminding us that it will be dramatically changed during future events! It would be so futile to pursue things that will be destroyed anyway! With these changes in mind, we should prepare ourselves NOW and live in a state of holiness, that means: separated from sin so that we can live our lives in a Godly manner—devoted to worship (as we do in conventions) and service—as we act when we are with others in the "outside" world—able to

demonstrate our beliefs by words and actions. This a development of the reminder Peter first uses in 1 Peter 1. "*Therefore, with minds alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ... But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy.*" (1 Pet.1:13-16 NIV). Quite a graphic call, you will agree, for action on our behaviour! At the time this was written, it meant that the readers should literally gather up their long flowing garments to be ready for action. For us today, it can be taken as "an alarm call".

In verse 14 of chapter 3, Peter continues his reminders by saying: "*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him*" (NIV). To be spotless should not be understood literally! Having measles will not affect our character! The meaning here is to be unaffected by any of the sins of this modern world.

"*To be blameless*" ... well ... Look in Peter's first letter, 1 Peter 1: 19—where the same two Greek words are used in respect of Jesus Christ: "*the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect*". He was perfect, as we know and is, of course, the pattern we should strive to follow. With these two qualities achieved—spotless and blameless—such a person "*will be at peace with Him*".

It goes without saying then, that as we anticipate the "*new heavens and new earth*", that we should work on our character, manner of life and maturity NOW, to prepare for these, rather than material things which are to be destroyed—THEN.

2 Peter 3 verses 15-16 contain another of Peter's reminders—this time on the development of our 'understanding'. "*Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand*". This last phrase is surely not an understatement! Some of Paul's writings are hard to understand. However, the import of this passage is to emphasize the patience of our Lord. Peter is reminding us of what he wrote just a few verses previously—he does seem to realize how poor our memories are sometimes! .., verse 9: "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come*

to repentance." This gives one explanation of why our Lord has not yet returned. It is a requirement for others, to have adequate time to reflect, repent, give their lives and so achieve their salvation. Let's notice one final thing before we leave this point. Back in verse 12 Peter reminded us that it is possible to speed the return of our Lord Jesus: he wrote: "as you look forward to the Day of God and speed its coming" What does he mean here? That that day may be hastened by God's people as they speed up the accomplishment of His purposes, as we have just seen in verse 9, the sooner that day will dawn.

Prayer can hasten the Day—Our Lord Himself taught us to pray: " ... Thy kingdom come... " ... Since we well know that the Day of the Lord, IS coming and since we can speed its coming, let us be diligent to live godly lives including our prayers.

Peter's next reminder regards our understanding of the scriptures. Several times, he reiterates that he was not recording anything new, but teaching what had already been taught by the prophets, our Lord and the Apostles. In verse 16, we have seen Peter place value on Paul's writings. We know Paul's letters contain some things that can be hard to understand, which could make them vulnerable to be used for distorted or false teaching. It is our responsibility to discern what is true. Both Peter and Paul had personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, one through being an apostle, with Jesus for all His three and half year ministry, the other with the incredible encounter with the Risen Christ on the Damascus Road. We are reminded of a later statement of Peter: "For no prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God" (2 Pet. 1:21 GNB). Peter is telling us that we need to be REAL Bible Students (which we are, are we not?)—able to discern exactly what is meant, even through the barriers of time, culture and language. Not only do we have to understand what is written, but what it means for us, today, in the 21st century.

This development comes about as we mature, just as wines and wood mature over the years, so our lives mature in Jesus Christ. Christian maturity is a result of understanding—to be careful, for example, of false teachers. Four times in Second Peter, he refers to false teachers. To Peter it must have been important—perhaps he had met some of these on his travels. He certainly heard Jesus' words on the

subject—for instance—just one example—when Jesus was alone with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. He said: "... *if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah' or, 'There he is', do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time*". (Matt 24:23 - 25 NIV). These words are so striking, we believe, that they would certainly register firmly in Peter's mind and so be reproduced in his letters as we are now seeing. We must all beware of such influences and act accordingly. Never forget Jesus' words: " *Get behind me Satan ...*". Christ found these words necessary. We use them when wrong thoughts cross our mind. One of the tragic ways Satan works in this present evil world is through false teachers—through newspapers, TV or even conversation! Hence the question from Peter: " *... what manner of persons we should be ... ?*" Answer: live diligent godly lives!

It seems that so far that the scriptures have been coming solely from the New Testament. While most commands relating to our present conduct are based on the character of our Lord, it is right to remember, as an example, the instruction given by Moses to the Children of Israel. Moses is an antitype of Christ. There being some 25 comparisons—between the two.

For example: Moses was a shepherd and Christ is our Good Shepherd. (Ex 3:1; John 10).

Moses was called to deliver God's people from slavery in Egypt (Ex 3:10). Jesus was called to deliver people from sin. Both Moses and Christ gave God's people the law/covenant. The Old law came through Moses, the New came through Christ. Moses Law was inaugurated by the blood of animals, while the law of Christ was initiated with Jesus Christ's own blood. (Ex. 24:8)

Moses brought the ten commandments and the entire Law of the Old Testament to the nation of Israel. It served as the guiding principle for Israel as God's chosen nation at that time, to be a light to the world and an example of righteous, holy living. Their goal was the Promised Land and the route and time taken tortuous. It lasted many years. Moses records the instruction he received from God in Deuteronomy 5:31 - 33 (NIV), "You stay here with me so that I may give you all the commands, decrees and laws you are to teach them to follow, in the

land I am giving them to possess. So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper in the land that you will possess". A few verses later Moses reiterates another Commandment: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*". (Deut. 6:5)—Words echoed by our Lord himself when asked which of the commandments is the most important. Matthew records Jesus' reply to the teacher of the Law: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important commandment. And the second is like it: 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'. The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments*". (Matt 22:37-40), So we find parallels from Moses to Jesus Christ extolling the way we should live ourselves and behave toward others.

The journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the promised land, can in many respects, be likened to our walk through the Christian life. The instructions are given which we endeavour to follow. Difficulties and trials on the way may be legion but there is a glorious future in store when we reach our promised land. Peter, in chapter 3 refers to it and then puts that question as to how we should be NOW. We trust we have demonstrated, from the scriptures, just a few of the many desirable attributes we should have.

A decade or two before Peter's letter, Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi. A passage from Chapter 4, provides a better summary of our discussion than we can possibly make. Paul wrote:

" Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard ... put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" . (Philippians 4.8-9 NIV).

DS

THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

Chapter 1—The Holy One of Israel

The highest accomplishment of all religious life and experience is to become intensely aware of the holiness of God. This great fact—God's absolute holiness—is the very essence of all revealed Truth, in that it takes us behind all that God does in order to show us what He "is". Behind the whole structure of the Divine Plan of Redemption is the character of that God who framed it. If, in our Gospel day, we have been permitted to see that redemptive Plan as a manifestation of unfathomable love, it is because that love existed before the plan was made. If we today can talk of Bethlehem, and Calvary, and Olivet, and realise that the coming of a Babe, the dying of a man, the resurrection and ascension of the Son of God have made salvation possible for all, then back of all that preparation we must see the yearning heart of One who, for a time, had lost possession of His earthly sons. If, looking onward, down the years we see a righteous world, where no ill deed is done, and man is free from sin, then behind the whole design we must allow for One who hated sin before that sin began. Behind all precious doctrine, behind all redemptive work, behind each type and shadow, behind the whole Gospel story, there stands the identity of One who in Himself is greater than His works. From His own great heart the love-stream flowed; from His white-hot soul the sin-hatred sprang; and from His unfaltering Will, the drive and power of accomplishment came forth. Effects spring only from adequate causes—Redemption and Restoration must have Redeemer and Restorer, and though others may be chosen to help reach those effects, He only is the First Great Cause.

Behind all Truth, behind all development of this or that to serve His ends, stands God Most High; a God of Love and Pity, compassionate, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, yet not overlooking sin. If love of man is found in men, it is because it first was found in Him. If love of truth is found in man, again it first was found in Him. Out from His unsullied fullness sprang all that He has done. He "does" because of what He "is". Because He "is" today all that He ever "was", His purposes remain unchanged. Because eternal years to come will find Him still as He "now is", the utmost bounds of time will find no

variation in His ways. Today as yesterday, and throughout everlasting years, His integrity will remain the same because His native Holiness can know no change. His glorious plans, made sure by promise, and precious blood, and "Oath" upon His own Great Name, assure both Heaven and Earth that He will uproot sin, and uplift man, till naught of Adamic or Satanic taint remain; till man and angel too, shall savour of that holy state so like his own.

No student of God's word can feel surprise that He who dwelt with the Eternal God before the round of time began should here on earth, in time, teach mortal man as the first burden of his prayer to say "Our Father....hallowed be Thy Name..." Through the ages too profound to calculate the worthy Son had held in reverent esteem that Holy Name, and times unnumbered He had led the undefiled in heaven to sing its worthy praise, and echo forth the "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord"—a song which in due time will rise from every tongue.

Come down to this sad earth, the sweetest hours which blessed His lonely life were those in which memory sped back to those far days before the world was made. The memory of that Holiness in this His hour of need, what time He walked 'mid sin and death, kept Him, as needle to the pole, at rest and peace, and faithful unto death. When humble earthly fishermen, desiring to know God, requested to be taught, the theme that rose from His own soul was given as pattern for their prayers. "Our Father...hallowed be Thy Name".

In His touching farewell prayer, though heavy sorrow filled His soul, the same great theme engrossed His mind. When placing his little band for their safekeeping within His Father's care. He prayed "Holy Father, keep through Thine own Name, those whom Thou hast given me" (John 17. 11). No thought of nearing death could banish from his mind the "Holy Father" and the "Holy Name". By precept and example then, before His chosen few, the Son of Man who came from Heaven held up on earth that Holy Name as worthy of all praise and adoration, because it was the Name of Him who in Himself was holy beyond compare.

How extremely poor are illustrations and words to show to us men the incalculable heights of worthiness and excellence which natively reside in God. High as the highest heaven, above the lowest spheres of earth, so stands God's moral worth above the worth of

worthiest man. No single thought, no single word, no single act, from the far depths of everlasting years gone by, to the far distances of everlasting years to come has ever yet, or ever can know taint or flaw. No tongue of men or angel will ever need to utter accusation against the Holy Name, when once He deigns to show Himself such as He truly is. No truce with sin, nor irresolution to root it out will ever come to be preferred against the Holy One of Israel. The sacred writers say that "God is Light". How wonderful, and yet how inadequate is light to illustrate that greater "Light"! Far back along the stream of time chaos and unending darkness reigned, and light "was not"; but the "Eternal Light" dwelt in His abode and sent forth from thence His brooding power, and drew the beams of light out of the womb of black eternal night. Greater far that "Holy Light" than our majestic "king of day, at summer's noonday hour!

The Scriptures say He is "of purer eyes" than to behold approvingly the sins of men. But how insufficient are those mere words to tell of that undefilable purity which no foe can taint. If whiteness be the token of inward purity then God's native Holiness shall out-white the winter's virgin snow. If the white-hot glow is needed to consume the dross in order that the pure red gold may be set free, then God's fiery jealousy against sin is a flame intenser far. Brighter than the equatorial noonday sun, purer than the polar virgin snow, hotter than the mercury or oxygen-fed flame is Divine jealousy for the right, the good; the true, and its zeal against sin and wrong and evil in every form.

But there it must be left. Our world contains no parallel to the exceeding intensity of the Holiness of God. Our language has no words—not even Shakespeare's facile pen nor Milton's glowing tongue—to paint the Holy Fire which dwells eternal in the heart of God; and here our quandary begins.

All students of the Holy Book admit the Holiness of God. But none admit the holiness of man. How then can we contemplate our text? If God is Holy beyond compare, how can we attain to holiness like Him? What do these words of Peter mean? Let us note again that they are prefaced by an "it is written". "Because it is written". "Be ye holy, for I am holy". Back somewhere then in an earlier day the inspired penman had recorded these few words, and Peter takes them up to sharpen his appeal to win his brethren to a purer life. But can

disciples live a holy life? Is it not presumptuous to speak of holiness and saintliness while here on earth? Are we not of sinful stock, and tainted by the fall? Do we not oft do things we ought not, and leave undone those we should do? Can we claim, even in our best moments, to be free from sin? Nay indeed! Before the query arises the answer comes! Yet Scripture describes brethren as holy (Rom. 12. 1, Heb. 3. 1) and often calls them saints (Rom. 1. 7, 1 Cor. 1. 2, Eph. 1. 1, etc.)! In what way then can sin and holiness accord? Another distinction here needs to be made. Paul says, "There is none righteous" (Rom. 3. 10). Is holiness and righteousness the same quality of heart? Holiness is generally understood to mean freedom from sin, "an absolute purity of heart". But so is righteousness; that is, when speaking other than of righteousness by faith. Wherein comes the difference then?

Righteousness is a forensic term—that is, it indicates a state or condition in harmonious conformity with a law. It is a "law" term, and as such applies to the equitable action, the righteous balance or the just measure, in men's inter-dealings with each other. A transaction is accounted righteous or un-righteous according to its conformity or nonconformity to a code of laws which has been accepted and constituted the standard of rectitude in any given community. These standards vary in different communities, hence an action may be lawful (legally correct) among one people, but unlawful in another. An action may be considered right (righteous) in one community but condemned in all the rest. Herein lies much of the basic cause for the world's present distress.

Connected with the things of God and God's dealings with men, it is the Divine code of laws which determine what is right and what is wrong. Here the standard of righteousness is absolute, and is the same for every land and every man. It applies to angels too; it embraces both heaven and earth. Not even God Himself is exempted from its claims (John 17. 25). Righteousness (in the absolute) is a state in which full compliance with Divine Law exists. Such compliance denotes a state of legal sinlessness. Sin is accounted to be equivalent to un-righteousness—"a missing of the mark"—a non-compliance with the Law's demands. Sin and unrighteousness are thus synonymous. Righteousness is the *legal* opposite condition to both sin and unrighteousness.

Holiness applies to the moral aspect of an act. It describes the moral quality of a man whose action when completed is determined as righteous. Lack of holiness, before an act, predisposes to the performance of an act which when completed is determined as an unrighteous act. Holiness is thus the moral opposite of sin. Lack of holiness implies taint in the man, just as unrighteousness implies taint in the act. Holiness implies that man is wholesome in himself, exactly as righteousness implies that the action is wholesome in itself. Holiness is thus the basic moral quality within the man whether in action or at rest. Righteousness is the outworking of that inner quality when its activity conforms to the accepted standard of law. Holiness applies to what one is ("the *Holy One* of Israel"); righteousness to what one does ("Thy righteous *acts* are made manifest"; Rev. 15. 4).

In God we have Holiness *in what it is*—in other words subjective Holiness—the holiness of the subject whether active or at rest; but in God we see it also applied to an end, to rid the world of sin. Here we see it as objective Holiness as well, applied to an objective or purpose. The holiness of God's inner Self desires the holiness of His whole environment. In God's Divine Plan we have God's intrinsic Holiness expressing itself in such activities as will eventually reproduce a similar intrinsic holiness (the same kind though in less degree) in a race of men who had been once defiled by sin. God sets Himself before this race of men as the pattern for them to imitate. He desires to see produced in them the same high qualities of heart which dwell so richly in Himself—to see men love their fellows, and dwell at peace, each with his kin, and all with God.

God longs for man to reach up to an untainted state within, in order that he may perform untainted works without. Thus, to renew righteousness in the earth God will act upon the human heart, enabling man to create a new environment. From the inner to the outer; from the centre to the circumference, from the heart to the hand; such is God's order in the uplift out of sin. To make man's life sound without, God will first make it sound within.

If then God's Holiness is such, where do we stand today? In this mad world of sin and sorrow how can we become like Him? It is not Nature's gift to any man to be a saint, it is the work of Grace. We needs must learn, patient and slow, how best to copy God, and then, to stand the strain, God must give grace to help, and eyes to see, and meanwhile

hold us in His hand; and then by slow degrees the lesson will be learned, and we shall come to see our God more lovely than all the sons of men. The dark forbidding cloud that hides Him from men's view will open up its folds and we shall pass within the veil of mysteries and see things there which human eye has never seen, nor mortal ear has heard, nor heart of man conceived. In there, like Moses on the mountain's crest, God's glory falling upon our hearts will change them day by day, until the holy supersedes the vile, and we become like Him.

TH

GORDON CHILVERS

We first met Gordon Chilvers at a young people's meeting at Coventry in John Hough's Mission in 1946. A few years later at a Midland Convention at Leicester he gave a short talk—it was about lemonade bottles the labels of which had been changed. It was a parable, of course and we came to enjoy Gordon's illustrations which always drove home a valuable lesson.

He developed into a first rate preacher and could always be relied upon to give a good sermon. After their marriage Gordon and Ruth established their home in the orchard of 'The Haven'. As their lovely family grew so did the fellowship at Bethany and it became a centre of meetings of all kinds. Best remembered are the 'Bible Weeks', when what appeared to be dozens of children assembled, sometimes with parents, to learn in a variety of ways about The Word of God. Gordon was involved in much of the work of the Midland Group of Free Bible Students including developing the Midland Newsletter and printing it, and many programmes. In his last years he took over the editing role of Bible Study Monthly. He had a singularly forceful way of writing and teaching, both with the spoken word and in writing.

DN

Thanks to the anonymous donor of \$100 cash

CHRISTMAS CAROL

Now Mary and Joseph
To Bethlehem went
They searched through the town
but could not find rent
No room in the Inn was
The cry from them all
Then Innkeeper to Joseph
I lend you my stall
Shepherds while watching
In the night
Saw a vision a wondrous sight,
Fear not said the angel
Glad tidings I bring
For today to you is born
A king and this shall be
A Sign to All you'll find
Him in a manger stall
To the shepherd went
As saw just as the angel
said before



Wise men travelling from afar
Was guided to Bethlehem
By a bright star
They came to Bethlehem
Until that bright and
Shining star stood still
Into a house they
Did enter
Giving gifts of Gold
Frankincense and myrrh
And like the shepherds
And wise men too
This day we give
our hearts to you

BP

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