

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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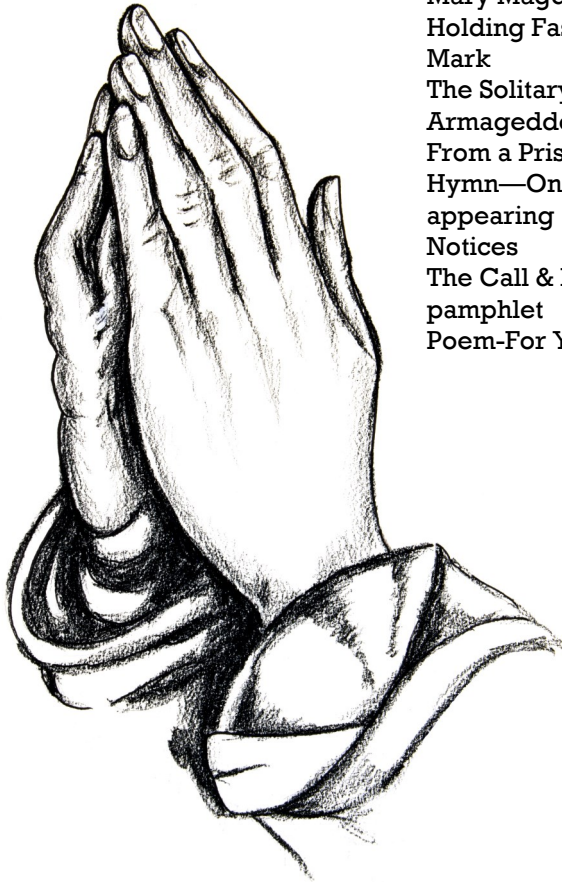
January / February 2015

Pray for the peace of
Jerusalem.

Psalm 122.6

Thy Kingdom come.

Matt. 6.10



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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)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge on request to all who are genuinely interested.

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Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"

This is a bit of a play on words. Salem meaning 'peace' and Jerusalem being 'the city of peace'. This peace must be achievable otherwise David would not have been inspired to write it. But the world at present does not know peace.

In January 2015 it will be the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. That event seems emblematic of the conflict and lack of peace there was in the 20th Century. In many ways its not so long ago that the world was involved in such a conflict that allowed such extreme persecution of certain groups especially God's elect. Therefore it is not such a big surprise to see the Middle East still enduring conflicts which are leading to many deaths.

At a recent local production of 'Fiddler on the roof', an actor gave the words, 'wouldn't this be a good time for Messiah to return?'. One can wonder whether the other theatregoers had similar thoughts go through their minds.

One of the closing scenes in this production the matchmaker fleeing the pogrom in Russia decides to return to Jerusalem. Therefore you can understand why people chose to move there in recent centuries. Many more have returned to Israel since the events of 1945.

Habakkuk is a prophetic book which has been describing the troubles of Israel and the world, but also bringing the message of hope that things will get better in due time. We rejoice in that message of hope Habakkuk and the other prophets bring to us this day.

Psalm 122 is a psalm of David when Israel still had the ark of the covenant in the Tabernacle, however it still remained for his son Solomon to build the Temple, ‘the House of the LORD’ in Jerusalem. At this time the people of Israel went up to Jerusalem three times a year for festivals, such as Passover, hence in many ways it represented Israel as a whole and was the Centre point of their nation.

But what does this mean to Christians today? We are like ‘Solomon’s Temple’ or ‘the house of the Lord’, enjoying a covenant relationship with God, who will make up the New Jerusalem. The second part of Psalm 122.6 (YLT) reads, “At rest are those loving thee.” We are at rest and at peace having heard the Good News and now stand fast in the love of God.

Our prayers for the world at this time can be to pray, ‘thy kingdom come’ being the remedy for our own problems as well as the whole world of mankind.



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ON EARTH PEACE—GOODWILL TOWARD MEN

Part 2-The More Excellent Way

They could not understand how such a method could accomplish any good. Time and again even the Apostles failed to follow this more excellent way. Peter struck off the ear of the high priest's servant; Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Put up thy sword (carried in that land as a protection against wild beasts) into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18.11)

The Matthew account (Matt. 26.53-54) clearly indicates that Jesus voluntarily allowed His persecutors to take Him captive, for He explained "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" This is the same thought as that given in John's account—"The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" If this be linked up with the words of Hebrews 5.8 we begin to see the Divine method, for there we read "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are superior to those of men, even as the Creator is above the created (Isa. 55. 8-9), in due time, He will be vindicated.

In order to bring peace on earth, God had so arranged His Plan that His Son should be the Redeemer of mankind, and that He should give His life amid conditions of evil which He was commanded to resist by the force of love alone. This is very clearly seen when on one occasion the Greeks (it is understood) desired Jesus to be their King, which would have avoided the cruel death on the Cross. But Jesus, in perfect subjection to the will of God, informed them that if He was lifted up from the earth to heaven then He would be able to "draw *all* men unto me."

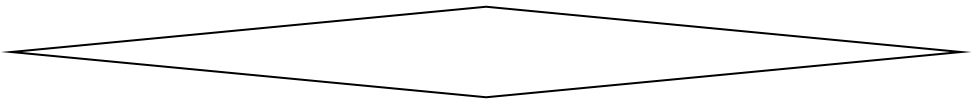
When viewed in this light we can see the deep wisdom of the Heavenly Father, for in no better way could He prepare His dearly beloved Son for His future work as the Anointed Priest made "higher than the heavens." While Christ defeated the sin of the world by accepting it into His love, He at the same time learned obedience, demonstrated His absolute *loyalty* to God, and developed *sympathy* for those Whom He died to save. To this

agree the words of the Apostle in Hebrews 5.1-5 “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God... Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way... So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.”

This method seems so futile without the Divine Spirit of enlightenment. That is the thought expressed by the prophet “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa. 53.7-8). So it seemed when He died, as they cruelly giped Him: “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross....He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Matt. 27. 40-42). Nevertheless, He rose within three days to be the greatest Leader of all time because faithful to the Divine method in this Age of dealing with evil, and in due course “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied,” for, by virtue of the Atonement, it will be possible for God to pour out His Spirit on all flesh so that they will learn to love peace and good will.

Selected

Next time—Part 3 Called to Follow in His Steps, Christ’s terms, way and cost



* Before reading the next article,....

On 12 November 2014, the Independent reported that a Japanese man had set himself on fire to protest against the decision of the government to ease the restrictions on the use of the Japanese military. Since World War 2, they had been unable to use military force against other nations, unless in self-defence. This act of self-immolation was even filmed.

This man has reportedly died. A similar case was reported in June, but that time the middle-aged man survived.

Self immolation is linked to sacrifice.

THE GREATEST OF THESE

A study in I Cor.13.13 Part 1.

The “other” things

Before we can estimate at its true value the Love of which Paul writes in this sublime chapter, we must consider for a little while some of “the other things” with which he contrasts it in the course of his argument. We shall find that this Master-grace is not only a greater thing than faith and hope—the two particular virtues mentioned in our text—but a greater thing than all the occult mysteries with their complex organisations, which for many centuries had formulated and laid down the ways of life for countless millions of the earth’s misguided population. We shall also find it to be a greater and more excellent thing than that immature and mechanical way of life prevailing in the Corinthian and other Churches in those very early days prior to the writing of those letters and Epistles which together comprise our New Testament. In a word, the scope of Paul’s argument throws this heaven-sent Grace into sharp contrast with all those occult and idolatrous influences which had moulded the customs of the various sections of the human race; had instituted their many ways of life, and which, because of the hold it gave them over the masses, were held in great esteem by the intellectual princes of that ancient world. It is only when we can make allowances for all that old-time prophecy had meant to some, the “Occult mysteries” to others, and the practices of Stoic self-immolation* to still others, that we will be able to appreciate, as Paul appreciated it, what this marvellous heavenly gift will mean to men, when, at last, it comes to replace them all.

The relationship between God, man and the universe

Behind all these “other things”—the systems of prophecy, of the mysteries, and of self-immolation—stood the great problem of God and the Universe, and of man’s relationship thereto. To the unenlightened heathen mind, whether cultured or untaught, this besetting problem was ever the great enigma of their lives. With them, as with men of modern times, there was always a riddle of the Universe, deep, elusive, and difficult to solve.

Ancient theories known by 1st Century Corinthians

Many speculating minds sought to understand how a First Great Cause—which all admitted there must be—could have created an order of things in which the sensuous and servile qualities of men predominated so extensively. Men found themselves scarcely separated from the brute, bound with tendencies to lust and vice, unable to escape from the “pull” of a self-centred life. Why were they fettered in this way? Why could they

not rise above this environment; How had this state of things come to be? Had the Prime Cause (or Causes, if more than one) definitely and deliberately made it so? Many and various were the speculations voiced by numerous enquiring minds, and many were the theories attempting to explain this riddle of the Universe. Some attempted to explain it by asserting that two antagonistic deities existed side by side—a good one and an evil one—and that all the evil in the world had been introduced by the evil god, with whom the “good” deity was at constant war—the one producing storms, gales, cyclones and all other disastrous things, while the other was responsible for the sunshine, bounteous harvests and life-giving water springs. “How” they asked “could one all-pure, all-good God form a world whose substance and inhabitants were so replete with such evil properties, and so many evil things?” The only solution they could see was that there must be two opposing Gods—the one responsible for the good in life, the other for the bad. This solution was not stated quite so simply as that, but was dressed up in high-sounding speculative terms, so that to the uneducated there was always something of mystery attending it.

Others sought to answer in another way. The First Great Cause projected from Himself, spiritual entities called Aeons or Emanations; these also, in turn, projected other Aeons or Emanations. With each succeeding projection the original divine element became weaker and less pure, so that, in course of time as the lower ranks of angels were projected they became able to deal with the chaotic matter in the universe; shape and make it into this terrestrial world, and people it with sensuous man.

Thus the gap between the Great First Cause and man was deep and wide, and many were the speculations as to the “how” and “why” it had been brought about. Specific claims to know these secrets were made by certain presumptuous minds whose special claim it was to have been thus entrusted with this “knowledge” by the gods. An air of deep mystery pervaded all this “*gnosis*”, separating men who “knew” from those who did not “know”.

In other lands mysteries associated with priestcraft and idol-worship claimed to hold the secrets of the gods. Stories of the exploits of the fallen angels in their clandestine relations with the daughters of men (Gen. 6. 2) both before and after the flood (see Num. 13. 33, for reference to the “giant” offspring of the illicit contact—same word “*Nephilim*” as in Gen.

6. 4) were invested with abstruse (obscure) meanings, and embodied in a vast system of “Mystery”. Double meaning to words gave rise to both an inner and an outer explanation of these mysteries—the inner or “esoteric” explanation being for the priestly “initiate” alone. From this source came all the idolatrous systems of Babylonia and Canaan.

Knowledge and love

That Paul has all these ancient systems of mystery in his mind is evident from the recurring references he makes to the idol system with which the Corinthian brethren had had contact in those former days, before they received the truth. In Chapter 8. 1, he introduces his line of contrast between the “*Gnosis*”, and the “*Agape*”, and informs us that possession of the “*Gnosis*” alone would result in vanity and conceit in the individual, while possession of the “*Agape*” would cause a sound foundation to be laid upon which a solid superstructure could be reared. Continuing (vs.5) he says “...there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many and lords (*baals*) many”—a sure indication that he has the many heathen systems under review.

Again in Chapter 10. 20, he says “...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils (demons ‘*daimoniois*’)...” (See also vs. 21). Furthermore, the use in Chapter 13. 2, of the two words “*musteria*” (mystery) and “*gnosis*” (knowledge) affords the strongest evidence that Paul was taking a very wide survey of the heathen world, with all its ways of life. Even though the word “*musteria*” was a word in general use to denote things peculiar to a trade or profession—trade secrets we would call them today—the special circumstances of those days would invest it with a more specific meaning than that. Trades and professions were dedicated to the gods, and specific knowledge of the trade was interwoven with specific knowledge of the god.

Paul’s use of these terms shows that he is contrasting “the way of life” purpose by God with all the many ways of life associated with the many gods, and with the many philosophic answers to the unsolved riddles of the Universe. He will yet show that “the *Agape*” alone can provide the answer to this otherwise insoluble enigma.

In this analysis Paul also sees the system of the fire-worshipper who gave his body to the flames, not to be burned to death, but to have it callosified (made callous or insensitive). “Fakir” practices like this abound in some

eastern lands to this day. Great merit—sainthood—was considered to flow from this method of burning sin out of the flesh.

To the Jew

Additionally, with his eye on the stickler for Jewish orthodoxy in the Corinthian Church, Paul introduces the Jewish way of life into his analysis, and visualises the “explainer of the Prophecies”, at his work. To the ardent Jew—as a member of a people separated unto God, the old-time prophecies contained the very word of God Himself in answer to the universal enigma—they contained the sum and substance of all essential knowledge needful to understand men’s relation to the First Great Cause. And he who could, by great subtlety of argument, bring down the high things—the mountains—to the level of the human mind was accounted great indeed in his people’s esteem.

Corinthians not broken clear

Here then in these varying contrasted things, Paul has compiled a summary of the greatest and most revered institutions known to the peoples of his day. Among the Corinthian brethren were some who had had contact with, and some degree of knowledge of, one or more of the systems on his list and would be able to evaluate Paul’s line of contrast much better than we can do today. To us these things are merely historic echoes from an ancient past; to them they had been the living factors imposed upon them by heredity and environment—rounds of life from which they had not as yet entirely broken clear.

But, though we cannot judge these contrasts as they could, we should try, at least, to understand that all these cults and systems had been for them the only channels of present satisfaction and of future expectation in that dark period of the world, both for the life that now is, and for the enshadowed life that lies ahead. The dim pleasures of Elysium, or Nirvana, and every other conception of final bliss had been to them the only climax to these several ways of life that they had lived for.

The daily life

In this list of contrasts we are brought face to face with universal things, the daily round and common task for nations and for men, from the cradle to the grave; also with the vast superstitious systems which had moulded both nations and men and made them what they were. We should also realise that apart from the new heaven-sent Way which Paul was setting forth there was no road out, no way of escape from the age-worn groove into which they had been born, in which they were fated to live, till life

was done. Life's deeper things were mysteries indeed, riddles concerning the universe, riddles concerning the First Great Cause, and riddles of even humankind itself.

With all their supposed philosophic knowledge and their myriad mysteries what advantage did they gain? Death still reigned supreme, evil still ran rampant without check, tyrant rule stalked the earth, and priestly craft still bound the minds of men, even of their noblest and best. Where was their driving power, and to what end could they lead, save into deeper darkness and hopelessness? The nations were indeed without God and without hope in the world. Even the Jews, by tradition, had made void the Word of God, and the Light was about to pass them by, and leave them also in darkness deeper than theretofore.

Agape Love

Against all this flotsam of thought and practice Paul sets forth one thing—*The Agape!* Were I able to reveal every mystery—so he says—explain every prophecy, feed all the poor everywhere, mount the purifying pyre, or even charm the earth with angelic wisdom or Homeric eloquence all this would avail me nothing if I lacked the *Agape*. It would but add to the world's clanging din, out of which no good had yet come; out of which no good could ever come world without end. Generations would still drag their weary way to the tomb, groping through the darkness without one ray of light.

Not from the mystery-mongering of conceited men, not from farfetched solutions of ancient prophecy, not from Stoic or humanitarian activities could that which is "perfect" come. There is but one power that can lead to that desired end—that Power is "*The Agape*". Not by self-effort can that "Perfect" estate be attained. It can come only by the help of God. And it is that "Helping Hand" which Paul sets over against all these "other things".

Superior way of Life

God has purposed to bring in a "way of Life", which, because it is the "Way of Love" will be superior to all these "other things", and thereby reveal the answer to the riddle that has baffled human-kind for all the ages past. It will, in itself, be the explanation of the Purpose that has had all the ages for its development. It will show why men by searching could not find out God, and why through the dark centuries they were left to guess and speculate about the Great First Cause, about the Universe, and about themselves.

TH

HABAKKUK—PROPHET OF FAITH

5. Let God Arise

God came from Teman! We left Habakkuk dazzled by the glory of the vision; God rising up to the deliverance of his people in a blaze of light which eclipsed all other light. *“His glory covered the heavens . . . his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.”* (ch.3. 3-4). That last phrase is badly translated; the meaning is that of rays of light streaming from his hands as though held in a clenched fist, and his hidden power “veiled” as though concealed in that hand ready to be let loose upon the earth in judgement. Certain mythological gods have been depicted in ancient sculptures holding flashing lightnings in their hands in the same fashion; here the thunderbolts of Jehovah are about to be rained down upon a world ripe for judgment. Since in this third chapter of Habakkuk’s prophecy we have been carried forward to the last great day of this present world, the day when God stands up to intervene in human affairs once more and bring in his Kingdom of everlasting righteousness, this judgment is the one that is to terminate this day and age in which we live, a judgment the beginnings of which we already see in our generation, a judgment which is none the less of God though it be the direct fruit of men’s own selfishness and wickedness leading man to the fearful impasse which at this present time confronts him.

“Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet” (vs. 5).

This is the first hint of the gathering storm. In front of the advancing Lord go pestilence and disease, bred by man and taking their revenge upon man, decimating the hosts who would oppose the onward progress of God’s Plan. Here is a fit symbol of war, the great desolator of mankind, war which breeds pestilence and throws fire upon earth.

And now it is as though the Most High, arising to “shake terribly the earth”, has paused for a moment to take stock of the position. *“He stood, and measured (i.e. took the measure of) the earth. He beheld, and drove asunder the nations, and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow (before him) whose ways are everlasting”* (vs. 6). This is not the coming forth of God to actual judgment. It is preparation

for that judgment, and as such corresponds very well to this last Century when the nations struggle in a morass of tumult and strife, war and revolution, famine and disease, distress and disaster which is effecting the scattering of the symbolic mountains, the kingdoms of this world, and the driving asunder of the nations. God has not yet come forth in judgment. He is yet in the day of his preparation, calling the nations to Armageddon and gathering them into the valley of threshing. *“Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles,”* He Commands, *“prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near...let the weak say, ‘I am strong’. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen (nations), and gather yourselves together round about: thither the LORD will bring down thy mighty ones...”* (Joel 3.9-14 margin). This is how God measures the earth, drives asunder the nations, scatters the everlasting mountains, and brings low the perpetual hills. We in our lifetime are seeing this very thing come to pass; today this gathering of the nations to judgment seems to be all but completed and the stage set for the final act in the drama.

Men sense that fact, and they are afraid, just as afraid as were the inhabitants of Arabia and Canaan when they beheld the advancing hosts of the Most High coming out of the desert with the Shekinah glory cloud at their head. Habakkuk knew of their fear, and described it in moving words. *“I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.”* (vs. 7). “Upon the earth” said Jesus there will be “distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” (Luke 21. 25 & 26). The time in which we live is such a time of fear, and the fear is well founded, for the sword of the Lord hangs in the sky above this doomed social order. How long before it descends, as Isaiah said it would descend, “upon the people of my curse, to judgment” (Isa. 34. 5)?

The evidence of Divine displeasure with the earth increased as Habakkuk continued to behold the vision. He broke off his account for a moment to ask two questions—rhetorical questions. *“Was the LORD displeased against the rivers?”* he asks *“was thine anger against the rivers? Was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?”* (vs.8). In the Exodus story, the Red Sea and the river Jordan were barriers to the onward progress of God’s people into their inheritance. The Red Sea was driven back, and the Jordan was

restrained from flowing, to give the people free passage. In our day there are symbolic rivers and a symbolic sea which alike oppose the onward progress of the Divine Plan and they too will experience the Divine displeasure. The river symbolises human autocracy and the sea human democracy, both playing a prominent part in the affairs of nations today but both destined to give way before the triumphant march of the King of Kings. That the sea symbolises “the people” in prophetic lore is demonstrated by Isa. 17. 12-13 (margin) “*Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like thistledown before the whirlwind*”. Of the great host that is to be raised up from the north parts to invade the land of Israel at the end of the Age it is said “their voice roareth like the sea” (Jer. 6. 23) an indication that their savage onslaught has behind it the irresistible force associated with a mighty overwhelming flood of waters sweeping over the land and carrying away everything in its course. “*In that day*” says Isaiah, speaking of this same great host that will invade the Holy Land at the end “*they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea*”. (Isa. 5. 30). The picture is that of a tumultuous host of people recognising no authority save that which proceeds from their association together; the roaring is the roaring of “mob rule”, of government by the masses, of democratic government without God; and God is against it. “*Was thine wrath against the sea?*” asks Habakkuk. God’s anger at the time of the end will most assuredly be against the sea.

And the rivers? The great rivers of the Bible—the Nile in Egypt, the Euphrates in Babylonia and the Tigris in Assyria—became the centre of each nation’s life and the source from which each drew wealth and sustenance. To the river the nation owed everything, fertility of land, food, facilities for trade; all came from the river. So “the river” very easily becomes a symbol of kingly power and rule, contrasting with the sea, general or mob rule. Ezekiel alludes to this, identifying Pharaoh king of Egypt with the river Nile “*Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself*”. (Ezek. 29. 3). Jeremiah, seeking for a simile to describe the coming of Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt to do battle with the Babylonians at Carchemish, cried

“Who is this that cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? Egypt riseth up like a flood, and his waters are moved like the rivers;” Jer. 46. 7-8). Just as the sea pictures or symbolises the restless masses of humanity seeking to evolve their own system of government, so do the rivers symbolise the more autocratic rule of kings and princes, of military powers and commercial interests; and the anger of the Lord is against them all. God comes forth upon his horses, to war—and the chariots of salvation are following him.

What are these chariots? They are the forces of heaven, coming forth to bring Millennial blessings to mankind immediately the judgment is ended. *“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.”* (Psa. 68. 17). Elisha’s servant was permitted, for an instant, to see the chariots of God in the mountains, sent to defend the prophet of God (2 Kings 6. 17). Daniel saw the angelic messengers around the throne in his great vision of the inauguration of the Kingdom (Dan. 7. 10), and John the Revelator, seeing something of the same in his vision, said of the heavenly ones with the returning Lord *“the armies which are in heaven followed him”* (Rev. 19. 14 ASV).

The next verse marks the completion of God’s day of preparation. *“Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word—SELAH.”* (vs. 9). This is a poor translation and the meaning is obscure. The word for “tribes” also means an instrument of chastisement, and it is thought that the most likely rendering of the passage is *“Thy bow shall be bared, even the chastisements sworn by thy word”*. Now if that is the true rendering—and it is certainly more intelligible and more closely connected with the context than is the A.V. rendering—we have a picture, from verse 4 to verse 8, of the “day of his preparation”, the gathering of the forces that are to play their part in the closing scenes of this “battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16. 14) and then, in verse 9, all things being ready, God, as a great warrior, as it were, draws back his bow and lets loose the winged shaft that will bring judgment, swift and decisive, upon the forces that have arrayed themselves in determined opposition to his incoming Kingdom.

This conception of the swift descent of judgment upon the evil host is illustrated by allusions in other parts of the Scriptures. *“For my sword*

shall be bathed in heaven” says God through the prophet Isaiah, “*behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment*” (Isa. 34.5). The prophetic song of Moses recorded in Deut. 32 has a similar strain when the Lord promises that at the end of time He will remember the sorrows of his ancient people and deliver them, inflicting judgment upon their enemies. “*For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment... I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh...*” (Deut. 32. 40-42). “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed*” says the Psalmist, but “*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.*” (Psa. 2. 2-5). Perhaps the most biting, burning, moving words of all are those of Jeremiah, directed, it is true, to the Philistines of his own day and having no prophetic application, but in their impassioned eloquence a fitting commentary on what has already been said. “*O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the LORD hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore? There hath he appointed it?*” (Jer. 47. 6-7). How can it be quiet, indeed, when all the sin and iniquity of the long millenniums of human history has filled up the measure of human guilt and the earth cries to high heaven for judgment? How can it be quiet, when the outraged holiness of God will brook no further delay, and the seventh angel is raising his trumpet to sound (Rev. 11. 15), and the nations are angry, and the time of judgment is come, and of reward to the faithful saints and prophets, and of destruction to the corrupters of the earth? (Rev. 11. 18). “*He gathered them together*” says the Revelator “*to a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon*”. (Rev. 16. 16). “*After many days*” says Ezekiel, addressing this same great evil host “*thou shalt be ordered forward*” (Ezek. 38.8 Leeser).

Thus the stage is set; the world in general, exhausted from its experiences in the “Day of His Preparation”, passively beholding the welding of every power for evil in the world into one great striking force, gathering and setting itself in array, against the Prince of Peace and all that is inherent in truth and righteousness; and on the other side, unseen and unknown to men, the raising of that sword of the Lord, that terrific spiritual power which is to descend and in one swift blow annihilate for ever the greatest

confederation of evil forces the world will have ever known. Ezekiel and Zechariah have vied with each other in finding words in which fitly to describe the overwhelming disaster which will descend from the heavens upon those who have dared to fight against God.

And at this point the prophet, overawed by the solemnity of the situation, breathes a reverent “*Selah*”. In the Temple service there was a pause, a hush, as for a full minute the worshippers contemplated that gleaming sword upraised in the heavens, poised that in a moment it might strike down.

Just so, it may be, shall Christian workers in a day yet future realise, as did Habakkuk, that the “gathering to Armageddon” is complete, the armies in position, the “land of unwallled villages” encompassed on every side, and wait with bated breath for that fearful maelstrom of Divine judgment which will demonstrate to all men without possibility of doubt that “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth”.

AOH

(To be continued)

SOLITUDE

The Gospel narratives show that our Lord accounted times of solitude essential to the spiritual life. He planned resolutely to secure hours when He should be apart from even the most intimate of His friends. The Scripture describes His withdrawal into the wilderness when He needed to shape the methods of His ministry, and resist temptations to misuse His powers. In the wilderness He gained the fixity of purpose and composure of mind which characterised Him through all the subsequent strain of daily work among the excited multitudes. When, again, He was to choose the Apostles—a choice critical for the future transmission of His message—He spent the previous night in solitude. Once more, after a Sabbath in Capernaum more than usually crowded with teaching and works of mercy, “a great while before day, He rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed.”

Only by such means could He be alone. “When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut the door, pray” was counsel which He who gave it can Himself have been but seldom able to follow. Yet, at whatever cost, and whatever demands upon Him of the disciples or the multitude, He must find opportunities for being alone. He joined in the synagogue and Temple services, He encouraged His followers to meet in His name for united prayer. So far from being a recluse, He loved companionship, and chose to have friends at His side both on the mount of transfiguration and in the garden of agony. None the less did He set aside intervals of solitude, for prayer, for contemplation, for making decisions which involved the future of the human race in their scope.

The habit of the Master has a special significance for those who try to be His disciples in the days when solitude is generally disliked, and not seldom dreaded. This is an attitude which has marked reaction upon religious outlook. Under its influence, too often the average man first disuses and then loses his capacity for serious thought. His creed, instead of being derived from his own faith and verified by his own experience, becomes merely a product of mass suggestion.

We are all apt at times to imagine that corporate worship and some share in organised Church activities can replace that deeply personal religion which requires not only intense effort, but periods of solitary reflection for its development. Each individual has to face the eternal issues for himself, and to make up his mind about them. Without that his creed may have all possible orthodoxy, but it will have no real vitality. There is a wise saying in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 37.13-14 which deserves to be remembered: “Make the counsel of thy heart to stand; for there is none more faithful to thee than it. For a man’s soul is sometime wont to bring him tidings, more than seven watchmen that sit high on a watch-tower.” The Christian will read into those words a meaning—which the example of His Master supplies. When a decision has to be made, though not only then, he will resort to solitude and prayer. So in the quiet he will hear not merely “the counsel of his heart,” but speaking through and shaping that counsel, the authentic voice of God.—

BSM, September 1945

MARY MAGDALENE

She came slowly towards him, head held proudly within its aura of braided hair, dark eyes flashing, sensuous lips curved mockingly. The richness of her garments set off the striking beauty of her features, a beauty of which the arrogance displayed in every look and movement betrayed her awareness. Men were her slaves; Mary of Magdala knew it, and they knew it. The bystanders looked on interestedly and intently as she came to a leisurely halt and directed her gaze fully upon the man before her.

“They tell me”—her voice was rich, vibrant, and sardonic—“they tell me that you can heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, make the lame to walk...” She looked at him, the kind of look which had made the senses of many a man swim. She looked, and waited.

Jesus, his eyes fixed on her, said nothing.

“It is said that you can cast out demons.” Her voice was still derisory, but there was the faintest trace of anxiety in the mocking tones.

Jesus did not answer. His gaze met her imperious eyes.

“You were at Simon’s feast the other day and you forgave a woman her sins...Who gave you the power to forgive sins?” The question came almost as an accusation, a challenge, and yet the words held a note of urgency.

“Because the Father sent me, I can see into the heart and I know how and when to forgive.” The quiet words fell softly on the still air.

The dark eyes were mocking again now. “Look into my heart, and tell me what you can see, and what there is to forgive.” She stood, proud in her youth and appeal, facing Jesus insolently.

The calm answer came. “I see a heart given over by day and by night to every kind of indulgence and weakness and sin. I see a heart which in the early morning hours reaches out for a better life and knows not where to find it, and when daylight comes goes back to the way of sin because it

knows no other. I see a heart possessed by demons which give no rest by day or night. And I know that last night, when the sun had gone and the moon rode high in the heavens, you fell to your knees beside your bed in your despair and besought God for release from the demons which have driven you to these things, without any real hope that He would listen or would answer”.

She stood, motionless. The mockery in her eyes had given place to astonishment. The scornful smile had gone; her lips were trembling.

“You—know?”

Quietly came the answer. “I know, my child.”

“Then—it is true, after all—what they say.” Suddenly she crumpled at his feet, rich garments trailing in the dust, her raven hair falling confusedly about her shoulders, face buried in hands. “O Jesus—Master—save me.” She was sobbing incoherently.

Gently Jesus raised her to her feet.

“Fear no more, my daughter. The demons have gone; they will not trouble you again. If now you will turn away from the life you have lived and yield yourself to God you will find happiness and peace”.

Her eyes now held only humility and adoration. Gone was the old hard voice; the accents were soft and low.

“Master—let me follow with your disciples.” Almost imperceptibly Jesus shook his head. “Go now to your home, Mary, and make your peace with God. Go to him in prayer and He will receive you. Then, if you will, you may come.”

Slowly, head bowed, heedless of the curious stare of the onlookers, she went.

* * *

Whether the conversion of Mary Magdalene was in fact something like this will never be known with certainty until the days of the world to come. All that is known about her life before becoming a disciple is that she was one out of whom Jesus “cast seven demons”. (Luke 8.2). The

association of her name in that verse with those of Joanna and Susanna, both wealthy women, might lead to the assumption that she likewise was a rich married woman who, like them, “ministered to him of their substance”. There is, however, an age-old tradition that she was a woman of bad character, plying her trade among the Roman soldiers and others in the lake-side towns—Magdala was a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee—and the casting out of the demons by Jesus delivered her from that life. The Western (Latin) Church has maintained this view from the sixth century and identified Mary with the “woman a sinner” at Simon’s feast recorded in Luke 7 although there is nothing in the Gospel narratives to warrant this conclusion. The fact that in Luke 7 there is no mention of the casting out of demons and the woman’s forgiveness was on account of her evident repentance and sorrow would rather appear to indicate the opposite. Nevertheless the Latin Church (but not the Eastern, Greek, Church) has maintained the tradition and in fact the English Prayer Book up to its revision in 1552 had a feast-day for Mary Magdalene on 22 July with the reading from Luke 7. The Talmud, written nearer the time, also vouches for the tradition, describing her wealth, beauty and shamelessness.

A more definite pointer may be found in the claim that women of Mary’s profession were known by the name of their town or village rather than, as was the case with other women, the names of their husbands or other relatives. Thus in the Gospels we have “Mary of Magdala” (the meaning of the Greek “Magdalene”) as against, for example, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Joanna the wife of Chuza.

That she was young in years, probably in her early twenties, when she became a disciple can be inferred from the fact recorded in John 20.2 to the effect that upon finding the body of Jesus missing from the sepulchre “*then she runneth, and came to Simon Peter...*”. Only a young woman would, or could, have run the distance of over a mile separating the sepulchre and the house of Mark’s mother where the disciples were assembled. An older woman would have had to walk.

So we are left with the probable position that Mary was a young woman sorely afflicted in the grip of an evil life or of supernatural evil powers whom Jesus met during the course of his ministry in the lakeside towns of Galilee. Magdala, three miles north of Tiberias and about five south of Capernaum, was probably visited by him fairly frequently, although it is

mentioned in the New Testament only twice, once in Matt. 15.39 in connection with the feeding of the four thousand, and once in Mark 8. 10 where it is called Dalmanutha. It appears in the Old Testament (Josh. 19.38) under the name of Migdalel so the town was of some antiquity. Today it remains as a village and is called Mejdal. But it might have been in any of the lake-side towns that the meeting took place; the nature of the encounter cannot now be surmised, only that it occurred during the first year of our Lord's ministry, probably about August-September, and that after the casting out of those seven demons Mary became a fervent and devoted disciple, faithful to her Lord to the end.

Strangely, nothing more is said about her until the crucifixion. It is not really likely that the women disciples of Jesus, the five Marys, Martha, Salome, Susanna, Joanna, and others, accompanied Jesus and the men as they went from place to place preaching the Gospel. Had they done so the proceeding would almost inevitably have given rise to comment and scandal. In any case most of them were married and had husbands and perhaps children to consider. It is more likely that they assisted in the provision of the disciples' expenses, as Luke 8.3 indicates, extended the hospitality of their homes when in their districts, and rendered services such as the provision and mending of clothes and so on. It was not until the crowning tragedy of the Crucifixion that they were all drawn together to be with their Lord in his last hours on earth, and so it is perhaps not surprising that nothing is said about them prior to that time.

Mary's sterling character is revealed by her behaviour during the trying experiences of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Of the little band of some nine or more women who were present at those times Mary was almost certainly the youngest, nevertheless she is the one who evidently took the initiative and was by common consent their leader. Of the ten occasions when her name is mentioned in conjunction with those of the other women, she appears first in nine. She, with one companion, was an observer of Jesus' burial when all the men disciples had gone into hiding. She was first at the sepulchre on the morning of the Resurrection and the one to bring the news to the men, still in hiding. And she had the inestimable favour of being the first to talk with the risen Lord. There is not much doubt that her courage and steadfastness held the little band of women together during those three days when they were bereft of the support and protection of the men. For a short time the men "forsook him

and fled”; Mary never forsook him. She remained firm in her faith throughout.

What happened to her afterwards? No one knows. She may have remained a stalwart member of the Church at Jerusalem which had its beginning in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost for the rest of her life, going with the rest of them to Pella in AD 69 to escape the destruction of the city which they knew from Jesus’ prediction was about to take place. She may have gone back to her old home in the lakeside cities and there lived a quiet life among the believers there. The Greek church has preserved a tradition that in about AD 50 she accompanied the Apostle John and Mary the mother of Jesus when they migrated to Ephesus, and died there about AD 90—which, if true, testifies to her youthfulness when she first met Jesus. The Emperor Leo, in the tenth century, allegedly removed her remains to Constantinople to repose there in his ornate church. But no one really knows: we are left with the picture of a woman whose undying devotion in the closing stages of our Lord’s life bears witness to the wonder of the miracle by which He had changed her life, delivering her from the power of darkness and translating her into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.

AOH



DON’T FORGET GOD’S BLESSINGS

Take comfort. We have nothing to fear for the future, unless we forget the way the Lord has led us in the past.

Proverbs 16:3

God’s little book of CALM,
Richard Daly

*Commit thy works unto the LORD,
and thy thoughts shall be established.*

HOLDING FAST AND PRESSING TOWARDS THE MARK

Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, over a cup of tea, my wife and I will watch the Antiques Roadshow on the T.V. We like it not only from the point of view of seeing some of the wonderful and exquisite workmanship which God has in the past given man the ability to produce, quite distinct from the mass production of the present day, but also because it provides a study in human nature. There is the oft-expressed enthusiasm and surprising knowledge of the valuer. One owner will express complete equanimity at the verdict another will literally gasp with astonishment at hearing the worth of his or her treasure. But the one that appeals to me is the lady who answered the valuer's question "would you sell it?" with the spontaneous remark made with deep feeling "Oh, no—I love it".

This is merely an illustration. Everyone has material possessions which they accept from the Lord's hand and for necessary uses, but do not, and should not, set their heart upon them.

But unlike, at least some of those exhibitors, there are other treasures—treasures which are not seen, at least by the uninitiated, and which no man can value for they are priceless, and which need not be insured because they are laid up "in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

Why then are we told to "Hold fast that which we have"? For the simple reason that being unseen treasures they are held by faith which is continually under attack from our great adversary. As long as we continue to believe, all is well, but if we drop our shield the devil's darts strike home. Then does faith take wings only to be restored by the Lord's mercy. In the story of Fact, Faith and Experience walking along the top of a wall. If Faith had kept his eyes on Fact instead of looking round at Experience he wouldn't have lost his balance and fallen off dragging poor old Experience after him. But Fact kept straight on along that wall. For the 'fact' is that God has spoken, and by keeping our eyes and heart on what He has said and believing we too can follow on to achieve our goal.

"Hold fast that which ye have...", are the words taken from Rev. 2.25. What then, have we got? First of all we have access to God, and that alone is a priceless gift for it is by faith alone, through our Lord Jesus

Christ and is entirely without works. Then, too, we have justification, and that also is by faith, and from that flows peace with God (Rom. 5.1). We have righteousness, sanctification and deliverance, reckoned unto us as being in Christ Jesus as we are told in 1 Cor. 1.30. These are just a few of the things we have, and we could add to them. Then other things flow from them too, such as a most blessed hope of glory to come, for all are based upon the promises of God.

This world is a battleground, and sometimes the battle rages strong both in and around us. For whilst we have all these things, these blessings, ours by right of purchase by our blessed Saviour, there is always an enemy lurking near who would seek to rob us of them. Satan has many wiles and many ignoble courtiers willing to carry out his behests. We should not be ignorant of his devices. Therefore the call to us is ‘hold fast’ or ‘stand fast’.

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith”, Heb. 10.23 exhorts us as Weymouth puts it “to an unflinching avowal of our hope” and goes on “for He is faithful that promised” (KJV).

God cannot lie. In the words of Isa. 46.11 “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it”. So as Heb. 3.6 exhorts “Hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end”.

Poor old Job was determined to hold fast. But the question is—hold fast to what? In Job 27.6 it says “My righteousness I hold fast” and even piles on his own agony by adding “and will not let it go”—wherein, lay the seat of all his troubles. But he did let go—eventually—and what suffering he had to endure before he did so. But finally the Lord brought him to the point where he had to literally chew his own words and to admit (Job 42.3) “Therefore have I uttered that I understood not”.

Job wasn’t the only man who at some time or another has wished that his spoken words had remained unuttered. Possibly Paul too could have said the same. For in Phil. 3 he tells how at one time he was so zealous persecuting the Church and touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless, (verse 6) words which are, in essence, an echo of Job’s words. But when he had fought off that incubus, he could say that he counted it all loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his

Lord and to be found in Him NOT having his own righteousness which was of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

For it was Satan who tempted Job and it was Satan who tempted our Lord. Satan tempted Paul and the same evil being still tempts along similar lines. Always the defence is “Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of man”, so one seeks to hold fast to the things we have, the doctrines we have been taught.

The Greek word ‘katecho’ which is translated ‘hold fast’ is also translated “keep in memory” in 1 Cor. 15.2. Paul is saying, the Gospel which I preached unto you will save you as long as you hold it fast. So never let it go. Dwell upon it constantly and treat it as a most treasured possession. “For this reason we ought to pay the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, for fear we should drift away from them” (Heb. 2.1 Weymouth). In a note to this Weymouth states “Drifting is an unconscious process... We are all continually exposed to the action of currents of opinion, habit, action, which tend to carry us away insensibly from the position which we ought to maintain”.

There are two more passages exhorting ‘to hold fast’. 1 Thess. 5.21 “Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good” and 2 Tim. 1.13 “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me...” These two passages go well together. For one certainly needs to prove all things, and should not be just taken in and acquiesce to all one hears. Some may say matters of doctrine should be left to the elders. That is not ‘proving’. Proving is comparing spiritual things with spiritual and endeavouring to ‘rightly divide the word of Truth’ and being fully persuaded in one’s own mind. If unconvinced, it is far better to acknowledge so and await further light.

It is true that one cannot always find a literal “Thus saith the Lord” for every viewpoint, but the Spirit which the Lord has given discerns all things, and the question becomes rather ‘Does it go against the Word of God rightly divided’? For instance our Lord said once “What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.” But we can also say “What God has separated let not men join together”. Still someone might object that such an expression does not appear in the Word of God. But surely a little thought will show that it is admissible. Can one join together ‘good’ and

‘evil’, or ‘light and dark’, ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ etc....Paul even writes a whole Epistle to the Galatians to confute their error in joining together ‘law’ and ‘grace’. So there was very good reason for Paul exhorting to not only ‘prove’ all things but also to ‘hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of ME’ emphasizing the ‘Me’ because, even Peter found some of his words ‘hard to understand’ and to Peter were committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven with all that implies. Whereas to Paul called by the risen Christ in glory was committed a secret which up to that time had been hid in God and found nowhere in Scripture. With it was given a ministry in accordance therewith to ‘commit to faithful men’, who in their turn would be ‘able to teach others’ as Paul tells Timothy. So, Paul says “Hold fast (don’t let go) the form (or pattern or outline) of sound words which thou hast heard of ME”.

To stand for the testimony of the Lord there will be continual warfare, because now, although perfect in Christ, which is the truth at the very centre of Paul’s testimony, each has to hold the ground where God has placed them as new creatures in Christ. Warfare, as it is generally understood carries the thought of armies marching into other countries to subdue their enemies. But we are not told to march but STAND. So whilst endeavouring to ‘hold fast’ one is also exhorted to ‘stand fast’ IN THE LORD. “Watch ye, stand fast in the Lord, quit you like men, be strong” Paul tells the Corinthians and warns the Galatians “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”. How necessary was—and is—that warning. No less so today than when Paul wrote those words. The idea that man must do something for his salvation is just as prevalent today as ever. Not only do we have to keep this liberty which we have as a very precious possession, but we have to be ready to contend for it if called upon.

Justification by faith alone is still completely unacceptable to Satan. The mixture of law and grace is evident on all sides. Sometimes the Epistle of James, for instance, is elevated to a position which the Apostle Paul would certainly not have countenanced. One would think that the Reformation had never taken place for how little one hears of this glorious doctrine which has done so much to emancipate the mind of man from bondage in the past. But perhaps one shouldn’t wonder when Paul says that the holy Scriptures are “able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,” (2 Tim. 3.15) that the “time will come

when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts (desires) they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”(2 Tim. 4.3-4)

It is needful to ‘hold fast’ and to ‘stand fast’ and to “contend for the faith that was delivered once for all unto the saints.”

The fight is never ‘over, the battle won’ other than Christ is the victor. The Devil is a wonderful tactician, a master of all subtlety. Therefore, as Paul tells Timothy, “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” and “keep (or guard as the word means) that which is committed to thy trust”. “Onward Christian soldiers” may sound a very fine hymn with a full choir singing it, but how many really understand the words? Many a child has sung this hymn at the top of their voice not knowing the meaning of the words. Some adults have thought it’s a hymn about soldiers going to war.

The point is that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” There should be no need to sing the words of that other hymn “Soldiers of Christ arise and put your armour on” for it should already have been put on—and be kept on, as the hymn says “From strength to strength go on; wrestle and fight and pray; Tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day”.

Many years after Paul’s conversion he made another visit to Jerusalem and communicated unto them THAT Gospel which he preached among the Gentiles (Gal. 2.2). And he went, he continues, because of false brethren unawares (stealthily) brought in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage (Gal. 2.4). No way was Paul going to have that. No way was he going to lose that liberty which Christ had given him and he was equally concerned for others whom the Lord had called. He stood firm and held fast that which he had, and then later when he met Peter in Antioch he “withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2.11). It was a subtle snare he was combatting.

In the story of Gideon in the Book of Judges the Midianites came up against Israel. They were like grasshoppers for multitude and they destroyed the increase of the earth and left no sustenance for Israel. So Gideon threshed wheat to hide it from the Midianites. He was guarding some of the produce of the land which God had given Israel because he valued it so highly and would not be robbed of it. It is a type of Christ as the bread of life. Thus was Gideon being prepared as one that could deliver Israel.

There is a similar account in 2 Sam. 23.11. Shammah, was one of David's mighty men, when the Philistines came up into the land and all the people fled. But this man stood in the midst of a piece of ground full of lentils and defended it. He slew the Philistines and "The Lord wrought a great victory".

These two brave men, Gideon and Shammah and others in Hebrews 11, are examples in standing, holding fast and defending the possessions which the Lord bestows. To this end the more we are immersed in the Word of God and hold on to the precious promises He has made to us, the brighter will shine our armour and the sharper will be our sword as we wield it in defence of the Gospel.

Holding fast means standing upon all the promises God has made, and not letting them go, nor watering them down to make them mean something other than was intended.

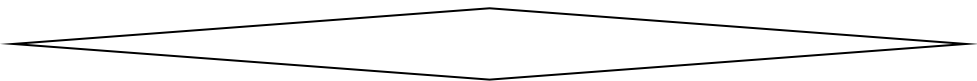
If ever there was a believer who knew what it was to 'hold fast' surely that one was John Bunyan (1628-1688). Not only was he a firebrand plucked out of the burning, but he was also one of the 'foolish things of the world' chosen to 'confound the wise'. Yet in spite of having to endure untold hardship as a soldier of Christ, he never lost his sense of humour nor his keen insight into human nature, and his use of allegory was almost without parallel.

Holding fast then, is what we are all exhorted to do, not in our own strength, but clad with the whole armour of God just believing that we are kept by His mighty power. Although Paul could say that 'all in Asia have turned away from me', and though he suffered untold hardship both in body and spirit, his whole bent was much more than to what God had

revealed to him, which was much more than to anyone else at the time, to press toward the mark for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus and exhort the brethren in Christ whom he loved to do the same. Then at the end as his departure drew nigh he could say ‘I have fought a good fight. I have KEPT the faith.’

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4.8)

JS



THE SOLITARY WAY

Alas! How few may know the grace it takes
To tread the solitary way! Alone!
Ah, yes, alone! No other human heart
Can understand the nameless sorrows there—
The nights in weeping spent, and yet, when dawns
The day, to greet the world with radiant smile,
And scatter sunshine while you whisper low
To your poor heart, “*Canst bear a little more?*”

Alone! Poor heart, and dost thou question, *Why?*
Dost think it *strange* that thou must walk this way?
Ah, no! Thou dost but follow in His steps
Who went before, and of the other people there
Was none with Him! Alone? Yet *not alone*—
Hath not thy blessed Lord and Master said,
“*My presence shall go with thee?*” Ah, my soul,
No longer, then, a *solitary* way!

Poems of the Way

ARMAGEDDON

Armageddon is the name given, in the Book of Revelation, to that last great conflict in which the forces of evil in the world muster themselves to withstand the incoming Kingdom of God upon earth. They fail, and with their failure the present Age ends and the “Times of Restitution” begin. The name itself is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Hamegiddon*, mountain of Megiddo, referring to the district of that name in Galilee where most of the historic battles of Israel were fought.

It is to be expected that many forces will combine to oppose the establishment of the Kingdom of God. A world order which is going to suppress all forms of oppression and injustice, command wars to cease, restrain men from inflicting evil upon their fellows, establish righteousness and just dealing as the order of the day, is bound to have its enemies. Although there is no doubt that the majority of mankind will accept the new Kingdom with enthusiasm—for the majority are righteously and peaceably disposed—there will be grim opposition on the part of those whose selfish interests are threatened by the change of sovereignty.

We are already experiencing the preliminary stages of Armageddon in world distress. Since that memorable year 1914 the nations have been angry, and never free from war. A growing disregard of God is being reflected in an impatience of the restraints demanded by the moral laws which God had ordained, and on every hand now the cry is that man, with the aid of science, can work out his own salvation without Divine help. In consequence any suggestion that the kingdoms of this world are to pass away and give place to the Kingdom of our Lord provokes increasing resentment.

The principal impact of that resentment will come against the nation of Israel, regathered to its own land in fulfilment of Divine promise and prospering there whilst the rest of the world is floundering more and more helplessly in the troubles of its own making. It is at about this time that the future princes of Israel, the ancient stalwarts of Old Testament history, will be raised from the dead to guide the destinies of Israel, and it will be against them, as representing the incoming Kingdom, that the evil forces of this world will advance. In this time of crisis God will intervene and make of no avail the weapons in which the forces of evil have trusted, and in their crushing defeat the nations will see the hand of God and be ready to pay attention to the proclamation of the new kingdom.

FROM A PRISON CELL

Part 1-Prisoner For Christ

The Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians were written by Paul from a prison cell in Rome. Evidently his detention there was of a very mild nature, for, though under arrest, Paul was permitted to dwell in his own hired house alone, save for the presence of his military guard (Acts 28. 16). Pending the hearing of his case at Nero's judicial bar, he was permitted to continue under house-arrest for two whole years, with no greater inconvenience than his chains. During these two years he was permitted to receive all his friends without check, so that he "*received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him*". (Acts 28.30-31). Thus, spared the awful severities of ancient prison cells, his own home became both a sanctum and a cell.

Under conditions such as these the mighty qualities of his master-mind blossomed forth into full flower. To his native in-born genius the operation of the enlightening influence of the Spirit of the Living God gave new and added powers, enabling him to develop and define those deeper things of God which mortal tongue had only once told before. No teacher save the Lord Jesus had trodden that path of truth. Even He had not spoken full and clear, because at that time none else could understand. The "many things" which He had wanted to say, but could not say (John 16. 12) were left for Paul to say, when hearing ears had been opened by the Spirit of truth. Then under the enlightening power of the promised Comforter, Paul was able to develop all those special features of the Lord's good news—now Paul's good news—and set them out in all their force and beauty, both in his conversations with his friends and in these letters to Ephesus, Colosse and Philippi. We have in these three letters the very essence and cream of all extant (surviving) Christian literature, reaching the loftiest heights of sanctifying expressions of which human language is capable. To such incomparable altitudes of illuminating thought do some of these expressions soar that students are to be found who speak of these things as though they constituted another and better Gospel, distinct and separate from all the teachings of Paul's own earlier days. Distinctions are claimed between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the "fellowship of the Mystery" with suggestions that there is but little (if any) relationship between the two themes. It will be our privilege to investigate

both these themes as our studies proceed, and we hope to be able to find that Paul wrote to his friends, exactly the same things which he spoke to those who visited his prison home (Acts 28. 31). It is possible to assign other reasons than that of another and better Gospel for the super-excellence of these Epistles without detaching them from earlier writings from the same pen. We have only to call to mind the unresting journeys of his active days, from Asia to Europe, from Europe back again, with scarce a moment's cessation from activity in which to concentrate and reflect. We only need to think of the foot-sore evangelist harried from place to place by relentless foes intent only on discrediting him, and of gathering to themselves the fruitage of his labours, to realise how impossible it had been for him to sit for long at ease in cool, calm consideration of the deeper points of the Gospel story. He had them in his mind, in germ and bud, and sometimes they flower forth from his pen, but not with the full bloom and beauty of the later ripened truth.

It was only when the rush and turmoil of an overcrowded life gave place to the safe peacefulness of his quiet prison retreat, first for two years in Caesarea, and now again in Rome, that the undeveloped germs and unopened buds of earlier days blossomed forth into stately blooms, delightful to see and hear. Immature and rudimentary thoughts, difficult to express and harder still to pass along, assumed full-grown form and were clothed in words of rare beauty and great power. God cut those restless wanderings short, not only that Paul might testify at the Roman Court, but that he might have time to rest and open wide the portals of God's treasure-house, that all who later came to believe might see set forth the amplitude of their inheritance in Christ. Without that season of enforced rest Paul might have burnt away the wick of life too soon, before even he himself had grasped the full immensity of the mystery of the fellowship in Christ. Had that been so, not his alone would have been the loss, but three score generations since his day would also have been deprived of these deeper, priceless things of God.

Paul was a deep thinker, and that was exactly what the Christian Church needed at the time. All other Apostles were untrained fishermen—men who had received no special training for their task. The Pharisees classed them as ignorant and unlearned men. Jesus had departed from the world leaving these untrained, untutored men to represent His cause. And while the propagation of truth was not intended to be accomplished by human

power and intellectual might, its deeper aspect needed to be comprehended and stated by at least one penetrating well-balanced mind. Paul was a chosen vessel into which and through which Jesus could issue forth the things which He had to leave unsaid. Paul's mind could not leave a theme till he had traced it back to its first cause, nor until he had outlined its fullest sequences. Not enough was it for him to know that Jesus was the Son of God—he must dissect that statement into its compound elements, and know precisely what it meant. Not enough to know that Jesus died for sin. He wanted to know why and how that death could offset sin, and till he understood he deeply probed the records of the Word of God. He had to do among believing men the work which Jesus Himself could not do, because men could not understand. Hence Paul had to say the things Jesus could not say. These things became the theme and topic of Paul's enquiring mind and under the Spirit's influence the unsaid things of Jesus were said, in the main, by Paul. His writings, when arranged in chronological order, show that his mind was always getting deeper and still deeper into the things of his Lord; truth, roughly and immaturely stated at first utterance, became developed and complete as years rolled by. With progressive thought, ripeness of expression kept step, giving to the later products of his pen a mellowness rich and mature. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon are the rich ripe fruits of Paul's mellow years. We may well thank God for Paul's restraining chain, even though at times it may have deeply chafed his flesh. It set free his soul to soar up to the heavenly heights to give form and words to lofty thoughts, high as the heavens themselves, and more enduring than eternal hills. Only God Himself can estimate the debt which we all of later day owe but cannot pay, to this diminutive giant of a man.

From that little prison cell, the enforced home of a little wandering Christian Jew, set at the heart of the world's metropolis, with all the tawdry trappings of Imperial Majesty on every hand, the soaring mind of Paul swept forth throughout heaven and earth, and told, under the unseeing eyes of Rome's sceptred prince, in language superb and sublime, that God was creating a universal throne at whose feet even proud Imperial Caesar would have to bow. No bricks nor walls, no chains nor praetorian guard could chain down that Spirit-led mind of Paul and make him mindful only of his little day and his fettered circumstance. Back to times before the world began, forward to better days, when heaven and earth are cleansed from sin, the Spirit led that receptive mind, and as he

grasped the great design, he wrote it down in rich superlatives. Ordinary diction was poor and tame; he must spin phrases of his own, phrases which seem meaningless to the profane, but phrases, each of which is a rich coronet clustered with gems to those who know the truth. Here are a few—*“blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ”*; *“chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”*; *“holy and without blemish, before Him”*; *“foreordained us unto adoption as sons....unto Himself”*; *“the glory of His grace which He bestowed on us freely in the Beloved”*. This and much beside is almost all new coin, never issued from any mint before, but all required to set forth the abundant grace of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rome may have had her senators and orators, but no Cato or Cicero could speak like this. Rome may give her little men her franchise, and set them in her ranks of free-born men, but she could not make them sons of God! Rome may hoist her chosen Caesar to her throne, but she could not lift her candidate to the heavenly Throne! Within the very shadow of Roman majesty itself, the words and thoughts which told of One who could elevate a beggar to joint-heirship in that Throne, took shape and form. How near together, therefore, in that little cell came the sordid and the sublime—only a length of chain which, binding their ambassadors together, separated those two worlds. Guard and prisoner constituted together a miniature of this present world—one, the emblem of the supreme power of these Gentile Times, one, the token of the persecuted Christ, whose day of power is yet to come.

From that small spot, abounding with such great contrast, flowed forth doctrine which has changed the world. It has been both food and light to help God’s child along his way. It has developed faith and gendered hope, and kindled love in many hearts. There is no contradiction between this and the earlier themes. Ephesians and Colossians are built on the broad foundations laid in Romans and Galatians, but times and conditions were under change. The nation as a whole was drifting to its doom while the small elect remnant was growing up into Christ. In the early days Paul dwelt much on the First Coming of the Lord as the point towards which the history and destiny of the Hebrew race had long been tending; in his later days it is the Christ Who is Lord of angels and worlds, and to Whose Second Coming the whole array of the universe is moving. In the first days he sought to convince his kith and kin of their opportunity to accept

and rally to the Messiah whom God had sent into their midst. Hence, he stressed repentance and justification from sin. But when the nation was bent on plunging to its doom it was to the treasure within the field he paid greatest heed. He dwelt less on the redemptive work of Christ, and more on its Head and constitution; less on the justification of the repentant sinner and more on the sanctification of the elect saint; but all these later things had been implicit in his Gospel from the first. Just as the earlier themes were never wholly absent from the later and more explicit themes. Throughout his ministry the burden of teaching sought to show the union of the believer with his redeeming Lord and for the description of this unity he has coined a whole vocabulary of phrases and illustrations; believers are “in Christ” and Christ in them; they bear relation to Him as stones to a foundation, as members to a Head, as a wife to her husband. This unity he shows to be “ideal” for before time began the Divine Father made the destiny of Christ and the destiny of the believer one.

TH



THE MINISTRY OF WAITING

Each one of us does his own little part in carrying out God’s great plan. If our part is to stand and wait, it is no less honourable than his who comes after us and takes up what fell from our hands and carries it on to completion. Said the blind Milton—

“They also serve who only stand and wait.”

“The world comes to him that can wait,” says the proverb; and victory comes, and rest comes, and God comes, and glory comes, to him that can wait.

In Green Pastures
J.R. Miller

ON THE MOUNTAIN'S TOP APPEARING

On the mountain's top appearing,
Lo! the sacred herald stands,
Welcome news to Zion bearing,
Zion, long in hostile lands:
Mourning captive,
God himself shall loose thy bands,

Lo! thy sun is risen in glory,
God himself appears thy Friend;
All thy foes shall flee before thee;
Here their boasts and triumphs end:
Great deliverance
Zion's King vouchsafes to send,

Enemies no more shall trouble,
All thy wrongs shall be redressed,
For thy shame thou shalt have double,
In thy Maker's favor blest;
All thy conflicts
End in an eternal rest



These are the words of Thomas Kelly (1769-1855) written in 1802. In various hymnals the words appear altered, sometimes even appearing in four stanzas, nevertheless its interesting to note where they differ from the words that have given many such joy to sing. What exact expectations he would have envisaged for the land of Israel when he wrote these words at the commencement of the nineteenth century is not entirely certain. Nevertheless two hundred years later we have seen that nation appear and withstand the conflicts since then, knowing that there will be a day when all conflicts will cease.

Kelly was born in Dublin, the son of an Irish judge, and he himself trained to be a lawyer. But gave this up to study the Scriptures, learn Hebrew, and become a preacher. Initially he was with the established church, but he was forced to leave and then preached in non-conformist circles, talking on subjects such as justification by faith and the doctrine of grace.

He published 765 hymns in 51 years and was unusual because he used metres not adopted by most writers of hymns. Sir John declared his hymns to be ‘some of the real jewels of English hymnology’. One common tune for this hymn is Regent Square, but there is also an arrangement to the Israeli national anthem.

Here are some of the texts which have been and could be attributed to this hymn;

Isaiah 52:7-9 (AKJV) How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

Nahum 1:15 (AKJV) Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.

Romans 10:15 (AKJV) How shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Isaiah 40:2 (AKJV) Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.

Zechariah 9:12 (AKJV) Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare *that* I will render double unto thee;

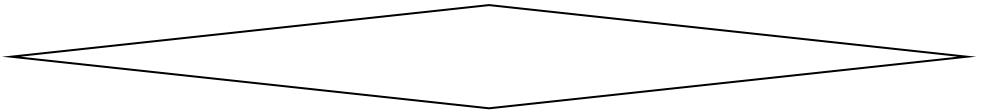
Isaiah 2:2-3 (AKJV) And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains,...and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Bible Students Fellowship Conference
Tuesday 11–Sunday 16 August 2015
High Leigh Conf. Centre
Hoddesdon
England

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God's Fulfilling Purpose

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OUR COMFORT IN SORROW

There is no book like the Bible for the sorrowful. It tells of the Comforter; it points to the perfect plan according to which God is working out our blessedness: it insists that all things are working together for good; it opens the vista of the blessed future, where all the griefs and tears of men shall be put away for ever.

Gone from us
Norah Weddell (Northampton)

Thanks to the anonymous donor of \$100 cash

THE CALL AND DESTINY OF ISRAEL-A PAMPHLET

This particular booklet is very informative, with many Bible quotes to backup the writer's thoughts.

It takes one through the basic history of Israel and the Jewish people up until almost the present day. This makes for a very logical and interesting read.

One reader said that it is very relevant for the Christian today, or indeed anyone who wants to know the basics of the 'Jewish story'.

With what is happening in Israel today and its surrounding neighbours, the conflict and wars, it is perhaps a sign that the end of Jacob's trouble is close i.e. that God will soon fulfil his promise, that if and when Israel is ready to accept and believe in the Messianic rule in the 'Age to Come', that God will restore to them their good name and the conflict, pain and suffering they have endured for centuries will stop and become the means of the salvation of the world.



But you, Israel, are My servant...the descendants of Abraham My friend...I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, ...and will keep You... as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house”.

Isaiah 41. 8, 42. 6 & 7 (NKJV)

Booklet available free on request, please send to Bible Fellowship Union, 12 Stanley Gardens, Tring, HP23 4BS, U.K. or by emailing—mailing@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

FOR YOUR NEW YEAR

*With a solemn step and stately
Draws the old year to a close.
Day by day it has recorded
Joys and blessings, trials and woes.*

*Has it wrought in you some progress
Toward the Father's blest design
That his work perfected in you
Should reflect his power divine?*

*Is faith stronger and hope brighter
Than it was a year ago?
Does desire for God's approval
Burn with fervent steady glow?*

*Solemn questions, all important,
Yes, 'tis not with slavish fear
That you face the hidden problems
Of another opening year.*

*Not alone you tread life's pathway,
Our deliverer walks beside.
Promised guidance, peace and comfort
To the end he will provide.*

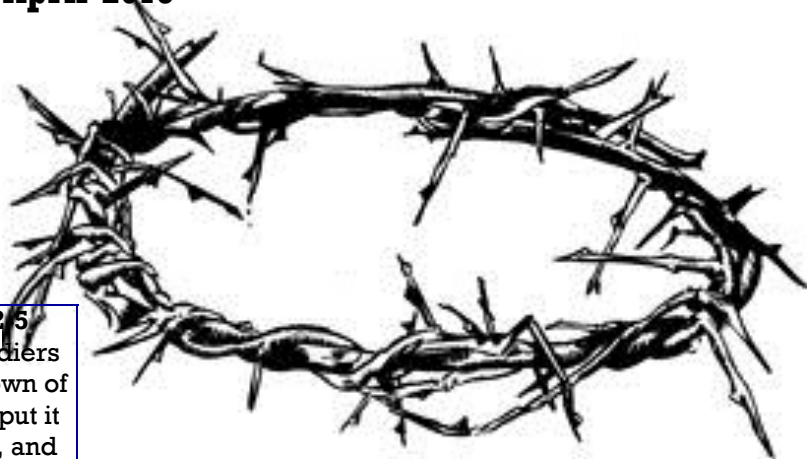
*Strengthen thus your faith and courage
And the love that casts out fear.
Then with peaceful expectation
You will enter your new year.*

Songs of the Nightingale

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 92 Issue 2

March / April 2015



John 19:2-5

And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.

Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!

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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)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge on request to all who are genuinely interested.

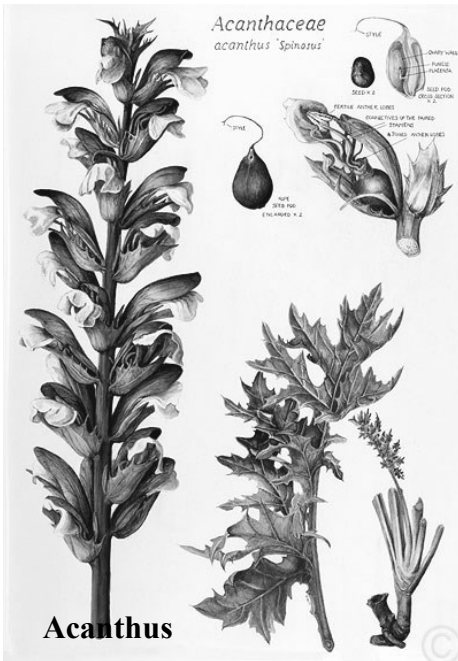
(Please renew your request each year.)

It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers, and these are sincerely appreciated.

Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

THOUGHT FOR THE SEASON

The picture on the front of this issue is of a 'Crown of Acanthus' (Diaglott) accompanied by some scriptures from the Gospel of John. This feature of the end of Jesus' life is also included in the Matthew and Mark accounts so it surely happened.



There is some discussion whether it is acanthus or *lycium spinosum* as Winer, Hug, Luthardt & Godet suggest. But whatever was used in the local area it would have been painful being all around the head. It is not always easy to imagine how Jesus would have felt.

The other object of this was to humiliate him or as the Mark account

says ‘mock’ him as ‘King of the Jews’, and it was in this humiliating appearance that Pilate had him in front of the people in Jerusalem, the supposed city of peace.

There is almost a sense of irony in these thorns as Genesis 3 records how for Adam the ground was cursed and that therefore it would bring forth thorns and thistles (vs.17-18). Jesus being the second or last Adam (1 Cor.15.45).

Mocking is not a wise thing to do and can possibly lead to danger. The sort of danger Sarah may have imagined when she saw Ishmael mocking her son, Isaac. As a result Hagar and Ishmael were forced to leave and prevent anything more threatening than mocking.

‘Crown’ comes from the Greek word, ‘stephanos’ which is the root of the word to twine or wreath, and can be a badge of royalty, a prize in public games, according to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance. It could therefore be used in the sense of a royal crown or a victor’s crown. It is the root of the word for that popular Biblical Christian name Stephen, who was the first Christian martyr. Him whose spirit of forgiveness was evinced when dying his final recorded words were ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ This spirit of forgiveness is an example to many since then until now .

SEEK ROSES AMONGST THORNS

We all need to become like avid rose gardeners, hunting for buds of beauty within our thorny circumstances. It’s a sure cure for complaining.

*God’s little book of Calm,
Richard Daly*

*On Easter may your eyes behold
More beauty than can e’er be told,
As heaven’s light dispels the gloom
And brings to mind the empty tomb.*

songs of the nightingale

PEACE ON EARTH—GOODWILL TOWARD MEN

Part 3

CALLED TO FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS

The Scriptures reveal that Christ Jesus is to have a “little flock” associated with Him in the great work of bringing to pass the message of the heavenly host, and that they must walk the same narrow way as He trod; they must meet evil as He did—on Christ’s terms, by Christ’s way, and at Christ’s cost. This is the mystery of Christ of which the Scriptures speak in many figures, types and shadows so that we may understand the close unity which exists between Head and members in sacrifice, and also in Kingdom power.

It was at Pentecost that the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus was first made known, for once Atonement had been made by Christ Jesus ascending into the presence of God (antitypical Most Holy), the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples with creative power to transform them into His likeness as new creatures in Him. This is why we see in their writings clear instruction concerning the same method of meeting evil by the force of love alone, as a necessary preparation for our future work—a method to be adopted collectively and as individuals.

Let us now consider Christ’s attitude towards evil as our pattern in the development of His likeness ready for the fuller life of the Kingdom, when peace will be on earth and good will among men.

CHRIST’S TERMS

He asks nothing less than full consecration, which means that we are to be “dead” with Him. His was a sacrificial death, and we are called to be made conformable to that death, by filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. Weymouth renders this thought as “I fill up in my own person whatever is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1: 24) which demonstrates that the sacrificial sufferings were not completed with Christ, the Head. They are continued in Christ, the Body, throughout the Gospel Age, just as the anointing flowed down from the Head to the Body from Pentecost onwards. It is only by full consecration and entry into Christ that we can understand this apparently strange way of meeting evil, coupled with faith to believe that all such are being qualified thereby to bring peace on earth in due time.

CHRIST'S WAY

The Apostle Paul had learned well the way of Christ when he witnessed the non-violent resistance of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. He was falsely accused, but he did not meet evil with the weapons of his persecutors, “and all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6: 15) for it was lighted with the Holy Spirit. Later, he was stoned, but manifested the same disposition saying “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7: 60) and we also read “Saul (standing by) was consenting unto his death.” (Acts 8. 1) His death seemed unavailing and powerless to accomplish good, but what a mighty force it was when later Saul heard the Voice of Jesus on the Damascus road: “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 9: 5), for he immediately linked up events with the death of Stephen and the “havoc of the church” which he created by his zeal, wrongly directed. Little wonder, then, is it that we find Paul clearly defining Christ’s terms in these words “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12: 21). These are the terms of the One who “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity” (Heb. 1: 9), realising as He did that it was not yet God’s time to restrain evil in the world at large; the Gospel Age is the period in which Christ, Head and Body, is to resist evil by non-violent methods, and thereby to receive their training for the Day in which evil will be suppressed. Christ’s terms, then, are simple and plain; we are not to force them on others, but to realise that only the Body-members can fully understand their implications, and the peaceable fruit of righteousness which will be the outcome of suffering for His sake without resistance.

CHRIST'S COST

This method is costly when judged by human standards. It entails sacrificial death, as in the case of Jesus, but if faithful unto death we shall be raised in the power of the First Resurrection—already in course of completion—with the Divine nature of the Kingdom. Then, and then only, will it be possible to bring about what good-intentioned men are now striving by their own efforts to accomplish—peace on earth, good will towards men. Man feels it nothing less than criminal to stand idle in the present chaos; he is impelled to do all in his power to crush collective evil whatever the means, but this is because he does not understand God’s Divine Plan of the Ages. The Kingdom cannot come by man’s efforts, but by God in the hands of Christ, the great Mediator—the One who has

resisted evil by non-violent methods throughout the Gospel Age (Christian Era), first the Head and then the members. Man will never be able to cause wars to cease; it is God who will do this in His own time and way, for “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psa. 46: 9,10).

Selected BSM Dec. '45

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD—A PAMPHLET

This is such an important subject and relevant to this time of the year when we consider the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He was the first to be resurrected but not the last.

This pamphlet records several scriptures about resurrection in the Old and New Testaments, which speak of the sleep of death and the state of the dead, as well as the writings on the subject by such famous reformers of the past such as Tyndale, Calvin and Luther.

It splits out the resurrection of those who died many years ago from those at the last day who are translated into their celestial/heavenly bodies. In addition it talks about those who will be resurrected into earthly/terrestrial bodies in the regeneration (Matt. 19: 28), the general resurrection of mankind as well as the practical problems on earth in that period, quoting scriptures such as;

Psalm 146: 4 *His breath goes forth; he returns to the (his) earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.* (MKJV)

Isaiah 26: 19 *Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.* (NKJV)

1 John 3: 2 *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* (NKJV)

(Pamphlet available free on request)

HABAKKUK—PROPHET OF FAITH

6. Conclusion

“Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord GOD; this is the day whereof I have spoken.” (Ezek. 39. 8). There is a ring of finality about those words. Well may there be, for they speak of the most comprehensive and spectacular judgment against evil that will ever be witnessed upon the earth, not even excepting the judgment of the Flood. The sword of the Lord will descend, and things on the earth will never be the same again. It is this final arising of God to judgment in Armageddon that is prefigured in the remainder of Habakkuk’s vision.

That *“Selah”* in the middle of ch. 3 verse 9 divides the “Day of his Preparation” from Armageddon, or as it is sometimes called, “Jacob’s Trouble”. The preparation is ended; the nations have been gathered together in the symbolic “Valley of Jehoshaphat” and God is ready to reveal himself for the salvation of his people. To this time belong the events of Zechariah’s vision recorded in the last three chapters of his prophecy. Israel has been regathered and is settled in prosperity and faith in the land of promise; the forces of evil have laid their plans and set out to crush this new power for righteousness which has arisen in the earth with its centre at Jerusalem; there is a temporary and partial success—*“half of the city shall go forth into captivity”* (Zech. 14. 2)—probably a cleansing of the land from fainthearted and faithless elements; and then, with the people and their governors waiting in faith and assurance the further onslaught of their enemies, the unbelievable thing happens—God intervenes.

Habakkuk in his vision saw the breaking of the storm which had been gathering, and all the forces of Nature joined together in one great onslaught against the earth. Behind the storm he saw the majestic figure of the God of Israel, coming forth to judgment. *“Thou didst cleave (asunder) the rivers of the earth”* (vs. 9 margin) cried the prophet in wonder, as he saw the earth rent by the breaking forth of mighty waters from its depths. *“The mountains saw thee, and they trembled; the overflowing (inundation) of the waters passed by (swept along); the deep (abyss) uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.”* (vs. 10) Habakkuk saw a repetition of the Flood of Noah’s day, sweeping all the enemies of God away and overwhelming them in its depths. *“Upon the wicked he shall rain burning coals, fire and brimstone, and a burning*

tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup.” (Psa. 11. 6 margin). The word which is rendered “deep” in the A.V. is the Hebrew *tehom*, the primeval chaotic abyss which harks back to the waste and void condition of the earth described in Gen. 1. 2, the condition in which it stood before God began to prepare it for human habitation. The use of the same word here seems to indicate that Habakkuk witnessed a gigantic upheaval of the earth and the bursting forth of the waters of the abyss, destroying completely all the works of man. *“The deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high”* (vs. 10) as though with a roar like thunder the earth opened to permit the uprush of a giant waterspout from its depths. That is the picture, and it fitly describes what may yet prove to be one salient feature of the Last Days, an uprising of the peoples which will shake and destroy the symbolic mountains, the autocratic kingdoms of earth.

But the storm is not finished at this—it increases in fury. The sky grows darker and the sable curtain of clouds overcomes the sun and moon so that they seem to withdraw themselves and retire from the scene. *“The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear.”* (vs. 11). *“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood”* says Joel referring to the same happenings. The sixth chapter Revelation, describing the breaking of the “sixth seal” uses a very similar expression in connection with the same events. In Habakkuk’s vision it is as though the brilliancy of the lightning (the “light of the arrows” and the “glittering spear”—the darting flashes being likened to the celestial arrows and spears of the Almighty shooting down upon his enemies) has so outshone the heavenly luminaries that they have ceased from their onward progress across the sky and gone into the storm clouds out of sight. There is an allusion here to the day that the “sun stood still” when the Lord fought for Joshua against the Canaanites.

Now the Lord is pictured coming forth at the head of his legions. *“Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the nations in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, (even) for salvation with thine anointed”* (RV) and then, following Rotherham, *“thou hast crushed the Head out of the house of the lawless one, baring the foundation up to the neck”*. (vs. 12-13). Here is depicted the active intervention of God to the physical scattering of the invading host, an assertion that God has gone forth in order to effect the salvation of his people, regathered Israel, and the intimation that He is accompanied in

this onward march by those who are described as his “anointed”. The New Testament gives the clue to the fulfilment of this vision by describing the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ at his Second Advent accompanied by his saints, the Christian Church of this Age, to establish the earthly Messianic Kingdom. The Church—the assembly of true Christians everywhere irrespective of denominational affiliation—is that “anointed”, associated with the Lord Christ in the rulership and administration of the Kingdom. *“They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years”*. (Rev. 20.4).

This allusion to the “anointed” being with him at the time He is revealed in glory for the defence of Israel is particularly apt, for our Lord will have already returned and gathered his Church before these events of “Jacob’s Trouble” have commenced, and hence quite logically will have his Church with him when He is revealed in judgment against the evil forces and in mercy upon those that have put their trust in him. This verse in Habakkuk therefore corresponds very well with the “opening of heaven” in Rev. 19 where the rider upon the white horse emerges, followed by the “armies which were in heaven” to do battle with the forces of evil gathered upon the earth.

Here there is another “*Selah*”, another pause in the Temple service. At the last “*Selah*” the worshippers were able to contemplate the vision of God arising to judgment; at this one they see him marching through the earth scattering his enemies; when the story is resumed the work is complete and the workers of evil have been utterly routed. The prophet looks back on what he has seen. *“Thou didst strike through with his staves (weapons) the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.”* (vs. 14-15). The first phrase in the 14th verse is very significant. It implies that God has turned the enemies’ own weapons back upon themselves—thou didst strike through with *his* weapons the chief of his warriors is one rendering, thus paralleling the expression in verse 13 “the *head* out of the house of the lawless one”. There seems to be some suggestion here that the mighty enemy of God will in part at least encompass its own destruction by means of its own weapons. The prophet permits himself one word of exultation in a minor key. *“They came out as a whirlwind to scatter me”* he says, identifying himself with those of his people who would be living when the great day came—*“their rejoicing was as to devour the poor*

secretly”—a word reminiscent of Ezekiel 38 where the same host plans to swoop down upon an apparently defenceless people “to take a spoil and to take a prey”.

There the vision ends. The evil host has been scattered. Israel has been delivered, and Habakkuk is satisfied. From what he has seen he is content; he knows now that even though the time be long and Israel suffer yet further agonies of distress and persecution, at the appointed season God will come forth and save them with an everlasting salvation, and in that knowledge he can rest.

But although Habakkuk was content, he was by no means unconscious of the severity of that final trial upon Israel. Well did he realise the horror of the situation; although his heart leapt at the prospect of Israel’s final glory, it sank at the thought of the trouble that must needs precede it. And it is here, in this 16th verse, that we stumble across one of the most amazing statements to be found in any of the prophecies; amazing because it reveals Habakkuk’s own knowledge that he himself was destined to live again upon earth and witness for himself the stirring events which he had just seen in vision.

“I heard” he says *“...and I trembled in my place, that I should rest, in (waiting for) the day of trouble, when it cometh up against the people which invadeth him in troops .”* This is the Revised Version rendering. It declares in plain language that Habakkuk expected to rest in death until the events which he described come to pass. The implication is plain that he expected his period of “rest” then to end that he might share with his people the experience of that great day of invasion and deliverance. Leeser renders the passage *“That I should rest till the day of distress, till the withdrawing of the people that will invade us with its troops.”* There seems to be no doubt that this is the literal meaning of the text, and the amazing thing is that Habakkuk saw so clearly that he, and those who, like him, were “heroes of faith” of old, were destined to be raised from the dead in order to witness the overthrow of the powers of this world and take over the reins of government on behalf of earth’s new King, Christ Jesus. *“I will restore thy governors as at first and thy princes as at the beginning”* says God through the prophet Isaiah. Habakkuk must have known the inner meaning of those words, and looked forward in faith to the day when he should stand once more upon earth and witness Israel’s

final glory. *“For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee”* (Isa. 54.7).

It is this same understanding, and this same time, to which Zechariah refers when, speaking of the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem, he says *“In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about”* (Zech. 12. 6). These “governors” are the resurrected “Ancient Worthies” or “Old Testament Saints” as they are variously called, and Zechariah’s words indicate that they will have returned from the grave and be in control of affairs in the regathered holy nation when the great onslaught is launched.

It is at this climax that Habakkuk has given expression to one of the finest expressions of faith to be found anywhere in the Scriptures. The confidence engendered by the vision he has seen is such that he can now regard the greatest of disasters with assurance. Even though every aspect of his people’s national life be destroyed, every activity prove fruitless and the very land itself turn against them, still will he not only believe, but will even find occasion for joy. *“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”*(vs.17-18)

No matter how adverse the earthly circumstances, he knew that all was well with the Plan of God, because God himself was working out that Plan. On that note he ends; a note of utter confidence and joyous confidence. His faith has progressed from a silent faith to an ebullient faith, a faith of peace to a faith of joy, and in his ecstasy of heart he set his prophecy to music that it might be used for ever afterwards in the Temple service to the glory of God, a living witness to the faith of the man who saw in vision what God will one day do in reality, and laid himself down to rest in utter confidence that so surely as God had spoken, so surely would it come to pass.

(The end)
AOH

Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord God....Selah

JOB AND THE RESURRECTION

“I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God” (Job. 19. 25 AV & 26 RV).

This is the most remarkable pre-Israelite expression of faith in the resurrection to be found in the Old Testament. That such a faith could exist at so early a time in human history is considered by modern theologians so unlikely that the evident meaning of the passage is disputed and all kinds of variant explanations offered to minimise its significance. Even so, it may well be asked how the old patriarch acquired his very definite faith in a resurrection to earthly life in which happy state he would “see” God.

The present Hebrew text of vs. 26 is admitted by all scholars to be “corrupt”, that is to say, it has been mutilated by successive copyists and translators so that the Hebrew is now almost unintelligible. The A.V. rendering “and though after my skin worms destroy this body” does not make sense and “worms” has been supplied by the translators anyway; the Revisers substituted (as in the margin) “after I shall awake, though this body be destroyed” by adopting a possible variant reading. Of the few modern translators who have made serious attempts to get at the probable original meaning Margolis has it “*when after my skin this is destroyed, then without my flesh shall I see God*”; Leeser “*after my skin is cut to pieces will this be: and then freed from my body shall I behold God*”; Rotherham “*and, though, after my skin is struck off, this (followeth), yet, apart from my flesh, shall I see GOD*”; Ferrar Fenton “*and after this skin is destroyed I shall yet in my flesh gaze on GOD*”, and Douay “*I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I will see my God*”. The RV gives what is probably the best rendering “*after my skin has thus been destroyed yet from my flesh shall I see God.*” The International Critical Commentary (Vol. “Job”—S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray) says that the Hebrew words “from my flesh” can equally mean “from within my flesh” or “away from, outside, my flesh.” Most translators appear to have adopted the latter meaning and this obviously with the theological idea that Job would, in the after-life, “see God” in heaven where the body of flesh is a thing of the past. This however ignores the fact that neither Job nor any of his contemporaries had any conception of a spiritual world or a

heavenly salvation; whatever understanding of a future life they had was one to be lived upon earth. The passage is therefore best understood as an expression of Job's faith that although, his present disease being incurable and his state hopeless, his skin now ulcerated and corrupting from his afflictions must surely perish and his whole body inevitably be destroyed in death, at a future day his Redeemer would come to earth and stand upon the earth and restore him to life in a new terrestrial body. From within that new body of flesh he will look out and see his Redeemer, God who had so inexplicably hidden himself from Job during the term of the patriarch's suffering but in whom he had never lost faith. Job knew that his misfortunes and sufferings had been at least permitted by God, if not directly inflicted by him. He had long since given up hope that he would recover: death was the only sequel he could see and in his agony he longed and prayed for death. But death was not the end of all things for Job; he knew that he would live again. He expressed that faith in words of rare beauty in ch. 14. 14-15 "*all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands*". The notable thing about his declaration in ch. 19 is his knowledge that this life by resurrection is to be accomplished by means of a redeemer in the New Testament sense. Christ became man's Redeemer by paying a price, the yielding up of his human life upon the Cross. In both instances where the term "Ransom" is used the word implies a deliverance effected in consideration of a price paid. Our Lord does not deliver man in the fashion of a military conqueror who batters down the prison by brute force and so sets the captives free; the act of redemption cost him suffering and death. Now Job uses the Hebrew term which indicates this same idea. Of the two words for "redeemer", "*padah*" and "*goel*", *padah* has the meaning of procuring freedom or release, to deliver, unconditionally; *goel* means the same thing but upon payment of a price. Job used the word *goel*, and in so doing anticipated Isaiah, who a thousand years later described the Lord as the *goel*, the Redeemer, of Israel, some nineteen times in his prophecy. There are thus three important principles embodied in this 25th verse of which Job was aware and convinced; that the act of redemption was going to cost something, that the Redeemer ever liveth, and that he would "stand upon the earth" at the Last Day, when Job would hear his call, and would answer it. Job knew nothing of Christ; the Redeemer he visualised was God whom he worshipped, but all that he saw and believed and hoped for is fulfilled in the person and work of Christ who is the manifestation of Deity to man.

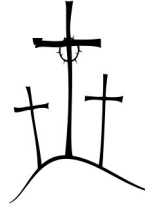
Job also understood that resurrection is by recreation, the re-emergence of the identity, the personality, in a new body. This is a fundamental principle; at death the old body returns to its dust and its constituent atoms coalesce again with the whole terrestrial mass. In the resurrection, as St. Paul explains in 1 Cor. 15. 38, *“God giveth it a body as it pleased him”* a newly-created organism or body adapted to the environment in which the resurrected one knows himself for who he was and who he is. Job fully realised this. Though this skin and this body be destroyed, yet in my flesh, from within my flesh, I shall see God. This is a fair paraphrase of his utterance. He knew full well that his present body, disease-ridden, emaciated, corrupting, must inevitably pass into the grave and be destroyed, but he shouted to the heavens his faith that in a day yet to come he would stand upright in a body of new flesh and in that flesh see God his Redeemer. *“Whom I shall see for myself, ... and not another, though my reins (body) be consumed within me”* he says (vs. 27). That is an affirmation of faith in the preservation of his identity, his personality, even although during his sojourn in the grave his terrestrial body has dissolved away and nothing is left. *“Then shall the dust return to earth as it was: and the spirit...unto God who gave it”* says the Preacher in Eccl. 12. 7 and this was Job’s understanding. He knew that his personality was safe in God’s keeping until the day of resurrection and that he would then arise and take up the thread of conscious existence just as a man does when he awakens from his nightly sleep.

From whence did Job obtain this knowledge? There was no Bible—not even the Old Testament—in his day. God had not yet spoken to Israel by Moses and anyway Job was not an Israelite. It is evident that in those early days God had means of imparting knowledge of himself and his plans of which we now know little or nothing. Since Job was of the land of Uz, which took its name from Uz the son of Nahor, Abraham’s own brother, it is possible that Job was a descendant of Nahor. In such case, and since Nahor, like Abraham, was a worshipper of God, it could be that the primitive understanding of the Divine purposes which was undoubtedly passed down from father to son from earliest times, and through Noah and Shem at the time of the Flood, reached down to Job through Nahor and afforded the sorely-tried but steadfastly faithful old patriarch this faith in the coming redemption and resurrection which enabled him to endure his affliction in hope of a future guaranteed by the promise of God.

AOH

WERE YOU THERE WHEN THEY CRUCIFIED MY LORD

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?



Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?



Were you there when God raised him from the dead?
Were you there when God raised him from the dead?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when God raised him from the dead?

This is a well-known African American spiritual, written by slaves and is believed, according to hymnary.org, to predate the American Civil War. It first appeared in the hymnbook ‘Old Plantation Hymns’ by William Eleazar Barton in 1899. It has been recorded by several artists including Marion Williams, Johnny Cash, Harry Belafonte and as recently as 2014 by Neil Tennant (Pet Shop Boys).

Here are some scriptures which are believed to have inspired these words; Matthew 27:50-56 (NKJV) Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom;...So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!” And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.

Luke 23:44-45 (NKJV) Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened.

Galatians 3:13 (NKJV) Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”).

John 19:34 (NKJV) But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear,

Luke 23:50-56 (NKJV) A man Joseph, a council member,...He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was* from Arimathea,...who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God...went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath...

Matthew 28:1-6 (NKJV) As the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*. But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen.”

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NKJV) Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day.

Philippians 2:8-12 (NKJV) As a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of...the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,...but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

James 2:19 (NKJV) You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

THE GREATEST OF THESE

Part 2. The Charismata. A study in 1 Cor.13.13

Part 1 of this series showed how pagan man in his systems of religion and mythology was endeavouring to find the answer to the great questions of life—the First Cause, Good and Evil, the way to life, without success. In 1 Cor. 13 St. Paul seeks to show his Corinthian converts that their new faith has the answers they previously sought.

Between those former days when the Corinthian brethren worshipped at the idol's shrine, and these later days when Paul wrote to them these searching words, these converts to the Christian faith had been endowed with extraordinary supernormal powers. They had been invested with "gracious gifts" (*charismata*—1 Cor. 12. 31 Diaglott). They are also called "spiritual gifts" (*pneumatikon*) in Chap. 14. 1. The possession of these gifts enabled them to do and say many things entirely outside and beyond the range of their natural capacities. They were intended to be a source of help in their witness-bearing before their former friends and relations in the early days of the Church's establishment.

The use of such supernormal powers was not an entirely new feature in their lives, for they would have seen and heard the heathen priesthood exercising similar powers many times. Supernormal exhibitions of occult power were of frequent occurrence in the worship at the shrine—while the pronouncement of cryptic oracles, or the infliction of the most terrible taboos, under demonic influences, were but regular features of the priesthood's daily functions. To produce impressionistic effects upon the worshippers' minds black magic of many kinds was employed, while other features of the black arts were used either to restore to health or to blast to death such individuals as the priest might choose. Men have been known, so historians say, to wilt and die forthwith under the priestly curse. We are told by competent authorities that occurrences of this sort took place in every land where a demon-inspired priesthood held sway, hence these at Corinth would be no exception to the rule.

But in those former days these brethren had been no more than observers and witnesses of these Satanic happenings. None but the priesthood with their acolytes had been thus endowed. While therefore the sight of these happenings was really no new thing in their lives, it was most surely a

new experience entirely for themselves to be endowed and equipped with such supernormal powers. And in that endowment lay its danger to themselves. Ingrained as that way of life had been from their infant days, into the very fibres of their soul, every act and experience, every word and thought had been tintured through and through with occult influence. When passing over into the Christian Church these Corinthians seemed to have brought much of this early heritage along with them. They had not all cut entirely clear from its entangling influence. Some of them still attended at the idol shrine, and sat with family and friends at its festive board. With them they still partook of the “offered” meat, while others scrupled not to lend themselves to immorality. Seemingly, for some of them, the “pull” of the newer faith was yet too weak to neutralise the fascination of the ancient shrine.

And yet there was some “pulling power” in the new faith. They came at the appointed times to the place of fellowship and mingled with other communicants of like mind. It was at these times that the new influence came to rest upon them. It was in this place that the heavenly “*Charismata*” enabled them to speak without premeditation or other preparation in their own foreign tongues. Some were accorded ability to interpret a “foreign tongue”, and make it of use and service in the general ministry. Others were given insight into an ancient prophecy, which was then communicated to all for the common good. Others had ability conferred to heal the sick or work minor miracles.

Thus, within the limitations of their own ecclesia, these one-time heathen worshippers were endowed with supernormal powers. And, in that they lay outside the range of their own natural abilities, they were in this sense, akin to those of their former priests, though intended for nobler ends. With men inclined to be wholly good—men like Paul and Peter and the whole Apostolic band—these “charismata” could be of untold benefit, both to the recipient himself and to the wider circle around him, but with men not yet cut clear from evil things and evil ways, they could well be a source of great danger and immense difficulty. With men such as these in the assembly other “powers” also invaded the place where they were “come together in the name of the Lord”. Under demonic influence some one or more had openly said “Jesus is accursed” (1 Cor. 12. 3) a state of things which Paul assured them was not promoted by the Holy Spirit of God in their midst. Perhaps also from the same source came the unyield-

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ing reluctance to give place to another speaker who may have had a “leading” from the Lord at the same moment of time. In this way the occasion which should have been devoted wholly to Divine worship became reduced to a noisy babel of conflicting sights and sounds.

The bestowment of these “gifts” was intended first and foremost to stand as witness that the Most High was in their midst. Any stranger entering in among them at these times ought to have been convicted by the earnestness and sincerity of each and all, in consequence of which the secrets of his own heart would be disclosed (by a confession of penitence) and then falling on his face, would worship God and declare that God was really in their midst (1 Cor. 14. 24-25). In addition to this witness to the stranger, the exercise of these “gifts” was intended for the edification of all. (1 Cor. 14. 3 and 26).

Unlike ourselves in these later days, they had no completed New Testament available with its clear outlines of redemptive and moral truth, and such copies of the Old Testament as they may have had were not easy to understand, hence they stood in need of heavenly aid to enable them to conduct their ministry. Thus, a flash of insight here into the meaning of a promise or a line of reasoning there regarding the purport of a prophecy might be a means of broadening out the foundation of their hopes. Or again the reading of a Psalm might help to deepen the devotion of the hour. In all things Paul sought to have them look upon the whole assembly as though they were members of a human body, of which no member could say to a fellow-member “I have no need of you”. He desired them so to conduct their services that all might be edified, choosing rather to have them speak five simple words in their own native utterance than ten thousand in an unknown tongue.

The object therefore behind these “gifts” was that of leading them apparently into a new way of life. And yet, under the circumstances then prevailing it could not be a perfect way, for there were tares among the wheat. Not every member of the ecclesia could be accounted to be “in Christ”. From the very inception of the Church’s history there has always been a Church within a Church or (to turn the statement round—and the statement then is just as true) a Church outside a Church. Always there have been more Christians there in name than Christians in fact. As seen by Scripture there has always been a greater company that has loved

moral goodness and just dealing than has loved the way of sacrifice. Out of the myriads who have been attracted by the Gospel story not everyone has been called of God to become conformed to the Image of His Son, and of the many that have been “called”, only the “few” will come through as the elect of God. The eye of man has seen the whole assembly of the Church visible, the Eye of God alone has seen the faithful core within. For this reason alone the assemblies in the ecclesias, in the early Church (or now) could never claim to constitute the “perfect” Society—that is to say, the Society in which the “perfect” way of life could express itself.

That general statement, true of the whole Church of this Gospel Age, was particularly true of the Corinthian Assembly. From its very inception it was greatly handicapped by the influence of the old-time tradition and environment. Heathen worship was always a divided thing—there were “gods many” in the land, each god claiming its own particular following. The Corinthians were well accustomed to think of as many sects and cults as there were gods. This was the outlook they brought over into the Christian Church, and did not scruple to range themselves in divided companies, behind this leader or that. Again, they had looked upon frequent scenes of impurity in the heathen festivals without undue concern. They also brought this state of indifference and unconcern over into their congregational life to work great havoc in their midst. The failure to make a clean break from the old way of life gravely jeopardised any prospect of making the new “way” a success.

But even with the best of them, and under the best conditions possible it seems obvious that no really new way of life could have been introduced by the use of the “Charismata”, seeing that, in the main, they were mechanical gifts operating from without, upon hand and eye and brain, enabling the recipient to do and say certain things which lay outside the range of normal capacity—a kind of supernormal obsession from outside themselves, producing effects for which they themselves were only, in part, responsible. And the fact that some among them laid themselves open to demonic control—as is evidenced by some one or more of them saying “Jesus is accursed”—greatly complicated the situation for the whole assembly. A counterfeit obsession by the evil powers—a state of things which few seemed able to detect or correct—produced consequences in their midst far from good or desirable.

In any case, the influence of the evil powers had showed itself too strong to be corrected by the heavenly gifts, as their divisions, their indifference to sin, their readiness to “go to law” proved most unmistakably. Even their very “love-feasts”, with which their usual gatherings terminated, had degenerated into seasons of drunkenness and gluttony.

These were sad scenes in a Christian Church, and make grievous reading even when lightly sketched. And the Corinthians were not the only Church in this tragic plight as reference to Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles will show. The Church at Corinth stands before us in the nature of a window, through which we may view the state of many congregations in those early days, shackled and fettered as so many of them were by the heathen influence of former days.

What then was effected among them by the “Charismata”? Were there no good results therefrom? Yes, indeed, there was great good where the heart and motive of the recipient was pure, but to produce praiseworthy effects the heart must first be pure. The mere possession of a “gift” did not by itself purify the heart.

What was the real purpose of the bestowment of these “gifts”? The answer is—it was to show the need of some better thing! Taken in their widest sense, these “gifts” were endowments of an enabling Power—Holy Spirit Power—accorded to believing men to assist them in their witness-bearing to the new faith, and to call attention to the changes that were being introduced in the earth. But a dispensation of “Power” alone was not enough to purify and sweeten hearts so supersaturated with sin. The hosts of wickedness under Satanic control could also dispense wonder-working power to their representatives, enabling them also to perform prodigies before men. And, being what he was, man would respond more readily to the evil display than to the good. The great and all-essential purpose behind the bestowment of these “gifts” was to show the need for the dispensing of “something” which God alone possessed—a “something” not possessed by any evil power—a “something” that would penetrate below brain and hand and eye, and win response from the deep discerning qualities of the heart. Mere “power” that operated from outer sources upon eye and hand and brain was not enough; it must be the deep call of One great Heart—able and ready to help to the uttermost—to every other heart

which had come to know its need of help. There is but one attribute that is ample enough for this great task; it had its source in God.

For a little while therefore God gave the lesser “gifts”, which were destined in due time to pass away, to show to men, (even to believing men) their need for a more excellent thing.

(to be continued)

TH

ANOINTING OF JESUS AT BETHANY

John 12. 3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

This event happened 6 Days before the Passover. Prior to this there was the raising of Lazarus who was brought back to his sisters Martha and Mary from 4 days in the grave (John 11). Many Jews believed because of this miracle and told the chief priests and Pharisees, but they felt Jesus was usurping their place in society and in front of the Romans too, so they decided to plot in order that he would be killed. Therefore, Jesus took himself into the wilderness for a time to avoid those who sought to seize him. However, as the Passover was only days away Jesus as well as many other Israelites came towards Jerusalem and he arrived at Bethany, a few miles from Jerusalem, as the Sabbath was commencing at 6 p.m. Now he would be safe from capture for a while.

Hence 6 days before the Passover on the 9th of Nisan Jesus came to the home of Simon the leper. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were there; Lazarus at the table and Martha serving. Presumably there were family gathered including Simon. It was as much a home to Jesus as anywhere and a place he must have been many times during his three and a half year ministry. How would they feel now about Jesus? He was like a saviour having saved 4-days-dead Lazarus as well as being their much loved friend and teacher.

Mary and the spikenard

What do we know about Mary? She was the one known for sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him while her sister Martha worked in the kitchen. Jesus said she had made the better choice in deciding to listen to

him rather than help her sister (Luke 10. 42). Jesus loved her (John 11. 5). Then after Lazarus had died and Jesus came and called for her, after speaking to Martha, Mary kneels at Jesus' feet crying saying "if you had come Lazarus would not have died". Jesus, being overwhelmed in emotion, cries too.

The spikenard was very costly. It was a spice that came from the Himalayas and countries such as India, Nepal and Bhutan and grows from about 3,000 to 5,000 feet high. Snowdon, the highest peak in England and Wales is just at 3,085 feet high. Mont Blanc in France is just under 5,000 feet high. The plant could be entombed in snow half the year, their flowers white as though expressing that purity and isolation from the valleys below in which they could not live. Apparently many aromatic plants grow in the high places. Great skill was required in blending. It was a high art and the apothecary of that day was not a seller of medicines but a maker of rare perfumes. It's cost—a year's wages.

There has been conjecture as to whether Mary alone owned it but it seems likely they owned it as a family and all of them would have agreed to its use. They probably were very eager for Mary to do this and one can imagine she was the instigator.

The pouring

The Matthew account (14.3) state that Jesus' head but the John the last of the gospels to it was on his feet. So assume that it was both his feet she wiped it with her hair (John 12. 3). This may be hard to imagine but this was a place in the world that washed others' feet and customs quite different to Britain and other parts of the world in the twenty first century.



(26. 7) and the Mark it was poured on account, which was be written, states that it's reasonable to his head and feet; on

But what did the oil represent?

Jesus says she 'kept it for the time of my preparation for burial' (John 12. 7 Weymouth). Does this mean that it was used on dead people? John 19. 38-39 says 'Joseph of Arimathaea took the body of Jesus and also Nicodemus, who at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture

of myrrh and aloes of a hundred pound weight.’ Joseph and Nicodemus did not use spikenard but two other products mixed so the spikenard was not for burying.

What were the priests anointed with in the tabernacle?

In Exodus 30. 22-25 the chief priest, in this case Aaron, was anointed with holy anointing oil which was a mixture of myrrh, sweet calamus, sweet cinnamon, cassia and olive oil.

Kings Anointed

Kings were also anointed with oil. Saul was anointed with oil by Samuel (1 Sam. 10. 1). David was anointed with oil even though he was still a youth at the time. (1 Sam. 16. 13). An interesting point here is that the scripture records that once David was anointed the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. There seems to be a connection here with the Holy Spirit. Solomon was also anointed king after riding into Jerusalem on King David’s mule. (1 Kings 1. 34-39)

But what was in this anointing oil for kings? Was it one product or a blend? It does not seem to be written in scripture. One suggestion was that it was the same blend as for the High Priest in the tabernacle and temple arrangement. Samuel who first anointed a king in Israel would be familiar with it from his time under Eli in Shiloh. Solomon is connected with spikenard in scripture. It is mentioned twice in Song of Solomon: The second reference as a plant in the garden in Song of Solomon 4. 14 and more significantly Song of Solomon 1. 12 where the spikenard smells while Solomon was at his table; Solomon was known for his sumptuous food and fine clothing. The connection seems to be with a king. In addition Solomon is thought to be a type of Christ, him being a Son of David of the kingly line. (Isa. 11. 1)

Did Mary remember Solomon and this account in chapter 1? It seems significant if the context of Song Of Solomon is interpreted as a poem or love song and even more significant if it is typical of the mutual love of Christ and his church. Mary did show her devotion to our Lord in pouring the spikenard and Jesus loved Mary and her family.

Image of spikenard plant



Unlike the anointing oil for the priest the spikenard for Solomon appears on its own and Mary anointed Jesus with a single product not a mixture. Jesus had no need to be anointed by the Holy Spirit or be endowed by gifts at this late stage of his earthly ministry as he had been full of the Spirit since his baptism. (Luke 4. 1,18-19)

King Jesus

Even back as far as the days of Moses, Numbers 24. 17 states “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel”. A similar assertion is given even earlier in Genesis 49. 10, which says “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh (Messiah) come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be”. The thought is of someone who is a king with a right to rule rather than a priest or judge. King Saul was the first king coming hundreds of years after Moses. David looks forward to a future king in Psalm 2. 6-7 which says “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” Isaiah the prophet sees a future king being born “the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David.” (Isa. 9. 7)

Kings and priests received a costly anointing. When Mary of Bethany took her “pound of ointment of spikenard very costly” for the anointing of Jesus, she at least knew what she was doing. So did the recipient of her generosity and outpouring of her love, for he knew himself to be both King and High Priest shortly to complete his sacrificial work upon the earth as the Passover Lamb. The word ‘Christ’ should be a pointer as it means ‘anointed one’. At the very least it was for distinguished people and our Lord was at least that and he was alive.

The next event in the last week of our Lord Jesus’ ministry was the triumphal entry also known as Palm Sunday when Jesus rode in as King. It was timely. This ought to be taken into account when considering the significance of this anointing as well as the title Pilate had placed on the cross “Jesus, the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.”

NAC



HIDDEN POWER

It is a privilege and opportunity to share the touch stones of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the rich gems of blessings we now receive in the risen Christ. The hidden Power we shall refer to is not only the important power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, but the same power the disciples and us that are in Christ receive now.

A perfect, innocent man was put to death, even the death upon the cross. Why does it say “even unto death upon the cross”? He went through the trials and was falsely accused. He had to be treated the same as those that were justified to suffer the death upon the cross because of the criminal law of Israel. (Deut. 21. 22,23) “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him upon the tree: ...but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance”. If the body was left to hang through the Sabbath day they also could have been put to death. Besides, the Sabbath day is a day of rest. God had already revealed what would take place to His beloved Son as He declared it unto His disciples. So, even in this important fact we need no other to teach us. We have firm confirmation in the written Word of God that Jesus was raised the third day “according to the scriptures”. How wonderful to know and believe this fulfilment of God’s promise. We are reminded at this time of year that ‘Love’s redeeming work is done’; when Jesus cried out “It is finished”. Love’s redeeming work continues in us by the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. We are washed daily when we come to the cross; daily we thank God for the cleansing blood for our bodies that needs to be frequently cleansed because there is certainly power; hidden power in the blood. This is why Jesus had to die and be raised by the mighty power of God. What a blessing we receive because of that cruel death and resurrection of God’s beloved Son.

We need to remind ourselves of those descriptive scriptures to understand fully what is meant and to apply such; in order to carry out according to God’s Will for us. The council at that time felt justified to carry out those proceedings according to the written law. Although He was falsely accused of blasphemy, whereas, we have been washed in the blood of the lamb. Here we have also received the cleansing power of the risen Christ, that atonement that was made on our behalf and the world of mankind.

Sanctification

Paul writing to the brethren at Corinth which we can apply today said “You were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”.(1 Cor. 6. 11 NASB) Here Paul was making a contrast between the unrighteous and the righteous. So having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. What a blessing from the resurrection of Christ. The sanctification is the cleansing power, the hidden power in the inner man. It is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the tomb. We have been sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit. Here again we see the outcome of power working in us and for us. Is this not an astounding miracle that is hidden? Paul reminds us that we are sanctified by the word of God and prayer. When he wrote to the church at Corinth; he wrote to the sanctified in Christ Jesus.

The hidden power of God

“And my message and my preaching”, he says “were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God”. He continues “Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory,” he continues and says “the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood;” and finally he mentions that all important point “for if they understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”.(1 Cor. 2. 4-8 NASB) Let’s repeat those vital words again “the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory”. The Amplified Bible explains it this way “But rather what we are setting forth is a wisdom of God once hidden (from the human understanding) and now revealed to us by God—(that wisdom) which God devised and decreed before the ages for our glorification (to lift us into the glory of His presence)”. We note “once hidden” “and now revealed”. Does it mean then, it was hidden so that the crucifixion took place but was revealed after the resurrection? This seems to be a reasonable explanation and also the reason for mentioning it here. You will remember very distinctly that James says if “you lack wisdom” pray for it. There were other times when certain things were kept back or hidden for the time being by God. When things were hard to comprehend or understand. One of those times you remember when it was not right for

their eyes and so forth to be opened. As we are enlightened by the hidden power of the Holy Spirit, we are given a greater understanding of the hidden power and wisdom of God through Jesus Christ. This power is unlimited and beyond human comprehension. On the day of Pentecost particular power was given to the disciples. Jesus told them of this time before it occurred; He said to them “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24.44-49 NASB). The hidden or unseen power of the Holy Spirit; we can only see the outworking evidence. It is also known and rightly so as a hidden mystery or sacred secret. We have also received the power of the Holy Spirit through the risen Christ. Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit which we have been given by God; for we are not our own. The power of the Holy Spirit enables our minds to be enlightened to penetrate the living word of God. The mind is controlled by the spirit, directing our thoughts and ways according to the Will of God; through Jesus Christ. The hidden power is undoubtedly beyond measure. This power forces against the evil power of sin and darkness. By one man came death and it was by one perfect man came life everlasting. We are alive through the risen Christ. We have a spirit filled life by the mighty power of God through Jesus Christ.

A life everlasting and eternal

“Our life is hid with Christ in God”. This is one of the most treasured gifts that we have been given by God; even eternal life. There is a difference between eternal and everlasting. In John 3. 16 (KJV) it is everlasting life meaning that once you have believed and have given your all to Him; this will never change as far as He is concerned. But eternal life relates to our hope beyond this life, although, the words in the Greek are very closely connected. However, this life we have in Him now; is a life of holiness from our Holy Father; God Himself. What treasures we already possess in our earthen vessels; and yet greater possessions await us in heaven reserved for each one of us. The word has it in Luke 11. 13

(NASB) “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

It also mentions that we need to ask. So we now come to an indescribable power of prayer. What we do know is that prayer is always heard and answered. If we have a difficulty praying then we need to remind ourselves of the great interpreter that sitteth on the right hand of the majesty on high. We cannot stress enough the power of prayer to God. James says the prayer of faith shall save the sick. We are told of the widow’s son raised after Elijah’s prayer to God. The word says “And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said “O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again”. And the child came back to life. This is one example; but the power is the power that raised Jesus the Son of the living God.

The hidden power

We have been called by the mighty power of God through Jesus Christ our Lord by the hidden power of God who created all things and gave His Son “All power”. We have been called, justified by faith, sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit. The hidden power of Christ within us confirms the promise of the hope of glory when we shall be changed into the likeness of Christ’s glorious body, the time when we shall see Him as He is. When He prayed that intercessory prayer to His Father it indicates that longing to be received back to that glory He once had. We have touched upon some of the rich blessings we are receiving because of the hidden power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and ascended to the throne of glory; waiting to come again to receive His bride the church to be with Him where He is. And now the hidden power of work is taking place; to prepare us for a dwelling in heaven to be with Him forever.

PW



SEEK ROSES AMONGST THORNS

We all need to become like avid rose gardeners, hunting for buds of beauty within our thorny circumstances. It’s a sure cure for complaining.

God’s little book of Calm, Richard Daly

KINGS OF JUDAH

A PLEDGE TO THE LORD

2 Chron. 34.31 (LB)

Part 1

In the books of Kings details about the kings of the ten tribes predominate from chapter 12 of the first book and in the first 17 chapters of the second book until Assyria swept them from the land for their many sins. The kings of the ten tribes were consistently evil with few acknowledgements of the God of Heaven. In the books of the Chronicles records of the kings of Judah predominate who were descendants of David and good and evil kings followed one another.

The changeable nature, the fickleness of Judah's "worship" of the Lord comes across in 2 Chron. 34.31, which the Living Bible renders: "As the king (Josiah) stood before them, he made a pledge to the Lord to follow His commandments with all his heart and soul, and to do what was written in the scroll." A scroll containing the laws of God, as given to Moses, had been found in the Temple and Josiah was in despair when he realised how far they had departed from the requirements of the Lord. The Lord sent comforting words after his repentance and Josiah made his pledge in response. Having discovered God's will, he resolved to follow it faithfully. Josiah's single-minded desire to follow the Lord and know His will contrasts sharply with the capriciousness and changing styles of the worship of Judah and their kings until Nebuchadnezzar took them away as the Lord foretold He would, if they did not mend their ways.

Why, then, were they so fickle? We have been accustomed, in Britain, to seeing successive labour and conservative governments pursuing policies according to their own wisdom at the time! But no matter what party governs, their efforts to benefit the community have been fraught with problems, not having the benefit of the direct guidance of God. On the other hand, why should Judah and their kings, having tasted the blessings which flowed to them in worshipping and serving God, so quickly cast Him aside, in favour of idol worship and other sins? In this context how powerfully comes to us the message of Matthew 4.10 to worship and serve only the Lord our God!

The kings
of Judah.

Saul

David

Solomon

Rehoboam

Abijah

Asa

Jehoshaphat

Jehoram

Ahaziah

Athaliah

Joash

Amaziah

Uzziah

Jotham

Ahaz

Hezekiah

Manasseh

Amon

Josiah

Jehoahaz

Jehoiakim

Jehoiachin

Zedekiah

What then is the objective in bringing these few thoughts? The title, “A Pledge to the Lord”, conveys the thought of a settled purpose of the mind, made for life. It conveys the thought of a decision made with that full seriousness and consideration which is appropriate in giving heed to the instructions of the mighty Lord of Creation. By contrasting this attitude with the happenings in Judah during the period of the kings, when even the best of the kings slipped from this high ideal and the worst pursued a life-style and rulership in headlong opposition to God, whom they did not believe and whose instructions they therefore obstinately ignored, we may learn both how to remain steadfast for ever in following His commandments and how we may avoid the traps that ensnared the feet of those kings who displeased him.

Let us then quickly survey the main features of the reigns of David and his descendants.

David

David himself followed Saul who did not keep the commandment of the Lord his God when he offered a burnt offering when Samuel delayed in his coming to Gilgal. (1 Sam. 13.8-14) In his case faith did not overcome fear of losing his troops before battling with the Philistine hordes and Saul did foolishly. His wrong attitude to God caused his dynasty not to be continued.

So the Lord marked out David the “man after his own heart” whom he prepared for service with many difficult experiences. In 2 Sam. 7.16 the Lord’s word to David is recorded. “Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee (me).” Better promises were made to him than the privilege of building a house on earth for the Lord which was denied him. David received this and other wonderful promises, which were not withdrawn in spite of his sins in the matters of Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, and numbering God’s people who were said to be innumerable. These sins brought judgements upon David and Israel; the death of Bathsheba’s child, trouble, rebellion and death among his own sons; David’s concubines were shamefully used as predicted by the Lord through Nathan (2 Sam. 12.9-14) and, in respect of numbering the people; a pestilence as chosen by David after Gad the prophet showed him God’s alternative punishments in 2 Samuel 24.12-15. Though the Lord forgives the repentant yet sometimes the trouble which results from a sin must run

its full course to teach a never-to-be-forgotten lesson and to complete the expiation of guilt.

Psalm 51. 1&2 (LB) gives David's desire, when he says "O loving and kind God, have mercy. Have pity upon me and take away the awful stain of my transgressions. Oh, wash me, cleanse me from this guilt. Let me be pure again." David believed in God's goodness and mercy and therefore understood that fundamental truth which is delivered to all God's children that there is no sin from which the repentant cannot be recovered. The deep sorrow at offending God's laws and consciousness of alienation from Him and the desire to return to His rest invoke His generous and condescending forgiveness and ensure a continuing basis for serving Him. Was this why the Lord foresaw that David was "a man after His own heart"—a man, though imperfect, with the same love of righteousness?

Solomon

And what of Solomon? How wonderfully he started. Listen to the account of his humility as recorded in 1 Kings 3.7. "O LORD my God, thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." And so he asked for an understanding heart to judge the Lord's great people—not long life, or riches, or death to his enemies. And how we are moved in reading Solomon's prayer which commences in 1 Kings 8.22! Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple, inspired by God's spirit, here declared how Israel will need to cry to the Lord out of various distresses brought about by forsaking the way of the Lord.

So we need to note that no frail human can perform unaided a pledge to the mighty Creator of all Things. We are all sinners, born and shapen in iniquity (Psalm 51.5) and cannot rise, without His constant aid, to the standards required in performing a vow to Him. 2 Chronicles 9.22 tells us that King Solomon was richer and wiser than any other king in all the earth yet for all his wisdom he did not wholly follow the Lord. Exodus 34.14-16 specifically warned against intermarriage with the daughters of idolatrous nations lest "their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods." And so 1 Kings 11.1-6 tells a sorry tale that can be summed up with a few extracts. "King Solomon loved many strange (foreign) women." "When Solomon was old,...his wives turned away his heart after other gods;... Ashtoreth... and...Milcom,...and Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went

not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.” No! this son of David was not the Messiah of whom it would be said “this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. (Matt. 3.17) What a warning here not to allow any attractions of the world or the devil to divert us from performing God’s will: But how we need His help in pursuing this resolve. We are doomed to failure without His constant aid.

Rehoboam

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, suffered as a result of the Lord’s anger with Solomon for not heeding His twice-repeated warning not to worship other gods. 1 Kings 11.11 to 13 (LB) gives the Lord’s message. “Since you have not kept our agreement and have not obeyed my laws, I will tear the kingdom away from you and your family and give it to someone else. However, for the sake of your father David, I won’t do this while you are still alive. I will take the kingdom away from your son. And even so I will let him be king of one tribe, for David’s sake and for the sake of Jerusalem, my chosen city”. So as the Lord predicted, Rehoboam antagonised the majority of the tribes of Israel who were then ruled by Jeroboam.

When Rehoboam was at the height of his popularity and power he abandoned the Lord and was attacked by the king of Egypt for his sins. However he repented and the Lord relented. But, Judah must pay tribute to Shishak the Egyptian king in order to realise it was better to serve God than an earthly king. 2 Chron. 12.14 (LB) sums him up as “an evil king, for he never did decide really to please the Lord.” What a faithful God that He still used His infinite wisdom to guide an evil man in diverting him from the worst excesses of his wickedness. How much more is He able and willing to guide those who love His will in His way that we might fulfil our pledge of consecration to Him.

Abijah

Abijah, was the next of David’s descendants on Judah’s throne. Although 2 Chron. 13 records that his reign was unstable for a war with Israel when the men of Judah cried to the Lord when ambushed by Jeroboam and defeated them, we have to turn to 1 Kings 15.1-3 (where he is called Abijam) to discover he was as great a sinner as his father Rehoboam. Perhaps that is why he was only permitted to reign 3 years before being succeeded by his son Asa.

Asa

The scriptures testify that Asa was “careful to obey the Lord,” (2 Chron. 14.2 LB). He was zealous to remove idol worship. (2 Chron. 14.3-5).

Again in 2 Chron. 15.17 (LB) it is recorded “in Judah and Benjamin the heart of King Asa was perfect before God throughout his lifetime.” Do you sigh with relief to read a statement like that after the previous 2 and a half idolatrous reigns which preceded him? However we then find when Judah is attacked in the thirty sixth year of his reign he turns not to the Lord for help but to the king of Syria. For this the Lord predicted wars for him and he became diseased in his feet but even then did not ask the Lord about it. How easy it is to become complacent in following the Lord so that we are not prepared for still seeking the help of the Lord when good times are followed by trials. We need a constant habit of seeking the Lord’s approval and help in all the affairs of life.

Jehoshaphat

There was good and bad in Jehoshaphat too. Although he did not worship idols and obeyed God’s commandments, (2 Chron. 17.3&4) he was a lot too friendly with the kings of Israel and made a marriage alliance between his son and the daughter of wicked Ahab. Jehoshaphat fancied working closely with the other ten tribes instead of being careful to retain a feeling for the will of the Lord. The Lord was displeased when he joined with Ahab in going to war with Syria. Later he had a partnership with Ahaziah of Israel in a shipping enterprise which also ended in disaster. But the marriage alliance brought Judah far more trouble since Ahab’s daughter turned Jehoshaphat’s son to wickedness.

Jehoram

Jehoram worked evil throughout his reign. He killed his brethren (2 Chron. 21.4) and was as wicked as the kings of Israel. Therefore the Lord allowed the nations who had been subject to Judah to revolt, (2 Chron. 21.8-10) other nations attacked and the king’s palace was ransacked, he was afflicted with a bowel disease, and he died unmourned (2 Chron. 21.16-20). What a signal warning not to become unwitting partners with those of this present evil world, who, though they may not turn our hearts from God, may be used of the devil to lay snares for the future we are not clever enough to foresee. Oh! for the Lord’s guidance and wisdom in all our ways.

To be continued

DL

Next issue

Ahaziah Athaliah Joash Amaziah Uzziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah Manasseh Amon Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiakim Jehoiachin Zedekiah

FROM A PRISON CELL

Reflections on the “Prison Epistles”
Part 2. The Good Pleasure of his Will

In the opening verses of his letter to the **Ephesians**, after the short introductory greeting, Paul piles up statement after statement in an almost bewildering way. The reflective mind is staggered by the immensity of the arguments as feature after feature is brought to view. This succession of amazing arguments presents, in the realm of religious thought, an appearance like a series of mighty mountain peaks towering up into heaven one up against the other, and stretching as far as the eye can see. So closely do the sentences run into each other, it is not easy to separate them one from another in order to take them each singly to analyse and explain them in turn, or in detail. By very careful differentiation, it is possible to divide the section (vs. 3-14) into three smaller sections, each of which seems to have its own outstanding particulars of teaching to impart. These three subsections are verses 3-6, verses 7-12, and verses 13-14. The first begins with ascription of praise to God for all His favours in general to the believer through Christ; the second with “*In whom WE have*” with a part in those favours; the third with “*In whom YE ALSO*” have come to receive a share with those who first hoped (or trusted) in Christ. The first one deals with God’s fore-ordination to take to himself a family of heavenly sons; the second shows them as a first instalment resulting from the operation of a plan of reconciliation embracing both heavenly and earthly things; the third places on record the bestowment of a token or pledge of Divine assurance that the full and complete inheritance for these sons of God is sure without fail. Towering high above all these assurances is the assertion that everything forms part of God’s unchanging purpose—“*according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed...of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*” (vs .9 and 11). In the words of a later section (Eph. 3. 11) they were “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Three times the Apostle makes reference to varying aspects of God’s Will. First (in v.5), he speaks of the process of adoption as being “*according to the good pleasure of his will*”, and lastly (v.11) he asserts that the whole scheme of reconciliation is “*according to...the counsel of his will*”. Thus the outworking of God’s Will is seen to be in absolute

accordance with the counsel given by unerring Wisdom, and though at its first inception it was in the nature of a God-kept mystery, known only to himself, it has now been revealed, and shown to be in full conformity with God's unfathomed appreciation of all that is holy and true and good. The prompting motive throughout, at every stage, is God's free and unmerited grace—(v.6) "*to the glory of his grace*" (v.7)—"*according to the riches of his grace*". Wisdom, Love and Power are thus set forth by the Apostle as the attributes behind the whole design, and as operating from before the foundation of the world towards the completion of the universal Plan. At the centre of the whole plan God has set "One" upon whom He has placed his own gracious Spirit, and from which "act of placement" that One has taken his title and his Name. That honoured "One" is called "The Christ". "The Christ" is rightly, depicted as the recipient of an "outpouring". In Mosaic times this "out-pouring" was represented in the anointing oil of the "chosen" person as God's High Priest. Hence the Apostle can speak of privileges embodied and residing in Christ as from distant days, but which became available to the follower of the Lord in these special days of grace. Thus we read of spiritual blessings in the heavenlies "*in Christ*", of God having fore-ordained us unto adoption as sons "*through Jesus Christ*"; of the grace, which He freely bestowed on us "*in the Beloved*"; of God's purpose to sum up all things "*in Christ*"; and that those "*should be unto the praise of his glory*" who had first hoped "*in Christ*". Thus, in far distant times, God had issued from his own possession and by his own sole authority, a whole galaxy of honours and preferments to and for his Chosen One when time and circumstances should cause that Chosen One to appear. "*In Christ*" the fulness ("pleroma") of Divinity was appointed to dwell (Col. 2. 9).

But more than this, all other beings in heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities or powers, were created in relationship to him, for it was God's will for him to hold them together, as a sovereign prince might coordinate and hold together many subordinate thrones. (Col. 1. 17). Their honours and stations were created and conferred to be ready for them to bear subordinate relationship to more exalted authority when He should reach his lofty throne. All this exalted superiority was vested "*in Christ*" before the world began and forms part of God's primordial out-pouring for his coming "Chosen One".

Twice the Apostle refers to an enabling power bestowed by God, the possession of which would activate and empower the members of the “*Chosen One*” to achieve the destiny to which they had been called. “*Blessed us with all spiritual blessings . . . ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*” (v.3 and 13). The Holy Spirit is God’s creative instrument, which can bestow blessing upon such as are in Christ—(spiritual light, spiritual food, and intense spiritual desire)—and at the same time mark or seal them as God’s own. This is an outflow of Divine energy from the throne of God, in order to produce in his elect a disposition and character like his own—Divine power creating in the object of his choice a character that can contain and retain for ever attributes of Divinity.

But all save one of this elect company have been subject to the power of sin. Twice Paul speaks of redemption for all such. First, such redemption as is represented by the “*forgiveness of sin*”. But that is not the full measure of redemption contemplated. Full redemption belongs to a later day, and will imply much more than forgiveness of sin. There is a Day of redemption provided for—“*the year of my redeemed*”. To redeem them from sin was ordained to cost their Lord and Leader his life. That Leader had to die for them, to procure cleansing for them from their sins, and further to enfold them about with his own spotless righteousness. To each forgiven follower the privilege was ordained for him to win his place in Christ, and be found in him. by partaking of Christ’s sufferings—being conformed to Jesus’ death. It was thus necessary for the Chosen One—the Logos of creative days—to whom it pleased God to ordain pre-eminence in everything, to stoop down from his lofty place and be found in fashion as a man, and become humbled unto death so that He might redeem the intended sons from sin and death, and then when himself raised from the dead, become their leader—as well as shepherd and bishop of their souls—to lead these many sons up to the ordained heights of glory, honour and immortality.

These, then, are the high peak points of Paul’s opening argument in this great letter from a prison cell. Are all these points of doctrine new items of revelation never before enunciated till his prison days? Did Paul say nothing on these great themes in Corinthians, Galatians and Romans? And had Jesus nothing to say on any of these doctrines?

We shall see!

TH

**Bible Students Fellowship Conference
Tuesday 11–Sunday 16 August 2015**

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Theme: Psalm 46 God is our refuge and strength

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For the benefit of those who wish to keep the memorial of our Lord's death at the time nearest the anniversary, it is suggested that Thursday 2 April 2015 after 6 p.m. is the appropriate date and time

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The Bible Study Monthly is now available as a pdf. Address on back page

OUR COMFORT IN SORROW

There is no book like the Bible for the sorrowful. It tells of the Comforter; it points to the perfect plan according to which God is working out our blessedness: it insists that all things are working together for good; it opens the vista of the blessed future, where all the griefs and tears of men shall be put away for ever.

Gone from us

Betty Webb (West Wickham)

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

The “Times of the Gentiles” was the name given by Jesus to that period during which Israel was to be subject to the other nations of the world. From the time of Israel’s organisation into a nation at the Exodus until its final captivities under Sennacherib of Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in the 7th century B.C., it specially represented God in the world. Its national polity was a theocracy, i.e., God Himself was King and the ruling monarch was said to “sit upon the throne of the Lord.” In this the nation pictured the rule of the future Millennial Age, when Christ reigns over the earth. This order of things came to an end with Zedekiah, the last Jewish king, and of him it was said “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it him.” True to these words, the nation was scattered.

From that time, a period of twenty-five hundred years, Gentile nations held sway over Jerusalem. Babylon first, then Persia, Greece and finally Rome held the country in their grasp. These four powers were seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, in which the gold head, silver arms, copper lower parts and iron legs symbolised these four empires. Likewise the four wild beasts of Daniel’s dream pictured these same four powers. In these symbolic prophecies this Gentile rule is seen to come to its end and the incoming of the Kingdom of God, in which the Son of Man, Christ, takes the power and the kingdom and reigns for ever and ever.

The time for that change has come. The great powers of earth have had their day and opportunity and whilst some have endeavoured to rule justly and wisely, and have brought the blessings of ordered government to their subjects, none have been able to abolish the great curses of humanity, sin, disease and death, nor can they. Only Christ’s Kingdom can do that. Now the present world distress, the failure of statesmen to achieve world peace, the mutual jealousy of great Powers, the general perplexity of nations, are all signs that we live in the day when the “Times of the Gentiles” have come to their end, Jerusalem is set free, the age-long oppression of God’s ancient people lifted, and the Kingdom of God, with all that it holds of life and blessing for every man, be ushered in.

AOH

THE VEIL IS RENT

*The veil is rent! The veil is rent!
What by this awesome sign is meant?
What happens in the sanctuary
As Jesus dies on Calvary?*

*The veil is rent! The veil is rent!
The Age of Sacrifice is spent.
Christ opens up the Holy Place
And ushers in His Age of Grace.*

*From heaven to earth the veil is rent!
We have a lasting sacrament
And enter in to speak with God,
Made holy by our Saviour's blood.*

The God of all Grace And Me
Maurice Cox

RESURRECTION

*May the joy of his resurrection
Fill your heart as you journey along.
May the peace he bequeathed be your portion,
May his love in your heart be a song.*

*May the hope thus begun become brighter,
May your faith in him firmer be,
Until soon in that first resurrection
His glorious face you shall see.*

songs of the nightingale



Proverbs 15. 19
The way of the slothful man is an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain



Proverbs 26. 9-10
As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouths of fools. The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors.



Proverbs 24. 31
And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down.

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 92 Issue 3

May / June 2015



*"I am the true vine, and
My Father is the vine-
dresser....Abide in Me."
John 15. 1-4 NKJV*

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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)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge on request to all who are genuinely interested and is now also available as a pdf.

(Please renew your request each year.)

It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers, and these are sincerely appreciated.

Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

On Thursday 7 May this year there is the UK election to choose those who will sit in Parliament in Westminster. This will be the first time this event has happened since the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 which set a General Election for the first Thursday in May every five years. These 650 elected public servants will serve a population of about 60 million men, women and children. They will be responsible for the National Health System, the economy, taxation, schools, the armed forces, foreign affairs, the Police, the Judiciary and more. This will no doubt lead to a long working week under much scrutiny from their colleagues and the media for the previously mentioned period of five years.

But the real question is 'who is God's elect'? In the Old Testament Israel the family of Jacob was described as His elect (Isa. 45.4). Also the angels are described as being 'elect' (1 Tim. 5.21). In the Greek it comes from the word 'eklektos' which also means chosen and by implication favourite. Just such an election was shown when Rebecca had twins in her womb, when Jacob was chosen over Esau and she was informed the first to come out of her womb would serve the one born minutes later.

The Church during this Christian era, whether Jew or Gentile, has come about by election of God and it has always been a part of his plan to prepare an elect (1 Thess. 1.4, 1 Pet. 1.2). These are ones who receive the Holy Spirit by the grace of God, feel His love in their hearts and bring forth of the fruits of the Spirit. These ones are clothed with mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patient endurance with a forgiving nature. Forgiveness is an important feature in the New Testament. It features in the Lord's prayer. Elsewhere our Lord Jesus tells us to forgive our brother seven times seventy and reminds us the Lord also forgave us (Col. 3 12-13). Peter picks up on this theme as well as he says having been purged from our sins and therefore we want to develop Christian qualities.

But there is only one way of doing so and this is by abiding in the vine or in other words always connected to our heavenly Father and His son, till the time should come when the government shall be upon his shoulder (Isa. 9.6-7) and kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev. 11. 15) in a day when the result of a UK General Election will be of no consequence.

A reader has a 'Young's Analytical Concordance' that needs a good home.
Please contact us at the address on the back page if you are interested.

PATIENCE

The purple grape must be crushed
To make the sweet, red wine,
And furnace fires must fiercely burn,
The drossy gold to refine;
The wheel must cruelly grind,
Else where the jewel's light?
And the steel submit to the polishing,
Or how would the sword grow bright?

How then, my soul, wilt thou
The Spirit's fruits possess,
Except thou lovingly yield thyself
To the Hand that wounds to bless?
Then patiently let the fire
Consume all earthly dross—
Thou canst not hope to wear the Crown,
If thou refuse the Cross!

Poems of the Way



Whoever has sipped this wine
will thirst for more, for although
Christ satisfies, the appetite is
not cloyed, but whetted. If you
know the love of Jesus—as the
hart pants for the water brooks,
so will you pant after deeper
quantities of His love.

*Extract 'The Way to Peace'
C.H. Spurgeon*

ON EARTH PEACE—GOODWILL TOWARD MEN

Part 4

THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The ministry of affliction plays a very important part in the development of Christ. In 1 Peter 2: 23, we read “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” It is sometimes said that this was because Jesus had a special work to do, whereas we are called upon to fight evil. The Apostle Paul writes, however, that “Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1 Cor. 4: 12-13), and this reminds us that the servant is not above his Lord. This is a line of conduct to be followed in the church and also in the world. It is no sign of weakness; it savours not of compromise; its practical outworking demonstrates both strength and beauty of character.

Conditions in Old Testament days were, of course, entirely different, and their wars when “iniquity had come to the full” were illustrations of God’s righteous indignation to be manifest against all who, after full light and knowledge, choose evil rather than good. Nevertheless, here and there we see glimpses of the same Spirit which we are impelled to follow in this day when it is not “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” We recall the case of David’s victory over Goliath: “Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (1 Sam. 17: 45). The three Hebrews resisted the king’s decree to worship the image in the strength of God alone, but with a definiteness worthy of imitation “Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3: 18). In the fuller light of the Gospel Age (Christian era), of course, we see the Spirit of Christ manifest in the sufferings of the Body-members from our Lord’s day, throughout the Dark Ages of the Inquisition and other forms of torture, down to our own day when, so far, the main suffering is in the mind. But the same Spirit of Christ must be manifest.

Severe tests have come amongst us—mental tests—and they demonstrate to what extent we have cultivated the Spirit of Christ. We must be definite

in our views and give an uncompromising witness, but we must refrain from judging others in the sense of condemning them. “If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5: 15). The Apostle tells us that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, then he is none of his, and the very essence of this Spirit is boldness combined with non-violent resistance, interpreted according to the high standard of Matthew 5. There is no limitation placed upon our Lord’s teaching; it applies as between individuals and in the wider sense among communities, as already suggested.

PEACE ON EARTH

When the last member of this Christ class has passed beyond the veil of the flesh, men will have the scales removed from their eyes; they will turn their instruments of destruction into utensils of husbandry, and a new Spirit within them, according to the law of the New Covenant, will cause them to love their neighbours as brethren. They will then be well pleasing to the Heavenly Father through the Mediator, and bring to pass the words of our text (Luke 2.14) which, according to Weymouth, reads “Glory be to God in the highest heavens, and on earth peace among men in who please Him!” That will be the time when in the words of Pastor Charles Russell “love welling up from every heart meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act... The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance.”

Meanwhile, it is for us to continue along the narrow pathway, faithful to the increasing light of truth as we endeavour to make our calling and election sure for the Kingdom promised, on Christ’s terms, in Christ’s way, and at Christ’s cost, come what may. Let us always remember that “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10: 13).

Reprint BSM 1945

Godlike love never gives up when human nature fails.

The Lord looks down on us, if we look up.

Every sunrise is a message from God, and every sunset his signature.

Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

JAMES THE JUST

A stern, unbending figure, rigid in his adherence to the Law of Moses and a fervent upholder of the Covenant in all its detailed ritual, a Nazarite from his youth to the day of his death; that is James the Just, known and respected by all sincere God-fearing Jews in Jerusalem during the days of Jesus. In one respect he was like the Apostle Paul in that at first he rejected the teaching and ministry of Christ, but after the Resurrection became a convert and died a martyr for the faith. In another respect he differed from Paul in that whereas Paul gave his life to preaching the Gospel to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, travelling the world over in the endeavour to extend the faith, James limited his work and his outreach to Jews alone, Jews of the homeland and Jews of the Dispersion, and after his conversion probably never went outside Jerusalem and certainly never left the homeland of Judea and Galilee.

He was a natural brother of the Lord Jesus, the first born to Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus. There were three more brothers—Joses, Jude, Simon (in Hebrew Joseph, Judah, Simeon) and at least two sisters. There used to be all sorts of theories advanced to avoid the plain implication in the New Testament that Mary was the mother of these children, devised at a time when the idea of Mary having other children after Jesus was considered improper or God-dishonouring, a survival of the old theological conception of Mary as the Mother of God. So it was suggested, without a shadow of evidence, that these children were those of Joseph by a former marriage, ignoring the fact that were this so, James, as the firstborn of Joseph, and not Jesus, would have been the heir to the throne of David. Another supposition was that the reference to Jesus' brothers really means cousins and that they were the children of Mary and Cleophas, which contradicts plain Scripture statements. It might be noted here that the frequently repeated assertion to the effect that the same Greek word in the N.T. can mean either "brother" or "cousin" has no foundation in fact. "*Adelphos*" is used consistently for exactly the same purposes as English "brother". Where cousin or other kinsfolk are intended "*suggenes*" is used.

James, therefore, a few years younger than Jesus, grew up with him in the little home at Nazareth, sharing in all the joys and sorrows of the family life centred around Joseph's work as the village carpenter from the fruits

of which he supported a growing family of at least seven children. Nothing is recorded of those early years but there is one vivid side-light which gives a clue to James' later character. Matt. 1. 19 says that Joseph was a "just man". This expression implies much more than it would normally denote in colloquial English. Spoken of a First Advent Jew, it means that Joseph was a whole-hearted and rigid devotee of all the minute ritual and ceremonial of the Mosaic Law. It means that in that humble Nazareth home every requirement of the Covenant was scrupulously observed; the feasts properly celebrated, the Sabbaths kept, synagogue obligations honoured, the Scriptures read and the children instructed in the same, all as commanded by Moses or hallowed by later tradition. In this domestic atmosphere both Jesus and James grew up; the one went through Jordan and preached a new message which took him to the Cross, the other became, as his father doubtless aspired that he would become, a pillar of orthodoxy and an example to all the village in his unyielding allegiance to the Law of Moses.

One wonders what kind of discussions took place between these two youths, fast approaching manhood, the one already reaching out in spirit to the wider understanding of God's purpose, and his own place in that purpose, which was so soon to lead him away from Judaism and make him the Light of the world, the other, steeped in the Rabbinic lore of the past and zealous, like Paul, for the salvation of his own people, not yet ready to receive the new light that was due to break upon Israel. Nothing is said of all that; James only figures in the story of Jesus' ministry twice. Once, soon after choosing the twelve disciples, Jesus' mother and his brothers came to him apparently in some alarm to take him home, saying "*he is beside himself*" (cp. Matt. 12. 46, Mark 3. 21). Again, later on, the brothers cast doubts upon the validity of his mission and work; "*for neither did his brothers believe on him*" (John 7. 3-5 ABU). There is not much doubt that James, as the eldest among them, took the lead in all this, and that right up to the Crucifixion he remained at best unconvinced by the ministry and teaching of his brother. It is significant that neither he nor his brothers were present at the Cross.

To the orthodox Jews he was a man to be admired and emulated. "James the Just" they called him because of his outstanding rigid virtue. He was a Nazarite, like Samuel and others of old, having taken the vows of that order in his youth, thereafter abstaining from wine or strong drink, never

allowing razor to come upon his flowing locks, and dressing always in white robes in symbol of purity. Because of his Nazarite status he had the advantage of the priestly concession whereby members of that order were permitted certain privileges of entry into the Temple. He was also called the “camel-kneed” because, it was said, he had knees like those of camels from being so often alone in the Sanctuary in prayer for Divine forgiveness of the people for their sins. James the Lord’s brother was an outstanding Judaist of his day.

But immediately following the death and resurrection of Jesus he became a Christian !

No explanation for this sudden about face is given in the New Testament. The first intimation of the fact appears in Acts 1.14 where the brothers of Jesus are found gathered with their mother and with the Apostles in the “upper room” in that continuing fellowship which preceded the stirring events of the Day of Pentecost. An apocryphal work, the *“Gospel according to the Hebrews”* does offer an explanation but its historical accuracy is doubtful. It certainly represents a tradition current in the Early Church and there may be some basis of fact. It states in brief that Jesus, immediately after his resurrection, *“went unto James and appeared to him, for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord’s cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep...He took bread and blessed and brake and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him, My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep.”* There is one obvious fault in this account; James the Just was not at the Last Supper. The account cannot be taken as true history, but it may well enshrine the conviction of the Early Church that the conversion of James did take place in consequence of the Resurrection. Paul says definitely, but without indicating the source of his information, that Jesus appeared to James at least soon afterwards. (1 Cor. 15.7). The evidence, scanty but precise, is that James threw in his lot with the believers immediately after the death of Jesus, his life thereafter being bound up with the history of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

Paul met him, perhaps for the first time, five years later (Gal. 1.19), but there is no indication of James’ precise position in the Jerusalem Church then. By A.D. 48, however, fifteen years after the Crucifixion, he was the

acknowledged leader. By this time most of the Apostles were scattered over the Roman world fulfilling their commission of preaching the gospel to all the nations. It seems that home affairs were by common consent left in the hands of James. Some six years earlier the Apostle James, brother of John, had been killed by Herod. Now the Church was entering into a theological crisis, the gathering storm over the burning question whether Gentile converts were to be subject to the Law of Moses. The native Jewish Christians in Judea still observed the Mosaic Law; it had never occurred to them to do otherwise. But there were Gentile churches beginning to spring up; Paul and Barnabas with others had laboured mightily at Antioch and a zealous and missionary-minded assembly was the result. Now some of the brethren from Judea came to them with the demand that they take upon themselves the obligation of the Mosaic Law (Acts 15.1) and this they would not have. So a general council was called at Jerusalem, and Paul, Barnabas and others attended to plead the case of the Gentiles.

At this, the first Church Council called to discuss a major doctrinal controversy, James presided. He was still a Nazarite; he must have presented a striking figure with his flowing, uncut locks cascading over the shoulders of his snow-white robes. He must, too, have realised the momentous nature of the conference over which he was called to preside. On the one hand his eyes swept across the serried ranks of the converted Pharisees and others who, though having accepted Christ for themselves, retained their fanatical Jewishness which refused entry into the Christian fellowship to any Gentile who would not submit to the Mosaic Law and become, in effect, a proselyte to Israel. The wider outreach of God's purpose to all mankind meant nothing to them; Messiah had come, but Messiah was for Israel alone and those who became Israelites by adoption. On the other hand, he looked upon the representatives of the Antioch Church there present, and those of Jerusalem who had themselves begun to see that "God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him", and he must have prayed silently for wisdom and grace to direct the issue aright. *

James' concluding judgment shows the progress he had made in that fifteen years of knowing Christ. His every instinct must have urged him to add his sympathy to the arguments of the Pharisees. His own life's training cried out Amen to all that they said. But he could not be blind to

the fact that there were wider and longer vistas in the Divine revelation than he or his had ever dreamed of or could be contained within the framework of Judaism. He would have listened attentively as Peter, a native-born Jew like himself, adduced his own testimony to the manner in which God had used him to carry the faith to the Gentiles. There had been much “disputing” (Acts 15.7) which incidentally means orderly debate and argument, not acrimonious wrangling as the English word would imply to us. Then Paul and Barnabas held the assembly silent as they recounted the story and the success of their own extended missionary work among the Gentiles of Roman Asia.

James’ summing up at the end reveals how clearly he had grasped the fundamentals of the Divine Plan as revealed by the life and death of Jesus. His knowledge of Old Testament prophecy and doctrine came into focus with all that Jesus had said, and with the logic of events as related to the missionary endeavour of those who had gone into the world with the Christian message. For the first time, perhaps, a clear and succinct expression of the three-fold purpose of Christ’s Advent was enunciated and placed on record; he quoted the words of Amos of old to demonstrate his point. Israel must first be scattered (“sifted”) among the nations and the word of God go to those nations that from them all God might find and take a “people for his Name”, the Church of this Age, partly Jew and partly Gentile. Following the completion of that work the scattering of Israel would be reversed and the nation be restored and rebuilt in its own land, purified, converted and an instrument in God’s hand for the future. Finally an opportunity for all of mankind who remain, the “residue”, to call upon God and be reconciled. The twin purposes of this Christian Age and the forthcoming Messianic Age are well expressed in the words of James. The conviction with which his conclusions struck home, no less than the respect in which he was held by all present, ensured the unanimous acceptance of his judgment. The threat of a serious division in the Church was averted and the delegates from Antioch went home with, maybe, a new respect for the rigid Judaist who had until then stood before their minds as an immovable exponent of the old order which they knew was now in process of passing away.

This was James’ greatest recorded achievement. He and Paul met once more, some ten years later, upon the occasion of Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem. Even then it is obvious that elements of the Mosaic Law

lingered within the practices of the Christian fellowship and it was through getting himself involved with these at the entreaty of James and others that Paul figured in the Temple riot which led to his arrest and eventual despatch to Rome and his first trial (Acts 21). It is probable that there was always a certain amount of more or less tolerant difference of viewpoint between these two. Paul's breadth of vision, his depth of doctrinal understanding, and the restless spirit which drove him ever on to conquer in fresh fields of service probably grated upon the other man with his essentially narrower outlook and quiet determination to serve the interests of the flock in the place where he himself found Christ. James on his part, try as he might and undoubtedly did, never really had much enthusiasm for the wider missionary outreach. Probably each man was best fitted for the particular function he was called upon to exercise.

The Epistle of James was most likely written after all these things had happened, when he was approaching sixty years of age. The Church at Jerusalem was well established by then and included a good proportion of "second generation" converts; the outward events in Judea and Galilee began to portend the fearful tragedy which was to befall the nation ten years later at the hands of Titus the Roman general. The Epistle reflects all this. First of all it breathes an atmosphere of the Mosaic Law with its insistence upon "works". Paul brought to light the doctrine of justification by faith but James still insisted upon the place of "works"; "*faith without works is dead*". His zeal for the Law, though, is tempered by his Christian interpretation. There are probably more references and allusions to the words of Christ in this epistle than in any other. He wrote to the Christians of the "twelve tribes scattered abroad"—this fact alone dates the epistle as late in James' life since there were no Christians in those lands until the missionary journeys of Paul and others—and the abuses such as "respect of persons" in the assemblies to which he refers show that some of these assemblies were already losing their first love. His strictures on the "rich men" in chap. 5 might very well refer to the state of Jewish society generally at the time, just before the nation came to its end. In fact, it has been said that the Epistle of James is the final appeal to both Jews and Jewish Christians before the end of their existence as a nation. Although not of the twelve, James did, like Barnabus and Paul, rank as an Apostle, and it might be a fair appraisal to say that he exhibited at one and the same time the marks and characteristics of a Hebrew prophet and a Christian apostle. At the very end of the Jewish Age he stood before his

fellows and his nation as representative both of the old dying covenant and the new one which came in with Christ.

He died, a martyr, in the year AD 63, seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem. During the few months' interval between the sudden death of the Roman governor Porcius Festus—the one who sent Paul to Rome—and the arrival in Judea of his successor Albinus, the High Priest Ananus took advantage of the absence of Roman authority to persuade his colleagues illegally to condemn James and murder him by throwing him from a pinnacle of the Temple. Thirty years of faithful service to the church founded by Peter and the eleven on the Day of Pentecost came to an end, and the first Bishop of the Church at Jerusalem sealed his testimony with his blood.

AOH

Numbers 6:1-8 (NASB) Law of the Nazirites

Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin.

All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long.

All the days of his separation to the LORD he shall not go near to a dead person. He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD.

The Nazirite (more accurately Nazirite, one separated) was a person of either sex separated wholly unto the LORD. Abstention from wine, the symbol of mere natural joy, was an expression of devotedness which found all its joy in the LORD. The long hair, naturally a reproach to man, was at once the visible sign of the Nazirite's separation, and of his willingness to bear reproach for Jehovah's sake.

Schofield

THE CALL AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH—A PAMPHLET

“If any man be in Christ...old things are passed away; all things are become new.”

2 Cor. 5.17

The formation of the Christian church was the main theme of the New Testament and this is where this booklet, now decades old starts.

It goes on to describe the future purpose of the Church, those who have made their calling and election sure, to reconcile “*all things*” to Christ with quotes from four Christian writers who have noted the importance of this future purpose of the Church. Those four being F.B. Mayer, C.T. Russell, William Andrews and Samuel Cox.

The booklet goes on to describe the high standards that need to be met by those who have this future purpose and likens it to a medical student that gives much time to study and misses out on a lot of fun while young in order to pursue his or her chosen vocation.



The booklet closes by reminding us of the commission given to the disciples by Jesus to go to all the world preaching the Gospel and describes how this has had limited success with the example of the large area in the Middle East which was Christian and now is predominantly Islamic and the Western world which is rejecting the Christian faith more and more. But that it has been achieving its purpose to select the Church.

This booklet is available free on request from the address on the back page or by email from mailing@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk.

“They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

Rev. 20.4

“The earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God.”

Rom. 8.19 MKJV

“The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

Isa. 40.5

THE GREATEST OF THESE

A study in 1 Cor. 13.13
Part 3. "If I.....have not love"

It might seem, at first sight, in a casual reading of the Apostle's words that all the "other things" here contrasted with Love were nothing more than items in the list of spiritual gifts imparted to the members of the Corinthian Church. To one was "*given...the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge...to another faith...to another the gifts of healing...to another the working of miracles...to another interpretation of tongues*". (1 Cor. 12. 8-10). Of this list Paul singles out the "tongues, the prophecy, the knowledge and the faith" for comparison with the *Agape*. But he also goes outside that list, and brings into the comparison one thing which was never a feature of Church life and experience either in Corinth or elsewhere. No follower of the Lord was ever taught to give his body to be burned. That was always an abomination in the sight of God. The inclusion of even this one feature of heathen practice is a sure indication that Paul was not restricting his survey merely to the "*Charismata*". Additionally, as already indicated, his inclusion of the "*musterion*" and the "*gnosis*" proves beyond question that his mind is travelling over a wider field. That being so, a wider meaning is also given to "the tongues"—"the tongues of men and angels". These are not merely the mechanical utterances of men in a state of ecstasy, while under immediate control of the Holy Spirit, but utterances of the noblest kind, such as even angels might bring.

For many years conceited men had been claiming they held solutions to the universal mysteries: during that same period able men had charmed the ears of their contemporaries with language of great beauty and excellence. Of these able men Plato and Aristotle are outstanding examples—Plato writing of things religious and poetic, while Aristotle wrote in a more scientific way. Again, a speaker of rare excellence addressed himself in such a way to the Greeks that his speeches were preserved and today find acceptance as models of all that a good speech should be. From these men came some noble thoughts, expressed in words of great beauty and charm. These were but three of a greater number whose works contributed each its quota to the "glory that was Greece".

Paul had been censured by members of the Corinthian Church—men who had previously acquired acquaintance with the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and the linguistic charm of Demosthenes—for the sparcity of his philosophy and the poverty of his language. He had entered in among them “*in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling*” (1 Cor. 2. 3). He had shunned the use of “enticing words” arising from man’s wisdom. He made no claim to be heard because he spoke with “tongues of men and angels”. He had determined not to be enmeshed in their tangles of philosophy, but to know one thing only while in their midst—and that should be “Christ and Him crucified”. That Gospel he had preached, and that Gospel had been believed by some of them. (1 Cor. 15.1).

Having been judged at the bar of philosophy and eloquence by these philosophic critics, Paul, with consummate skill, turns the tables upon them and assures them indirectly that the things they had doted upon were of no greater value than the sound emitted by a sheet of brass when struck by another metallic substance. Plato and Aristotle with all their compatriots had only filled the air with sound, with the clanging din of controversy. And throughout the long years, to this very day, the din of battle between the romanticists—the Platonists—and the realists—the Aristotelians—has continued to fill the air with the mere sound of clanging brass. How sharp is the irony therefore, and yet how beautifully tempered is its sting when Paul turns back upon his human-minded critics to say “Though I (should) speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not ‘*Agape*’ I (too) am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal”. Applied directly to the “enticing” sons of Greece the barb would have made a rankling sore, applied to himself the shaft went home but left no wound.

Seen in this light the philosophic wisdom and classic eloquence of Greece may be subjected to a more searching analysis than the Corinthian brethren ever dreamed of. And to the ancient philosophy we may add that of all the intervening years. In this summarisation of the world’s philosophies, and of its golden speech, no word of disparagement is intended here. The Dantes and the Chaucers, the Miltons and the Shakespeares, with all their literary companions of every clime and tongue, have left to the world a great inheritance. Without their inspiration the world would have been a poorer place. Their spate of thought, embosomed in their flood of words, has helped to open channels from the jungle to the

university. And when to the flash or genius the touch of simple faith could add its sanctifying influence the gain to men has been great indeed.

Had the purpose of Almighty God been merely to embellish human character surely these are the men to whom the task might have been allocated. If culture alone could have brought in the “perfect state”, these, together with the sweet singers of Israel, could have been the Divine instruments to that end. They have ennobled thought, and refined speech; they have sifted motive, and analysed intent, and thereby helped human-kind to think on nobler things. But when all is said that can be said, it fails to meet this old earth’s deepest need. It educates the mind but cannot renovate the heart. The polished surface may conceal corruption within. Beneath the shining veneer may be dry-rot of the soul. The thing that Paul has to place against the world’s philosophies is not a mere compendium of thought, not a galaxy of lovely words, but the Mighty Helping Hand of God. The purpose of his ministry was not to embellish the mere minds of men, but to appraise men of a Sacrifice for sin. He knew a secret which the philosophers had failed to learn. They knew not how to vanquish sin and death. Despite all their wise philosophy, sin reigned throughout the world, and death continued to reign by sin, and nothing they had done, or might hope to do, could lift this burden from Adam’s race. But Paul knew and understood that there was something, better far than all the hopes and dreams and fears of little men, that would eradicate sin, overcome death, and make a way for that which is “perfect” to come.

Considerations such as this show that Paul is not setting forth “The *Agape*” merely as a growth or adornment of Christian character, but as the vital redeeming and moulding power that can accomplish that which all the world’s wisdom and philosophy has failed to do. That the world’s superstitious systems have failed to inform and elevate its millions, needs not to be stressed; it is but too obvious. But that its best philosophers and sweetest singers have also failed is a truth that does need driving home. And that there is but one Heavenly attribute that can accomplish all that is required to set men up on the “perfect” plane needs to be stressed with might and main over and over again.

But before we venture to analyse that supreme attribute there is one more phase of human activity to consider. The world’s philanthropists and humanitarians—those who bestowed their goods to feed the poor—have


been a band of noble men. “Give to the poor” was the text imposed by Jesus upon the questioning nobleman. “The poor ye have always with you” said the Master, and an open door has always faced the world’s philanthropists. But what have they done to mitigate the world’s necessities—to meet its incessant needs? A moment’s satisfaction may have followed the opening of their hands—and all honour be to them for the gracious act—but with the setting sun the need has imposed itself again. The houses run by Charity may start a thousand—or a hundred thousand—on the rungs of life, but what are they among the teeming millions of the world? The fortune of a Rothschild is but as a crumb when measured up against a world’s dire need. We need not over-stress the obvious—but simply reiterate the words of Paul—“*though I give all my goods to feed the poor...and have not love, it profiteth, me nothing*”.

Here is a conclusion deep enough to make men think. “If I...have not love, I am nothing...it profiteth me nothing.” Without “The *Agape*” all activity, all philosophy is as nothing and profiteth nothing! Surely we can see here that Paul is speaking from a different stand-point than that of this present phase of human life! Many of these things have counted for “something” when measured up against man’s present transient fleeting life. There have been seasons of enjoyment and periods of relief, resulting from human-kind’s best attainments. But measured up against the restoration of all that the “perfect” man once lost, and the life that he then will know, what are all the hopes and fears, the dreams and aspirations of all the world’s sagest philosophies though couched in the world’s sublimest words? Just “nothing”—and profiting nothing!

Again we have to say that only a “Something” that can seep down into man’s sin-soured heart can meet the universal need. Only help from God is adequate to sweeten and restore the heart and the affections it can twine around the hand of its Restorer.

(To be concluded)

TH



At harvest time, the best way for an amateur to tell when wine grapes are ready is by tasting them—only when they’re at their sweetest, containing maximum sugar, will they be ready.

Grow Your Own Fruit, Carol Klein

THERE'S ONE ABOVE ALL EARTHLY FRIENDS

There's One above all earthly friends,
Whose love all earthly love transcends;
It is my Lord, the Christ Divine—
My Lord, because I know He's mine!

Chorus

I know He's mine, this Friend so dear;
He lives with me, He's ever near;
Ten thousand charms around Him shine—
And, best of all, I know He's mine.

He's mine because He died for me,
He saved my soul, He set me free;
With joy I worship at His shrine,
And cry, "Praise God, I know He's mine."

He's mine because He's in my heart,
And never, never will we part;
Just as the branch is to the vine,
I'm joined to Christ—I know He's mine.

Some day upon the streets of gold
Mine eyes His glory shall behold;
Then, while His arms around me twine,
I'll cry for joy, "I know He's mine!"

These are the words of Johnson Oatman Jr, (1856-1922) an American from New Jersey state, who is accredited with penning about three thousand hymns one of which is the well known hymn 'Count your blessings'. In addition to this he found time to be a local preacher while working full time in his family's mercantile business before working in the insurance sector.

The words seems to vary in a few lines from the original to those the household of faith may in this century be more familiar with.

Here are some scriptures that may have been in the mind of the writer -

Song of Solomon 6:3(NKJV) I *am* my beloved's, And my beloved *is* mine. He feeds *his flock* among the lilies.

John 15:14-15(NKJV) You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Song of Solomon 5:10 (NKJV) My beloved *is* white and ruddy, Chief among ten thousand.

John 15:1-5 (NKJV) "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

John 17:9-11(NKJV) "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are*."

Revelation 21:21(NKJV) The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

Malachi 3:17 (NKJV) "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him."

1 John 3:2 (NKJV) Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

KINGS OF JUDAH

A PLEDGE TO THE LORD

2 Chron. 34.31 (LB)

Part 2

Ahaziah

The evil continued in Ahaziah's one year reign which followed until Jehu of Israel killed him.

Athaliah

Eventually the Lord had vengeance upon Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, cause of all the evil, when in zeal for the Lord, Jehoida the priest had her killed after seven years reign.

Joash

Joash was crowned king, being the one royal descendant who had been rescued from murderous Athaliah. He tried hard to please the Lord during Jehoida's lifetime but after his death the leaders of Judah led him astray to idol worship. Here we have a lesson in not leaning on other human beings in our service of God. We must all jealously guard the privilege given us by the Lord of direct access to him (through Christ) and continue in the conviction that he deals with us individually. The proof of His individual care of each of us is not long in coming and second hand Christianity cannot save us. And so, due to their unfaithfulness a large Judean army was defeated by a small Syrian army, Joash was wounded and subsequently killed in his own bed in retribution against him for having Jehoida's son killed for preaching righteousness.

The kings
of Judah.

Amaziah

Joash was succeeded by Amaziah who "did what was right, but sometimes resented it" (2 Chron. 25:2 LB). This resentment was his sadness at having spent much money in hiring mercenary soldiers from Israel and then receiving a message from the Lord that he must not use them. "But the money!" whined Amaziah (2 Chron. 25:9). "The Lord is able to give you much more than this," the prophet replied. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," says Matthew 6:21. Amaziah then went on to conquer the Edomites, brought back their idols and worshipped them; though they had not saved Edom! Eventually his own people conspired against him and killed him in Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 25:27)

Saul
David
Solomon
Rehoboam
Abijah
Asa
Jehoshaphat
Jehoram
Ahaziah
Athaliah
Joash
Amaziah
Uzziah
Jotham
Ahaz
Hezekiah
Manasseh
Amon
Josiah
Jehoahaz
Jehoiakim
Jehoiachin
Zedekiah

Uzziah

Uzziah (or Azariah as he is called in 2 Kings 15:1) followed as king at the age of only sixteen. He was, in general, a good king in the Lord's sight. (2 Chron. 26:4) As long as he followed the path of God, he was blessed. A man called Zechariah who had revelations from God was a great help to him. He manufactured engines of war and when he was very mighty, he became proud. He entered the forbidden sanctuary of the Temple and offered incense and was rebuked by Azariah the priest. Instead of withdrawing he became angry and the Lord struck him with leprosy. We need to be beware of feeling we are so blessed of the Lord that we cease to need the offering of our priest or to seek His will and guidance constantly, carefully heeding all the instructions of His word.

Jotham

Jotham's reign followed and he followed his father's generally good example. However, 2 Kings 15:35 tells us he did not destroy the shrines on the hills where the people sacrificed and burned incense.

Ahaz

Ahaz followed and his was an evil reign for he pursued the worst idol worship practices including sacrificing his own children in the fire. More significantly, he nailed the Temple door shut.

Hezekiah

Hezekiah turned over a new leaf and, within a month of his reign commencing, he re-opened the Temple doors, cleaned the Temple up and restored Temple worship. The Passover was celebrated late but for 14 days, instead of 7, such was the people's enthusiasm. Then there began a massive campaign against idol worship. (2 Chron. 31:1). The reign of Hezekiah is most noted for the attack of King Sennacherib of Assyria upon Judah. This culminated in Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib's letter before the Lord in the Temple and praying for help. (2 Kings 19:14-19) And so the Lord sent an angel to destroy the Assyrian troops sending Sennacherib home in shame. We take from this account great encouragement to trust God in our extremities. However, do we take notice of 2 Chron. 32: 23-26? The respect and gifts which came to Hezekiah following the Lord's salvation brought pride to his heart and he did not respond with proper thanksgiving when the Lord miraculously cured him of sickness. He was cured by a fig cake upon his boil. Was the Lord saying He wanted a fruitage of obedience and praise to Him to cure the national sickness? Eventually he and the people humbled themselves before the Lord and delayed the effects of His wrath.

Manasseh

Hezekiah's son Manasseh reigned next, coming to the throne when only 12 years old. His reign was evil and it was for 55 years. That would have been a long time to engrain evil in the land. He did not shut the Temple like Ahaz. He used it for idol worship! However he did come to his senses while under punishment in captivity. He then acknowledged the Lord as God and subsequently re-instated the Temple for its proper purpose. What a lesson in the Lord's mercy and forgiveness to the repentant.

Amon

Manasseh's son Amon, however, was wicked but his own officers assassinated him after only two years reign.

Josiah

This meant that his son Josiah came to the throne at the age of only eight years. He was a good king. At sixteen years old he began to search for God and carefully followed David's example, his ancestor. He removed idol worship from the land. He restored the Temple. When the scroll of the laws of God was found, Josiah fell into a state of deep distress as he realised how far they had departed from God's requirements. This is what caused him to make his pledge to the Lord. Josiah's 31 year reign ended abruptly when he fought the Egyptians when they came to attack Assyria. Josiah was mortally wounded in the battle. 2 Chron. 35:22 says that Josiah refused to believe that King Neco of Egypt had a message from God when he warned Josiah not to meddle in his mission against Assyria. Josiah does not appear to have sought the Lord's will in this matter which brought his downfall.

After this there are four evil reigns. **Jehoahaz** reigned for 3 months until deposed by the King of Egypt.

Eliakim or Jehoiakim reigned 11 years until taken in chains by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon.

Jehoiachin succeeded him but for only 3 months and 10 days.

Zedekiah made an oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar but broke it by rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar. He refused the Lord's counsel through Jeremiah. This brought David's line of kings to an end, and resulted in the destruction of the Temple, palaces and walls of Jerusalem.

Why were the people of Judah so fickle? They enjoyed many wonderful blessings as promised by the Lord when they served Him but there was no lasting response of love and gratitude or consistent leadership for good. They lacked faith and therefore failed to please God.

All the kings failed. Saul was fearful and did not wait for the Lord's aid through Samuel and so David succeeded him. God promised to establish his house and kingdom before the Lord for ever. Yet there were none of his descendants good enough.

2 Kings 23:25 testifies of Josiah, "There was no other king who completely turned to the Lord." David and all his successors sinned to a greater or lesser degree, even the best of them! They were afflicted by being drawn aside to idol worship like Solomon, forgot to seek the Lord's guidance in all things like Asa, or compromised with evil like Jehoshaphat. In other cases they only did right when propped up by a God fearing person, like Joash, were half hearted in serving God like Amaziah, became proud like Uzziah, failed to give thanks for deliverance from sickness like Hezekiah and took a long time to believe the Lord is God like Manasseh. Even Josiah was mortally wounded pursuing an unblest war with Egypt.

And so Judah followed the rest of Israel in going under foreign domination until He should come whose right it is to reign over them. (Ezek.21:27.) The Lord said that to Zedekiah. So the world still waits for the revealing of the Son of David to all Israel. He has stood among them, yet they knew Him not! Yes, God's perfect Lamb came and presented Himself, pledging His eternal service. In the words of Psalm 40:7 & 8 Jesus says, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Previous sons of David were under the law covenant which made nothing perfect (Heb. 7:19) and were subject to death. This Son of David shall reign until all things are in "subjection under His feet" (Heb. 2:8). "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He hath set judgement in the earth". (Isaiah 42: 4) Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Let us review what we have learned from these accounts of Judah's kings. Firstly the changeable nature of Judah's worship can be strongly contrasted with our understanding of our pledge of consecration. Consecration to do the will of God in Christ is not to be undertaken lightly. Once the commitment is made it is for ever, with no going back. Thus Solomon and Joash were not finally pleasing to the Lord in spite of good beginnings for they forsook the Lord in favour of idol worship. So Jesus says, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62. Thus our pledge to the Lord is forever.

Saul was concerned when he saw his troops scattered in fear and the word of the Lord through Samuel delayed to come. Even in spite of our pledge to the Lord and His commitment to hold our hand, and keep us (Isaiah 42:6), are there times when we look in fear on the apparently impossible odds building around us? Let us then remember the Lord may be testing us to see if we truly trust Him to care for us.

Our pledge to the Lord is accompanied by His pledge not to fail us or forsake us. (Deut. 31:6). Rehoboam experienced this when the Lord brought him back to him by punishment and a prophet's word when he went astray. The Lord also brought circumstances to bear on Manasseh to make him acknowledge that the Lord is God in spite of the evil of the early part of his reign.

David too experienced the Lord's corrections and punishment in respect of his sins concerning Uriah the Hittite and numbering the people.

Our pledge to the Lord means relying wholly on Him in all times of difficulty and need. Thus the Lord did not let down Abijah when pressed by the superior numbers of Israel in battle. Little Judah defeated Israel. But the Lord was not pleased with Asa when he "put his trust in the king of Syria" or with Jehoshaphat when he became so closely involved with sinful Israel.

Our pledge to the Lord cannot be fulfilled if we become proud like Uzziah and Hezekiah when made powerful and repenting. Let us never forget how very much we constantly need the Lord's help and in humility watch lest we should think we could ever do anything worthwhile outside the Lord's will and lest we should forget to give thanks for His mercies.

Our pledge involves an enthusiastic and consistently wholehearted zeal to serve the Lord. We are reminded again of Amaziah who did what was right but sometimes resented it! The Lord has no desire for lukewarm servants (Rev. 3.15-16). He requires the Josiah spirit. 2 Kings 23:25 (RSV) testifies, "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might." Can that be said of our zeal for our God, and our following in the steps of the Master? (1 Pet. 2: 21)

Thank God for His king, the Son of David, fulfilling all His Father's pleasure, leaving us an example to which we can conform our lives. Let us continue to look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith that we might realise God's promise to make us kings and priests unto Him. (Rev. 5:10)

DL



“I AM THE VINE, YE ARE THE BRANCHES”

JOHN 15: 5

It is the branch that bears the fruit,
That feels the knife.
To prune it for a larger growth,
A fuller life.

Though every budding twig be lopped,
And every grace
Of swaying tendril, springing leaf,
Be lost a space.

O thou whose life of joy seems reft,
Of beauty shorn;
Whose aspirations lie in dust,
All bruised and torn,

Rejoice, though each desire, each dream,
Each hope of thine
Shall fall and fade; it is the hand
Of love Divine

That holds the knife, that cuts and breaks
With tenderest touch,
That thou, whose life has borne some fruit
May'st now bear much.



FROM A PRISON CELL

Reflections on the "Prison Epistles"

3. God's Eternal Purpose

"According to his good pleasure which He has purposed." Eph. 1. 9 (AKJV) The assertion that God is working to a Plan or Purpose is several times stated in the group of letters written from Paul's prison cell. The words just quoted are proof that God is following out His own designs, and that all that He does is "according to" a purpose drafted before He began to engage in His great work. Again, Paul follows this assertion by another which says that all who are in Christ were "*foreordained* (predestined) *according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his Will*" (v. 11 RV). Then in a great statement indicating that the principalities and powers in the heavenly places are learning more of God's diversified wisdom through his dealings with the Church than they had hitherto been able to learn, Paul states that even this is "*according to the eternal purpose*" (the plan of the Ages) "*which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*". (Eph. 3. 11 RV). Another reference to the activities of him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his Will" is found in Phil. 2. 13. "*It is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure*" (R. V.) This mighty energy which works creatively in the saints is linked at two points with the assertions in Ephesians. In both cases it is God that "worketh"; in both cases it is according to his "good pleasure"; hence the creative work in the hearts of the saints is part of his own great Plan.

Paul had already made known to the Church, before his prison days, that God was working to a Plan. This was no new feature of his doctrine. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul states that both the death and resurrection of Jesus took place in conformity with previous evidences given in the Scriptures. "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. . .and hath been raised. . .according to the Scriptures.*" (1 Cor. 15. 3-4 R.V.). Whatever occurred "according to the Scriptures" is proof of conformity to a design. He who caused the Scriptures to be written also designed, prior to the inspiration of the prophetic testimony, that Jesus should die as an offering for sin, and that afterwards He should be raised. Again, on the same point, Paul says "*while we were yet weak*" (R.V.) "*in due season Christ died*" (Rom. 5. 6). What occurred "in due season" also conforms to design. This same thought is also applied to his birth, "*When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a wom-*

an..." (Gal. 4. 4 R.V.). "Times" also, as well as the form of Divine activity, were incorporated in the Plan. Then in Rom. 8. 28, this thought of design comes out in great prominence. The control of the affairs of life by Divine Providence is assured to all who are "*called according to his purpose*". Again, in the distant days of Isaac, in conformity with the purpose of God it was said that the elder son should serve the younger, "*that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. . .*" (Rom. 9.11). That incident therefore in Rebecca's life was also accomplished in conformity with a "Plan".

Thus it is abundantly demonstrated that God is no mere opportunist, no strategist or tactician, waiting to seize and exploit some flaw in his opponent's methods and activities, but the Lord and Master of every circumstance, the originator of every cause, and the director of every effect. That this is so is proved by the fact that God was working to His Plan before sin came in. It was not by the act of sin by Adam, nor yet the previous act of sin by Satan, that brought the plan into operation. It was in operation untold Ages before sin began. God did not require to make any strategic move to checkmate the tactics of the great rebel who had become his open enemy. His plans were already made, and to those plans the Most High strictly adhered throughout.

God's plans began to be executed in his firstborn Son. He was the "*firstborn of every creature*" (of every created thing) far back in the unfathomable depths of undated time. (Col. 1. 15). That was according to God's Plan, that He might enjoy pre-eminence in the great family of God. Thenceforward, each angelic "being" and every instituted dignity was created and set in its place to bear some relationship to him. Paul says they were created "by" him. But they were also created "for" him—just as an instrument is made for a man to use or employ. But even more than this, every created being was created "in him"—"in" a combined fellowship under his control, to accomplish a great design which had been entrusted to the Firstborn himself to be brought to full accomplishment when a certain course of Ages had run. They were to be as working members or limbs of a body, over which He was to preside as the directing brain or Head, each member being responsible, and yielding allegiance to, him and his command. Every grade of power or rank was instituted with special relationship to what He had to bring to full accomplishment when the fulness of the appointed time should have

arrived. And of the agencies in the earth which have been or will yet be found in harmony with righteousness and truth, this is also true. For *“in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him.. .”* (Col. 1. 16 RV). “He is before (prior to and in advance of) all things (in the creative and authoritative procession) and in him all things consist” (are held together) (Col. 1. 17 RV).

Perhaps this may best be illustrated by reference to the co-ordinated offices blended together in the king’s government. In affairs of State, whereby the government of the people is carried out, several distinct offices are blended together each having its own province or sphere of operation. First we might mention the legislative sphere, by means of which the laws are made. The nature of the legislative body may vary from dictatorship on the one hand, to an open deliberate assembly on the other. The dictator (advised by his council) will decree law, the deliberative assembly may enact it, but for the purpose of this illustration it matters not which system is in operation. Laws are promulgated either for the King (by his Parliament) or by the King (as an autocrat). That is one office. Next we may cite the Constabulary office, whose duty is to see that the law is observed by the King’s subjects. If the subject fails or refuses to observe the law, the Constabulary cites the offender before the Judiciary. The members of the Judiciary Office “try” the case presented against the offender and if the occasion requires it, mete out punishment upon the offender. When the offence so warrants, the Judiciary hands over the offender to the “detention” officers, and the offender is sent to prison for the period specified by the Judiciary.

Only the legislative body made the laws, but all the others apply them. The Constabulary is composed of many ranks and grades of authority, from the supreme chief at the centre of the Administration down to the humblest village policeman. The Judiciary is also composed of many ranks or grades of office, from the high chief down to the lowest prison officer. In addition to the legal machinery there is also the customs and excise, taxing and rating authorities, health authorities, etc., etc. Each department is separate from its fellows, yet each and all are “in” the King’s confidence, and do the King’s business in his stead. They are thus “in” the kingship—“in him”—yet while they are all held together “in”

him and “by” him, he is “before” them all—higher in rank and prior in time. He is “first” in procession and “first” in prerogative.

Thus it was with the firstborn Son of God in relation to the whole range of authorities, dominions and powers in the heavenly realms. All these sons of light were created to bear relationship to him in the government committed to his care. By him each had been created; by him, each had been commissioned and authorised to act in his name, having dignity in rank, and splendour in person, according with the allotted sphere or task.

One member of this hierarchy, a being of high and illustrious rank appears to have been accorded vice-royalty over the earth, to act first as representative of his Lord and next as overseer and caretaker of man. Of him alone could the words of Ezekiel 28: 12-15, be true. He only had been in Eden the Garden of God—and had been full of wisdom, and perfect in his beauty. He had been the cherub that had “covered”—that had spread his wings of authority over man. But iniquity (lawlessness) was found in him. He wanted to sit, not as viceroy for his appointed Lord, but as king and ruler in his own right. The story of his fall, and of the seduction of his charge from loyalty to God is too wide a story for this present exposition. Suffice it now for us to note the fact. Here, by the rebellious act of Lucifer, that ideal oneness was broken. Sin had appeared both in the heavens and in the earth. Subsequently other discontented heavenly messengers, rebelling against the Creator-Lord, left their own and sank to a lower estate to gratify evil desire. In due course the Heavenly Powers put these rebels under restraint, thus to remain until the Judgment day (Jude 6). Thus sin and rebellion spread itself in the heavenly sphere and throughout the earth.

As that ideal “one-ness” in and under the firstborn Son was the great design with which the creative work began, that “one-ness” is still the goal towards which all subsequent developments are directed. There is no alteration in the nature of the great plan for it is still God’s purpose in “*the fulness of the times, to sum up*” (to head up) “*all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth*”. (Eph. 1. 10 RV). Not even the rebellion of Satan nor the fall of man changed the fore-ordained design. Before the world began arrangements had been made for the call and elevation of beings from the human plane to the highest heavenly plane “*...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him...*” (Eph. 1. 4 RV). That is

proof that the entrance of sin had been foreknown, and that every step, from the tremendous step-down from his exalted place by God's firstborn Son (and who in course of time came to be known as Jesus of Nazareth), on through the throes of death, until He was raised up to his Father's right hand, as the firstborn among many brethren, was all fore-known and foreordained. Even the defection of some of the angelic host produced no alteration of the plan, for the government of heaven and earth carried on the right without their aid, carried on in spite even of their bitterest opposition. At every step of the development on earth, the evil discontents of heaven have sought to thwart and overthrow the Plan, and seem destined to fight it to the bitter end. Some Scriptures seem to indicate that despite this opposition there will open a door of hope for them in a later day, if they cease to interfere in human affairs and wait in patience for the day when judgment will begin. For all things in the heavenly sphere as well as on this earthly globe, that can be reconciled, will be reconciled to the supreme Lord of the great Plan, and to the great Designer of this sweeping universal Purpose. *"For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him"* (the glorified Lord) *"should all fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself...whether things upon the earth or things in the heavens."* (Col. 1. 19-20 RV). Thus the unreconciled "sons of darkness" are to have the opportunity to become again "sons of light", and return to the sphere from which they fell, and dwell again "in him" and "for him" for evermore. And all the rebellious sons of men, who likewise, on invitation, leave the ways of sin, will be accepted into his dominion, so the earthly viceroys of him who is the head of all power and dominion and every dignity that can be named will rule the earth in his name, and establish universal peace for both man and beast, *"according to his good pleasure which He purposed in him, unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up"* (to head up) *"all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth"*. (Eph. 1. 9-10 RV).

In that happy day every creature of every rank in heaven as well as in earth will occupy his allotted place and fulfil his allotted task. This is great doctrine—broad and deep and wide, yet it was not exclusive to Paul's prison days. He knew of it in an earlier day. While he does not enter into so many details in his earlier exposition, he covers all the ground relative to the subjugation of all enemies of God and of righteousness, until all things are under the Firstborn's feet. Then the Son surrenders the whole subjected and purified dominion to his Father and his God, so that God

himself may be all in all. In his letter to the Corinthians, written several years prior to his imprisonment at Rome, Paul wrote: “*Then cometh the end*” (envisaged in the Plan) “*when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have abolished all*” (antagonistic) “*rule and all*” (contrary) “*authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under his feet...And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him*” (God) “*that did subject all things unto him*” (the Son) “*that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15. 24,25,28 RV). This is the early germ of this great thought—Ephesians and Colossians give it full rich fruit, matured and complete. (To be continued) TH

GRAPE VINE

The vine, its fruit and the wine made from it are mentioned constantly in the Bible, from Noah onwards. Noah, indeed, planted a vineyard after the deluge (Gen. 9:20-21). The vine, wheat and olive—those essentials of the Holy Land are part of everyone’s daily life. “*A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees*” (Deut. 8:8). This was the promised land.

The vines of Palestine were famous for their heavy clusters of large juicy grapes. The spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan cut, in the valley of Eschol, a cluster of grapes that was so large that “*they bare it between two upon a staff*” (Num. 13:23). The Israelites in the wilderness longed for the puny grapes of Egypt—“*And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place: it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines*” (Num. 20:5)—unaware of the delicious ones which lay ahead of them. The grape vine is the first cultivated plant to be recorded in the Bible. Its origins are uncertain; botanists say that it came from Armenia, where it still grows with the luxuriant wildness of a tropical creeper, clinging to tall trees and producing abundant fruit without pruning or cultivation.

The vine is honoured before all other plants of the world. ‘The fruitful vine’ and ‘the vine brought out of Egypt’ symbolized the Jewish people and our Lord compared himself with the ‘true vine’.

The Flowers and Fruits of the Bible, John Chancellor

Pruning. Select fruiting arms either from a shoot produced by the spur(s) left from the previous year, or from one of the lower shoots off the previous year’s arm. In winter, tip the leader back by about one-third and shorten the other main shoots to two buds. Thin any crowded spurs back to one or two shoots.

Plant care. Thin out individual dessert grapes on the bunches to allow the berries to ripen fully and to improve air circulation. Use scissors to remove berries when they are small, removing about one in three per bunch.

Grow Your Own Fruit, Carol Klein

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

Old ideas die hard, and popular belief that the Day of Judgment is a period of twenty-four hours, at the dawn of which Christ will suddenly appear in the air, the “Last Trump” will sound, mountains and rocks quake and rend, the graves open and the dead stand before the Throne, sinners be condemned to everlasting torment and the few righteous taken to heavenly bliss, lingers still among Christians although not many talk about it. That grim picture is a survival of the Dark Ages and has no foundation in the Bible. According to the Scriptures the Day of Judgment is a long period of time during which all humanity will be placed on trial for life, with every incentive offered them to renounce sin and become reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time of joy and gladness, not one of fear and terror.

The Day of Judgment commences at the close of this present Age in which the “kingdoms of this world” hold sway. With the passing of these kingdoms in a “time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation” there occurs the Second Advent of Christ in the glory of His Messianic Kingdom, His Saints, the faithful Christian disciples of this present Age, being with Him in glory. This is the first event of that Day. Next in order is a proclamation to all the world, requiring obedience to the laws of the Kingdom, for “nothing shall hurt or destroy” and the power to inflict evil upon others will be taken from men. Then comes the Resurrection, during which “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.” The glorified Church will be active among the people, turning men and women to righteousness, and as the “Day of Judgment” proceeds, so humanity will line up on one side or the other, for Christ and His righteousness, or for the Devil and sin. In the meantime the earth itself will be made fruitful and productive, the desert blossoming as the rose, a fitting home for the sinless beings that are to inhabit it to all eternity.

At the end comes the test, a “little season” during which those who are incorrigibly set for sin will be manifested in their true colours and will die in their sin. That closes the Day of Judgment, for all sin and all sinners will have perished from the earth, and all men everywhere will be fully in harmony with the laws of righteousness.

AOH

PREPARING FOR THE KINGDOM

Part 1

Whatever view we hold concerning the way the Second Coming of our Lord will occur, the great need is to be ready for His appearing. There can be no substitute for readiness or alertness and knowledge of what is promised without the resulting preparation of heart and mind.

To paraphrase 2 Peter 1: 12-13, “Although you know these things, I won’t hesitate to keep reminding you of them, as long as I am in this rapidly deteriorating tent. Because it’s only right to stir up your memories as long as I am with you.” And to stir you up, is now the point: to stir you not only into thinking about how our heavenly Father is preparing to bring in His Kingdom of righteousness and how you are getting ready for it. But also into reflecting about how we’re actually putting those thoughts into action.

The return of our Lord is an event that, as far as the church is concerned, should be regarded as something that may occur at any moment. Some may say that there’s much to happen before He comes for the church but later on we’ll see why we should—as we’re repeatedly exhorted in the scriptures—be watching, looking, and ready for his return.

Preparing

In Mark 13: 34-37 we’re told that Jesus said that we should, listen carefully to what He has to say, then watch and pray, because we don’t know when He’s coming. It will be, He said like *“a man going away, leaving his house, and giving authority to his servants, and each man’s work to him, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Then you watch, for you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, at evening, or at midnight or at cockcrowing, or early; lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all. Watch.”* (MKJV) So, if we want to have the Honour and privilege of being with our Lord and being a part of his Bride—the Church of the Firstborn—then we have to make ourselves ready: we must be prepared.

Preparing can be defined as getting ready for a coming event which is expected, or planning a course of action to be taken so that we can achieve a desired result. The prophets had foretold the coming of the Messiah. Jesus at the end of His first advent promised that He will come again. But

before that glorious event occurs we're to be transformed into the likeness of Christ so that we may be found worthy to be a part of His Church. Not that any can do this in their own strength: but because we have shown our willingness to follow His will in every aspect of our lives we will, through the undeserved grace of our heavenly Father, be considered to be worthy to be granted the privilege of ruling with Christ in God's future heavenly Kingdom.

Now, in whatever we're going to do, the preparation is most important. There's not much point in planting a packet of seeds in the garden if you don't dig and clear the ground first. Unless first of all you properly prepare the ground then it's quite possible that the seeds won't come up. Even if they do manage to start to grow, the weeds that you didn't bother to clear away will probably choke them.

Our Lord said much the same thing when He told the parable of the Sower, which recorded by Matthew 13. As the farmer scattered his seed some of it fell on stony ground and was eaten by birds. Some onto shallow soil so that although it sprouted it withered in the first drought. Some fell amongst weeds, which choked their growth and only some fell into good ground and produced a crop.

The seed He was talking about was the seed of the word and the ground was the mainly hard earth of men's hearts. He was telling us that unless we prepare the soil of our hearts, by getting rid of the hardness, which stops the seed of His word from taking root in us. That if we don't carefully dig out the weeds of worldliness that will choke the new growth. Unless we clear away the stones of materialism, which prevent the seed from being able to put down a good root system. Then the seed of His word will wither and die in the first spiritual drought, because we are relying on material things to sustain us, not the word of the Lord.

What we should be doing, he said, was to be clearing the ground of our hearts. Clearing from it everything that could be a hindrance to the growth of the seed, then fertilising it with study of God's word in the scriptures, so that no trouble that arises can stop the seed of the word from growing.

Our Heavenly Father's Preparation

But we aren't the only ones who are to prepare for the Kingdom. Our Heavenly Father has been preparing for the coming Kingdom of

Righteousness since before this world began. We can see the development of that plan in the earlier books of the Bible: a plan which HE gradually made clearer to us through the prophets as the centuries passed, that He would send a redeemer. One who, in the words of Simeon was to be God's Salvation which he had prepared before the face of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the nations, and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2. 30-32).

This redeemer would not only give His life to cancel the sin that had come into the world when Adam fell from grace. But He would also bring an end to death, which had resulted from that sin, and would, eventually, become ruler of the whole world, bringing man into a new and closer relationship with GOD.

This promised one was to be our Lord Jesus, who we're told was the Lamb, slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13. 8). A lamb that our Heavenly Father had prepared,—even before our earth had begun to take its first vague shape. A lamb that would give us life so that, through its shed blood, mankind could be saved from eternal death.

We're shown a picture of this saving grace in Exodus 12 when, on the night many millenniums ago, Pharaoh was forced to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. On the tenth day of the first month of the year, each family of the Israelites were to take an unblemished lamb and keep it in their homes. Then God said that; *"Ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it"* (Exo. 12. 6-7). This blood was to be a sign to the "angel of death" that no first-born male in that house either human or animal, was to die. In the same way, mankind will have to symbolically put the blood of JESUS who was; "The lamb slain before the foundation of the world" on to the doorposts and lintels of their hearts. Because we're told that *"every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess"* that JESUS is their LORD and King. Everyone will give Him their complete obedience because only by doing this, will that condemnation of death, placed on Adam and all his descendants, be lifted from them.

This shows us that really, Jehovah, is a loving Father, anxious to bring all

His children back into the closeness of His family circle. HE isn't the one who will consign man to eternal death. It's man himself who will do so, if he refuses to change his sinful way of life and accept the generous free and completely undeserved gift of the Grace of GOD, which, in His love for mankind, our heavenly Father is offering.

John The Baptist

Jehovah's final solution to the question of sin became clearer when in Isaiah 40.3 it was prophesied, that there would be a voice crying in the wilderness, "*prepare ye the way of the LORD*" and, expanding on this, Malachi says; "I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming, says the LORD." (Mal. 3.1 NLT). Then about four centuries later, these prophecies were fulfilled when, as Matthew tells us "John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." Matthew 3.1-3.(MKJV)

He came preaching a message of repentance, which was a complete change from the beliefs of most Jews who believed that, because they were the chosen people of GOD, then they would, automatically, receive HIS favour and had the right of entry into Heaven, no matter what they did.

John's message wasn't just a negative denunciation, of men's evil ways. It was a positive statement of the moral standards of Jehovah. He didn't just condemn people for what they were and how they lived: He challenged them to change the direction of their lives and be what they could be, rather than what they were.

Then he went further and preached that, having repented, they should be baptised to wash away their sins, because, it was said that, one was no good without the other. So John taught that they should repent, and through this repentance dispose of the defilement in their lives: and then they should be baptised to be symbolically washed clean.

He claimed no authority for himself, he only said, that he was the fore-

runner of another and that “There is One coming after me who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down to loosen”. (Mark 1.7 MKJV)

These teachings were all a part of his message that they should, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” (Matt.3.3 MKJV) This was an allusion to a custom of the time, when all roads in the kingdom were known as “The King’s Highway.” They were all unsurfaced, with a few exceptions such as the approach roads to Jerusalem which, Josephus tells us that, Solomon had had paved with black basalt, to make the road easier for pilgrims and to “manifest the grandeur of his riches and government.” These unsurfaced roads were not maintained so they soon became little more than rutted tracks. Because of this, when the king intended to travel to another part of his kingdom, he sent heralds on ahead to tell the people that the king was coming and with orders that the roads should be repaired and smoothed in preparation for the king’s journey.

So John’s message was that he was the herald, come to tell the people that they should prepare the way for the coming Messiah—**Jesus Christ of the seed of David**, the heir to David’s throne. Not by clearing and smoothing out the roads of Israel, but by clearing away any obstructions and making the way smooth for Jesus to come into their hearts, by repenting of their sins and then being baptised to wash away the defilement left by those sins.

Our Preparation

Paul tells us that the way to make these preparations is to “*Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth*”.(Col. 3.2 MKJV) We have to pay proper attention to some earthly things, such as doing our job to the best of our ability, but we should never put doing earthly things before our duties to our Lord. When we do keep our thoughts on earthly things we’re, in effect, making an idol of them that could deprive us of our heavenly inheritance. So our aim should be to become more heavenly minded: not in a mystical sense, but in the way of practical, Christ-like godliness.

Our loving FATHER wants all men to be saved—He would have no man die. Jesus made this quite clear in two of HIS parables; first when He told how the Father, as soon as he saw the prodigal returning to him, ran—he didn’t walk, he ran—to meet the wanderer. Jesus was telling us that it’s

the same with our Heavenly Father. He doesn't wait for the prodigal to come to Him on bended knee to beg forgiveness. But as soon as the errant one, of his own free will, turns his face back towards his heavenly home, God doesn't just move slowly towards the wanderer but in His delight He actually hurries to meet the one who went away and then celebrates that prodigal's return.

We are also told that if one of HIS flock of sheep drifts off, HE will search until the lost one is brought back to the fold and when that wanderer is brought back He rejoices. So, if our HEAVENLY FATHER is not satisfied with only 99 out of a flock of 100, He certainly won't be satisfied until He has done everything possible to prevent one of His children from harming themselves through self-will, disobedience or just plain stupidity.

In these two stories the prodigal is the one who deliberately follows a life that will take HIM away from the FATHER, whilst the sheep pictures the one who drifts away through sheer foolishness,—the one who doesn't think about consequences. The whole point of these stories is to show us that GOD is more understanding, more merciful, more forgiving, and that HIS love is far greater than any man's.

Building on firm foundations

Then again, our LORD'S story of the two builders was a way of showing us that we must get ready for the coming Kingdom. He tells us how we should think and live. Then He says that, if we listen to HIM, take HIS words to heart and then put them into practice, our life will be quite safe and it will withstand the storms of life as well as, in fact far better than, a house, which has been built on a firm foundation to withstand the storms and tempests of nature.

David must have been having similar thoughts when he wrote; *“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do.”* (Psalm 11. 3 MKJV) So we must make sure our house is built on the rock which is our faith in our LORD and Saviour, JESUS CHRIST. Then as long as we cling tightly to that rock all the storms that batter us as we go through life will sweep around the rock and leave us *“Safe in the arms of JESUS.”* David had another word of reassurance to give to those who lay their foundations on JESUS, when, in the same psalm, he wrote; *“For the*

righteous Jehovah loves righteousness; His face looks on the upright." (Psalm 11.7 MKJV)

Preparing a Spiritual Temple

Our Heavenly Father is preparing a Holy Spiritual Temple in which He will dwell, and we can be quite certain that He has set a time for the completion of HIS preparations. So far, this heavenly Temple, the Church, the Body of Christ, has been steadily growing for nearly 2,000 years, and from all the signs in the world it must be nearing completion: but even though GOD appears to delay, He is never inactive. HE is a GOD of order and of organisation. HE is never too early and never too late. Every member is being prepared according to his attributes. Their abilities are being sharpened and their powers ripened for their work of joy throughout the coming ages: a work that will bring a blessing to all the families of the earth. Then, at the appointed time, we shall arise, equal to the task.

1 Peter 2, 4-5 (MKJV) tells us that; *"Having been drawn to Him, a living Stone, indeed rejected by men, but elect, precious with God; you also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* Peter calls Christ a living Stone, a title that teaches His followers that He is their protection and security. Whilst Paul, at the end of the second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians says that Jesus is the foundation on which they are built. He is the chief Corner stone, which unites the whole number of believers into one perpetual temple, and bears the weight of the whole fabric, a foundation that is everlasting and precious beyond comparison. And to be built on Jesus, means to believe in him completely and to commit our life to Him.

To be continued

JH

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Proverbs 31:10-31 (KJV)



- ¹⁰ Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.
- ¹¹ The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.
- ¹² She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.
- ¹³ She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.
- ¹⁴ She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.
- ¹⁵ She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.
- ¹⁶ She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
- ¹⁷ She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.
- ¹⁸ She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.
- ¹⁹ She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.
- ²⁰ She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
- ²¹ She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.
- ²² She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.
- ²³ Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.
- ²⁴ She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
- ²⁵ Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.
- ²⁶ She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.
- ²⁷ She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.
- ²⁸ Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.
- ²⁹ Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.
- ³⁰ Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.
- ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

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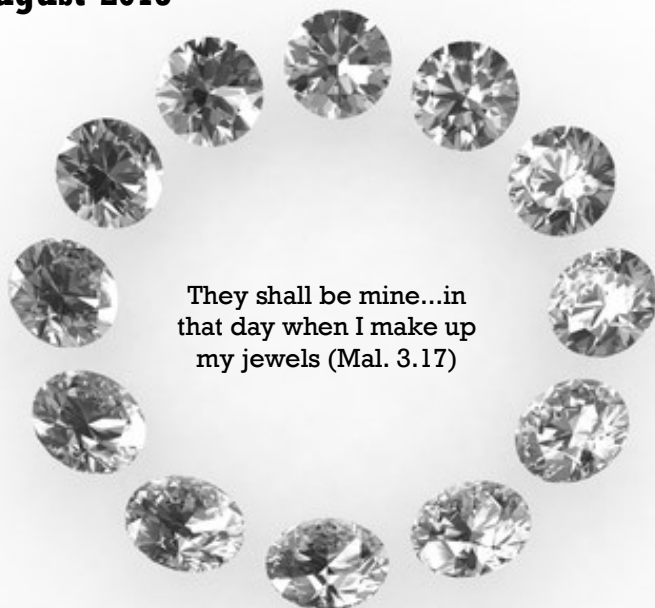
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 92 Issue 4

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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)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge on request to all who are genuinely interested.

(Please renew your request each year.)

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Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

"They shall be mine...in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3.17)

A jewel is a thing of beauty and value. The value part of this was probably the reason for the recent raid of deposit boxes in London's jewellery quarter in Hatton Garden. A former police officer, Roy Ramm was quoted as saying that he would not be surprised if the value of the jewellery stolen was worth as much as £200m, which is about \$300m or 300m Euros.

Jewels occur in various parts of Scripture. In the Old Testament they were set on the ephod or breastplate for Aaron the High Priest (Exodus 39.8-14). In the New Testament the foundations of the wall of the city in the New Jerusalem were garnished with twelve precious stones. (Rev. 21.19-21).

Jewels, especially diamonds, have many qualities—hardness, colour and transparency, brilliancy and fire (light). They are also excellent conductors of heat burning only at 800 degrees Centigrade or 1470 degrees Fahrenheit as well as being resistant to attacks by acids or alkalis.

Before diamonds or other jewels can be used or displayed they need to be extracted often by expensive mechanical processes from the earth, they have to be cut with great care and precision to remove the rock that

surrounds them and cut away any imperfections and polished. Most gems have about 58 facets or sides. The Cullinan diamond from South Africa, which was presented to King Edward VII in November 1907 took over 7,000 hours to polish.

If we apply this idea to the work that is going on now in Christians, any tribulation, polishing and removal of imperfections that may be felt in our lives is producing something beautiful and valuable, and we therefore can take heart and give thanks. Paul says, “we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14.22) James says “Blessed is the man who endures temptation, because having been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1.12 MKJV). The writer to the Hebrews says “do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens” (Heb. 12.5-6 NKJV). How wonderful to think of Christians becoming jewels that our Lord is preparing for a special place for a far-reaching purpose.

The Trial of our faith is spoken of by Peter as a fiery trial but a necessary experience if our faith is to be developed. He compares it to gold which is a precious and valuable metal and so is our faith. Then if we keep our faith and confidence in God and belief that our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead we are more prepared for the kingdom. 1 Peter 1.7 ESV “*so that the tested **genuineness** of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to **result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.***” This seems a wonderful thought that when the genuineness of our faith is displayed then it is like praising the Lord.

Perhaps its not a mere coincidence that jewels such as diamonds and sapphires are used in engagement rings in this country, such as the one given to the Duchess of Cambridge. Christians at this time are in some ways engaged for a wedding—a wedding we long for. This state is a great joy every day.

**Next Bible Students Seminar Day
Saturday 3 October, Crick**

THE GREATEST OF THESE

4. Love, the bringer of perfection

A Serial Study in 1 Cor.13.13

The main proof that Paul is not merely contrasting the *Charismata* in their various forms with the inward grace of Love (as this comes to be reflected in the various acts that make up a Christian's life) is found in Paul's statement in verse 12. Here two phrases are found which indicate, for the faithful foot-step follower of the Lord, that all imperfection and present indefiniteness is at an end. He will there see the realities of the Divine Plan "face to face", and will "then know even as he has been known". By whom has Paul been known while here on earth? Was he merely stating, that he hoped, one day, to be fully understood by those brethren, such as the Corinthians, who had so grossly misunderstood him and his work? Not a bit of it. At the very moment when the Corinthians misunderstood there was another place where he was fully known and fully understood, by Someone whose knowledge of all things pertaining to the Plan had then come to the "full". That Someone was his Lord. He knew Paul through and through, Paul hoped, one day, also to attain to such understanding that he too would "know" to the same degree, as his Lord had known him. But to "know" as he had been "known" would imply that he had been both "like" and "with" his Lord in the heavenly glory. Then he would have reached the vantage ground of being "face to face" with the Divine realities that had thrown their shadows backward into his earth life, where he had seen them as an indefinite reflection in the mirror of the Word in these present misty circumstances.

In some way therefore, this preview of that perfect state must tie up with his contrasts between Love and the 'other things'—the mysteries, the "*gnosis*" and the tongues—to give 'sense' and direction to his argument. Each one of these "other things" had stood for a 'way of life' for countless millions of the world's inhabitants. But Paul claims that the 'way of Love' would be the better way—a more excellent way. And yet to the common view of man that more excellent way is not apparent yet—it is not yet made manifest. Darkness still reigns over the minds of men, and binds them to the 'other things'. Only to the spirit-enlightened mind of Paul, as he looks forward to the future day, has that Way of Love any semblance of reality, and even then he sees it but "in part". But the big jump forward of his mind to that future day, when all preparation begins to give place to

the “*teleion*”—“the perfectness”, which is to be the climax and culmination of all the long preparatory work of God—shows that he is really contrasting the whole Plan of God—and Love. The motive force of the Divine Plan—with the spirit of priest-craft or culture-craft which had been the animating force of all these human institutions. Men had tried to explain the problems of the Universe, the mystery of God, and the riddle of human life, and had become inextricably entangled in their webs of philosophy. God himself would, one day, explain all these complicated enigmas of life and existence, and bring light out of this present darkness and gloom, and show men where they were wrong in their reasonings. By that happier day Paul would have arrived ‘face to face’ with the Divine realities and would then ‘know’ even as he had been known, and that which was ‘perfect’ having come for him, it would then begin to ripple out to all the dark places of the earth, and cause the knowledge of the Glory of God to be known by all.

While it is true there is the present activity of Love in the hearts of God’s consecrated children, (as part of the preparatory work leading up to the ‘perfect’ state,) running through Paul’s mind, it is more in the nature of a second line of argument lying parallel to his main line of reasoning. While also it is more excellent to have the Love of God dwelling in the heart than to be enmeshed in the mysteries of men, or even to be engrossed by the ‘charm’ of human ‘tongues’, this can only be considered as preparatory to, and anticipatory of, the ‘perfect’ state, and of the ‘face to face’ completeness that belongs to the better day. It is of Love as the solver of life’s mysteries, not as a mere display of its minor graces in the lives of the saints, that Paul is mainly speaking, though the second strand of the argument is woven in and out here and there in the whole pattern of his reasoning.

The crux, therefore, of Paul’s argument is that the Love of God will succeed in doing what all the artifice (good or bad) of a thousand generations of men has failed to do. We must not fail to appreciate the magnitude of Paul’s greater argument because a minor one is intertwined.

What then will the Love of God do for men, and will it accomplish its task? That would be a long story to follow through from its beginning. The ‘giving’ of his Son to be man’s Redeemer from sin—the story of that sacrificial life,—his death and Resurrection, and his long “henceforth expecting” period before He could come to man’s relief, are all parts of

that wonderful story. The comparison must begin with man awakened from the dead, and with the present embargo barring the outflow of the Love of God withdrawn.

First then, in contrast with the superstitious institutions of men, God *will cause knowledge to abound*. Only ‘the few’ were the initiates in the human way of life, the ‘many’ being kept purposely in ignorance of the supposed facts of life. But in God’s better way even the least among men will know and understand all the deeper knowledge hitherto wrapped in mystery. There will be no necessity for one to ask his brother ‘knowest thou the Lord’, for all will know him from the least to the greatest of men. God will remove the superstition and the ignorance by making known the truth.

Then the language of THE TRUTH will reach the hearts of men. Unlike the influence of the cultured tongue (or pen) it will not merely entrance and embellish the *mind* of man—(that is of the few who were able to absorb it in the days gone by)—but will reach the deeper seat of affection in the heart. God will write his Law upon the tablets of the human heart, and will thus reach inwards to the very centre of each individual life, and as “all” are intended to know the Way of Love, so likewise *all* the hearts of men are thus to be reached by the Spirit of God. The contrast opens therefore by understanding replacing ignorance, and by ‘all’ becoming recipients thereof, instead of the ‘few’.

Further God will restore man to his dignity. The ancient human ways of life dragooned and regimented men en masse. The idol worshipper was not asked to decide if he agreed to or approved the system to which he belonged—there was no option left to his choice. For the least demur the penalty was death. Compulsion surrounded him on every hand constraining him to yield obedience as his fathers, and his father’s fathers, had done. The Way of Love will meet him as an individual. God will tell him he is free—a freeman of his wide domain. He will be free to choose the object of his own desire. This he never was under the old system of idolatry. There had been no more liberty than a beast of the fields. This is not the place to discuss the fundamental facts relating to the freedom of the human will. Suffice it here to say that God intended the will of man to swing free within such limits as would ensure to man the opportunity to live accordant with righteousness. Only if man choose to live unrighteously would his free will clash with God’s sovereign right to dictate. It is an

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honour great beyond all earthly comparison that God should assure man that he is free to make his choice. It shows what confidence the Creator still has, or will then have in man's integrity and responsiveness to his own persuasive influence. Love will draw by its own power of moral suasion, and God knows there is that in man, when released from superstitious thralldom, that can respond to its attractive 'pull' and swing into alignment with his own righteous desires. Love will be 'long-suffering'—in that it will wait even if some wayward creature should choose to say "No" to the Divine overtures. It will wait a whole Age if there is the feeblest affirmative response.

Love will be 'kind'—it will have help to give and assurance to bestow. It will encourage faltering steps, and handle gently 'broken reeds'. Love will not chide man too harshly for inherited weaknesses, but will remind him what Redemption has cost. It will believe the best, and hope for the best, and wait while the battered affections grow strong again. It will cleanse his wounds, and pour upon them 'Good Samaritan' oil and wine, and take care of him till he is strong again. Then Love will ask "Will you live with Me, and permit Me to enjoy your company as I want you to enjoy Mine?"

As the knowledge of all that Love has done to restore this "*teleion*"—this perfect state—increases, the age-old mysteries will be explained. Who was the Great First Cause that created this mundane world with all its possibilities? Was there One or were there many Gods engaged upon this task? Was there a Good God and an evil god in eternal conflict over sunshine and storm? They will not again need to ask. Why did God seem always so hard to find behind the perplexities of life? They will learn that sin had been the barrier. They will learn that man is made to be monarch and caretaker of this world. Thus all the riddles of the Universe will be solved and Love, the outflow of the very heart of God, will have come into its own.

From the Fountain of eternal good, will come forth the Attribute that will have played a Creator-Father's part, and have linked together in one happy universal family every creature that his Hand has made whose choice it was to live in that happy home.

In this gladsome Paradise Paul will have found himself "face to face" with all these great realities—he will "know" as he was fully known—and for

him, as for countless myriads besides, that which is “perfect” will have come. The “Way of Love” will have become the “Way of Life” for every willing soul. Surely it is “the most excellent Way!”.

The End
TH

THE SPIRIT ENTERS IN

“Ye are mine,” the Lord has said,
“And so ye must be now as dead;
Dead to the world and dead to sin,
When my spirit enters in...”

Enters into Christ-like hearts,
Protected from the fowler’s darts;
Yes, in Christ, ye now are hid,
As ye obey—all ye are bid.

Jewels! Ye are, every one,
The bride ye are, of my dear Son;
Ye shall sorrow, not much more,
As ye pass through heaven’s door.

What a feast there soon shall be,
With my Son who set you free;
Jewels bought with precious blood,
That is the depth of Jesus’ love.

“Ye are mine,” the Lord has said,
How happy we—to feel so dead!
Dead to the world and dead to sin,
Rejoice! The spirit enters in!

Where Eagles Gather
RP

Gone from us

Terry Nadal (Milborne Port)
John Thompson (Australia, formerly UK)

OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

1. Denunciation of Edom.

The historical narratives of the Bible mention eleven men who bore the name “Obadiah”, out of at least six tribes, but it is quite certain that the Obadiah whose prophecy is the shortest book of the Old Testament was not any one of them. This Obadiah must have lived at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and it would appear that he was one of the few who remained in the land after the Babylonian king had carried the greater part of the people into captivity. The account of this disastrous episode in Israel’s history tells us that the Babylonians left some of the poor of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen, and appointed Gedaliah their governor (2 Kings 25. 12 & 22). Very possibly Obadiah remained with this little community of peasants, in which case he must undoubtedly have been in contact with the prophet Jeremiah, who also remained in Judea after the captives had been taken to Babylon. Following the murder of Gedaliah, a few months later, Jeremiah was forcibly taken into Egypt by the panic-stricken peasantry. Whether Obadiah went with them or remained by himself in Judea and died there, we have no means of knowing. Jeremiah must have had a copy of Obadiah’s prophecy in his possession when writing his own book, for Jer. 49. 7-22 is quite evidently a paraphrase of the greater part of the book of Obadiah.

From this evidence, then, we can say with some certainty that Obadiah lived at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and penned his prophecy at about the same time, so that Jeremiah could have possessed and copied it some years later when writing his own.

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of one chapter, of twenty-one verses only. The prophecy is concerned with the judgment of God upon the nation and land of Edom for its enmity against Judah at the time of the Captivity. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, and were therefore viewed by Israel in a rather different light than the rest of the nations. Even although there was often unfriendliness and enmity between the two peoples, there was always the injunction of the Law of Moses in Deut. 23. 7 “*Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother*”. It was all the more reprehensible, therefore, that when the Babylonians were ravaging

Judea the Edomites should have gone out of their way to assist them in their work of destruction. The children of Israel regarded this action as a base betrayal of the—admittedly rather flimsy—blood relationship between them, and Obadiah’s passionate denunciation, predicting the irretrievable ruin of Edom at the hands of God, is the outcome.

Edom was a little country about the size of Cornwall, lying to the south-east of Judea, on the way to the Red Sea. It is an extremely mountainous country; its one-time capital city, Petra, has been described as a “rose-red city, half as old as Time”, alluding to its extreme antiquity and the fact that it was built in a well-nigh inaccessible gorge flanked by precipitous red granite cliffs which made the city virtually impregnable against enemies. The original name of the district was Mount Seir, derived from the first settler known to have occupied the mountain gorge, Seir the Horite. It used to be thought that the Horites were merely an insignificant tribe of cave-dwellers, but within the last eighty years it has been discovered that they were, in fact, a wide-spread civilised people which had attained a high degree of culture. The Hurrian civilisation, as it is called today, covered a large part of what is now known as Syria and Jordan. By a comparison of genealogies it would seem that Seir lived at about the same time as Terah the father of Abraham, so that when Abraham entered Canaan the Hurrian civilisation was already well established there. One of Esau’s wives was Aholibamah the great-granddaughter of Seir. It is easy then to understand that when Canaan became unable to support the flocks and herds of both Jacob and Esau, the latter moved out and when to Mount Seir to his father-in law (Gen. 36. 6-8). That in turn is how Mount Seir became known as Edom, for the name Edom (meaning “Red”) was another name for Esau. From that time onward the land was known by either name, Seir or Edom, or as the “Mount of Esau”. It is evident from the extended history of Esau given in Gen. 36 that the Horites and the sons of Esau intermarried and eventually became one race, the “Edomites”. That race continued in possession of the land of Edom throughout the periods of Israel in Egypt, the Judges and the Kings, and were in possession when Obadiah uttered his prophecy of coming judgment.

The prophecy of Obadiah was fulfilled. Not many more years were to pass before another people, the Nabatheans, were to drive the Edomites out of the last recesses into which Nebuchadnezzar had pursued them

soon after the fall of Jerusalem, to occupy the whole land themselves until they in turn were overrun by Arab hordes from the desert. The dispossessed Edomites migrated to the desert regions south of Judea and were gradually absorbed in the Jewish nation. It is said that the last true Edomites perished in the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

So the prophecy of Obadiah has proved to be true history. There is no doubt about the time that he lived and no doubt about the events that marked the passage of the years after his death, events which proved him to be a true prophet. The Book of Obadiah would have served a great purpose had it been intended to do no more than that, to record the coming of Divine Judgment upon a nation that by reason of ancestry and associations was intimately connected with the people of God's covenant but chose instead to repudiate their kinship and betray those to whom they should have been as brothers, in order to curry favour with the godless power which at the time was ruling in the world.

But that was not the only purpose of the Book of Obadiah. All these kinships and events fit so marvellously an even greater betrayal of God's people in this Age by those who should have been their spiritual brethren, for the sake of an unholy alliance, with the powers of this world, that it is impossible not to see in the preservation of this short book in the canon of Scripture a record of Divine judgment pertaining to our own day and time. Rightly to understand that record it is necessary to go through the book in detail.

The primary object of the prophecy was to declare Divine judgement on Edom for its betrayal of its brother nation, Israel. The prophecy was fulfilled, so far as that object was concerned, during the century following the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. By the year 135 B.C., when John Hyrcanus, priest-king of the temporarily independent Jewish state, compelled the remaining Edomites to become proselytes to Judaism and crushed their last claims to separate nationhood, the last words of Obadiah had been literally fulfilled to the letter. Those who had escaped from Babylonian captivity ruled again from Mount Zion, and ruled what was left of the Mount of Esau. It is true that the kingdom was not the Lord's in the sense that we expect it to be when He has taken to himself his great power to reign, but within the limited scope of the prophecy it was true enough. Judea was free from the foreign yoke, the Temple worship went on unmolested, and every true Jew looked with heightened

expectation for the coming of Messiah. It requires only a moderate knowledge of the history of the years between Nehemiah and John the Baptist to realise that Obadiah's prophecy enjoyed an outward fulfilment during that period.

What then of its preservation into Christian times? There is surely something more in this dramatic denunciation than a mere recapitulation of the doom which came upon an ungodly people, a doom which we can read about in secular history books anyway. There must be some instruction appropriate to those who live in this latter day of Divine judgment, whose conditions match so closely those of Israel in the days of Obadiah.

Strangely enough, it is the Rabbinical school of interpretation which gives the clue. The Edomites, said the Rabbis of the First Century, prefigured all Christians everywhere. Edom prefigured Rome. The doom described in such bitter terms in the Book of Obadiah was to be fulfilled upon the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and Rome was to fall before Judaism, never to rise again.

The Rabbis said this of all who named the name of Christ, whether true or professors. In that they were not right. Nothing of the denunciations in the Book of Obadiah can fittingly be applied to anyone who is in covenant relationship with God. None of those sweeping condemnations can relate to any true-hearted Christian any more than in Obadiah's own time they could be applied to any true son of Israel. But just as the Edomites were guilty of allying themselves with the nations of the world against their own blood-brothers the Jews, so have professors of Christianity who have taken the name of Christ without partaking of his spirit allied themselves with the nations of the world against their own blood-brothers the true disciples of Christ, members of the Church in the flesh. These apostate, worldly-minded ones, are the spiritual Edomites against whom the secondary fulfilment of this prophecy is directed.

During the greater part of this Age the true disciples of Christ have been in a condition which could properly be called a "Babylonian captivity". The powers of this world have persecuted, oppressed and martyred, or have ignored, slighted and humiliated, the Christians in their midst as they have from time to time seen fit. During all that time, except for the

early centuries when Paganism was in the saddle, there has always been a so-called Christian power which was allied with the world against the true Church. They are the Edomites upon whom the spiritual counter-parts of Obadiah's judgments have descended and will yet descend.

Viewed in this light the book becomes charged with new meaning. It is the record of God's judgement upon "nominal Christendom", expressed in terms directly applicable to those who in an earlier age behaved in exactly the same way. And in order that there shall be no misunderstanding it is necessary at this point clearly to define terms and explain exactly what is intended to be conveyed by the expression "nominal Christendom".

It is not a name to be applied to the organisations and sects which constitute what is known as the Christian world. It is not any one or other of the great denominational groups. Nominal Christendom is the aggregate of nominal Christians everywhere, just as the true Church on earth is the aggregate of all true disciples of Jesus wherever they may be found. It is an admitted fact that no single sect contains all the members of the true Church. Their "names are written in Heaven" and only the Master knows just where they are to be found on earth, but we do know that they are likely to be in every sect and group and sometimes outside of all sects and groups. In like manner "nominal" Christians are also to be found in every sect and group, even in those which enjoy the clearest light on the Divine Plan. But just as it is true that the smallest and most insignificant of Christian groups usually contain the highest proportion of true disciples of Christ, chiefly because such groups have nothing of material advantage to offer the "nominal" professors, so it is equally true that the largest and most powerful sects usually contain the highest proportion of nominal Christians, because it is in such circles that there can be obtained the worldly advantages which they seek.

These two classes, true Christians and nominal Christians, have existed side by side throughout the Age, just as the wheat and the tares in the parable of Matt. 13 grew together until the harvest. Typical characteristics distinguish the respective individuals. "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*" The Christianity of a true Christian is usually fairly obvious to his neighbours and companions. It is certainly obvious to his fellow-believers. The worldliness of a nominal Christian is more or less equally obvious—at least to one whose own life is devoted to Christ. Because the darkness

hateth the light, because it is reproved by it, because its deeds are evil, nominal Christians usually display a thinly-concealed resentment, or on occasion open enmity, against true Christians. That resentment leads such to take sides with the powers of this world against the disciples of Christ when conditions are such that conflict of some sort is inevitable. In that attitude they become spiritual Edomites.

An ecclesiastic who places the glory and power of his position above his duties as a pastor, and uses it to obtain material advantage, is an Edomite. There were many such in past ages and there are some today. Worthless shepherds, who leave the flock, they are called by the prophet Zechariah. A man who takes the name of Christ upon his lips but in his heart is far from him, is an Edomite. The unfaithful steward of Matt. 24 (vs 45-51), who beats his fellow-servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, is an Edomite. The false teachers and seducers of the Pauline epistles are Edomites. Those who malign and vilify their fellow-brethren for supposed errors of doctrine or practice, and manifest anything but the spirit of Christ in their dealings with their fellows whom God has also received, these too are Edomites, for this thing goes very deep. Like Paul, who knew that even if he understood all mysteries, and all knowledge, if he was without love, he was nothing, so we must keep very near to the spirit and teaching of our Master if we too are not to fall under this condemnation.

So the Book of Obadiah has a strong but very necessary message. It reveals the Divine attitude toward all who have taken his name upon their lips unworthily. It shows how He will vindicate his own people in due time and bring retribution upon their oppressors. It declares in no uncertain terms that God is guiding his people's destiny and that in his own due time deliverance will be their portion and judgment that of their enemies.

That does not mean eternal damnation for the judged. More than one sect today proclaims a message of no hope for all who do not accept the peculiar tenets of the particular sect. That is quite in line with the spirit of the old creeds. "*This is the Catholick faith, which unless a man believe, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly*" says one of them. That is not God's design. The vindication of true Christian discipleship at the end of this Age ("*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their father*". Matt. 13. 43) is to be followed by the Millennial reign of Christ in which all who have never heard of him or have never had his

claims properly presented or have ignored him or, like the Edomites, have fought against him, will be subjected to the full force of the persuasive power of Divine love, and only then, as Dr. Paterson Smyth says in his “*Gospel of the Hereafter*” will God, after having put his arms around the sinner and looked into his eyes with his own eyes of unutterable love, and been rejected, will He turn sorrowfully away and leave the sinner to the consequences of his sin.

It is in this light that we must read the prophecy. The doom of the Edomites is complete and final, but the House of Israel is at the last to rule over the House of Esau. The Edomites die as subjects of Esau but they reappear as subjects of Jacob. Edom shall be no more but its citizens shall know another and better rule. “*The kingdom shall be the Lord’s.*” In that there is promise for all, for in that kingdom there is to be Sodom, Gomorrah, Nineveh, all restored to their former estate and having part in the opportunity for salvation. That lies outside the scope of Obadiah’s prophecy; he is concerned only with the immediate picture of judgment, and it is with that picture we are concerned also. And now we will look at Obadiah’s message in detail.

(To be continued)
AOH

THE BEAUTY WITHIN

Bodily health is beautiful. Mental vigour is beautiful. But heart-purity is the glory of all loveliness. The heart makes the life. The inner fashions the outer. So, above all things, be pure-hearted. That you may be pure-hearted let Christ more and more into your life, that he may fill all your soul, and that his Spirit may permeate all your being. That the beauty of the Lord may be upon you, that the winning charm of God’s loveliness may shine in your features, you must first have the beauty of Christ within you. The transfiguration must come from within. Only a holy, beautiful heart can make a holy, beautiful character.

In Green Pastures
J R Miller

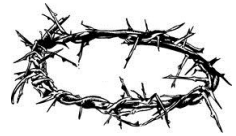
O HAPPY BAND OF PILGRIMS

O HAPPY band of pilgrims,
If onward ye will tread
With Jesus as your Fellow
To Jesus as your Head!

O happy if ye labour
As Jesus did for men:
O happy if ye hunger
As Jesus hunger'd then!



The Cross that Jesus carried
He carried as your due:
The Crown that Jesus weareth
He weareth it for you.



The faith by which ye see Him,
The hope in which ye yearn,
The love that through all troubles
To Him alone will turn.

What are they but His jewels
Of right celestial worth ?
What are they but the ladder
Set up to Heav'n on earth ?



O happy band of pilgrims,
Look upward to the skies,
Where such a light affliction
Shall win so great a prize.



John Mason Neale (1818-1866) penned these words during the 19th Century. He was a Londoner, educated at Sherborne Grammar School and Cambridge University. An excellent classical scholar he was preeminent in translations from Greek rather than Latin. In 1862 he published 'Hymns of the Eastern Church' in which this hymn was first published.

The author of the original Greek hymn was Joseph the Hymnographer (810-886), a native of Sicily who left that island for a monastery in Thessalonica, lived for a time in Constantinople before fleeing the persecution in that ancient city, now in modern day Turkey, for Rome. He was enslaved for many years in Crete having been captured by pirates.

Here are some scriptures which are believed to have been in the mind of the writer;

Philippians 3:10,14 (KJV) That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death...I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 10:34 (NKJV) For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

1 Peter 4:12-13 (NKJV) Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Malachi 3:17 (KJV) And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NKJV) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

TRUE BEAUTY

Beautiful hands are they that do
The work of the noble, good and true,
Busy for them the long day through;
Beautiful faces—they that wear
The light of a pleasing spirit there,
It matters little if dark or fair;
And truly beautiful in God's sight,
Are the precious souls who love the right.

RHODA

A young believer—who believed

It was an unusually important prayer meeting, and Rhoda was there. Although she was only a fifteen-year-old she was as earnest as any of them and just as aware of the calamity that had overtaken them. She sat near the door, at the back of the room, next to sixteen-year-old John, whose mother's house it was in which they were meeting, and bowed her head in reverence as the strong voice of the elder John, leading the meeting, was upraised in supplication. Prayer was being made of the church unceasingly on behalf of Peter, cast into prison by King Herod and in imminent danger of death.

One of the appealing figures of New Testament history is this Rhoda, appearing on the stage with the dancing steps of a child and as quickly tripping off again. That she was barely out of her childhood is apparent from the word used to describe her, "damsel" (*paidiske*) which denotes a girl in late childhood or early youth, but not later. A different word altogether is used in the New Testament for young women of marriageable age. We meet her for just a moment at the memorable prayer meeting held in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. Mary's house was the first centre of the church at Jerusalem and it was in that house that the first believers began to make progress in their new-found faith. Now the little community was faced with a crisis and the brethren had gathered together to make effectual fervent prayer. Whether Rhoda was the daughter of one of the believers and was herself just beginning to make the faith her own, or whether she had come in contact with the preaching of the Apostles independently and was attending the meetings on her own account we have no means of knowing; all we do know is that on this fateful night this young girl, hardly out of her childhood and necessarily quite new to the faith, became the means of impressing upon her elder brethren, at that meeting, and no less upon us, reading the story, several important lessons.

According to Acts 12 Peter, upon being miraculously released from prison in the dead of night by the angel, found himself standing in the darkened streets of Jerusalem. What he had thought, whilst it was happening, to have been a dream, he now found to be reality. It is probable that the intense coldness of the Judean night air quickly demonstrated to the

somewhat lightly clad Apostle that it was no dream. The city was, of course, deserted at that time of night except perhaps for an occasional watchman. The immediate question for Peter was: What next?

Perhaps this is the first point we should take from the incident, one not connected with Rhoda, "When he had considered" Peter turned his steps to the house of Mary (which is traditionally believed to have been just outside the city wall on the south side of Jerusalem). He did so being tolerably certain to find brethren gathered there and that is our first lesson. We do well to be where we can associate with the Lord's disciples, fellow-Christians in the Narrow Way. In seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness we will best advance our spiritual interests by finding our associations, our friendships and companionships, our activities and interests, among those who like us are consecrated to the service of God and are fellow-heirs in the High Calling. The first thing Peter did upon his release, even although it was twelve o'clock at night, was to make his way to the place where he knew there was always open house for the brethren.

It was really a rare compliment that Peter paid Mary in so doing. He might have surmised, but could hardly have definitely known, that there was a prayer meeting in progress at the time of his release, but he evidently had confidence that his welcome at Mary's house would be full and free even in the middle of the night.

So it came about that Peter was presently standing at the gate in the outer wall of the premises, knocking for admittance, and this is where Rhoda comes into the story. Perhaps the entire meeting heard the knocking on the outer gate, maybe only Rhoda heard and slipped out to investigate; in either case, for all her youthful eagerness, it must have been with a certain amount of trepidation that she crossed the courtyard and stood behind the gate, resounding with the thunderous blows which it was very probably suffering under the hands of the impetuous and not always too patient Peter. For all that Rhoda knew, the knocking might be the harbinger of Herod's officers, seeking someone else, or even all of them, to be taken to prison. Peter, however, on the other side of the gate, was probably reasoning that the sooner he got out of the public street and into the cover of the house the better.

So Rhoda's clear young voice, possessing a confidence she probably only

partly felt, ringing out on the still night air, “Who’s there?” was answered by a gruff and well-remembered but at the moment decidedly impatient response “Peter, of course. Let me in!” In her relief from apprehension, and joy that their prayers had been answered, Rhoda most inconsequently left him standing there and ran indoors to tell the others. One can almost imagine the lordly air of John Mark, from all the superiority of his twelve months’ or so advantage in age, remarking “Just like a girl” when it was all over and the explanations were being made.

Now here is the most intriguing part of the story. The assembled brethren did not believe Rhoda. “Peter at the gate: Rubbish” they said “You must be mad”. They knew perfectly well that Peter was in prison and people didn’t get out of Herod’s prisons so easily as that. The girl was imagining things; whoever it was, it couldn’t be Peter. They had been praying unceasingly for Peter’s release, and now they were told he was standing at the gate they refused to believe it. One is really justified in wondering how much of faith was mingled with their prayers. Perhaps though it might be more charitable, and maybe nearer the truth, to assume that these immature and inexperienced Christians had not yet appreciated the true power of prayer. After all, the authority of Herod must have been a very immediate and real thing to their minds. They certainly took a lot of persuading. “*Thou art mad*” they told her. “*But she constantly affirmed that it was even so.*” One can imagine the young girl trying by every artifice of reiteration and emphasis to induce the stubborn grown-ups around her to take her seriously. It would seem from that last expression that the argument went on for some time—evidently the prayer meeting had been temporarily abandoned. Peter, of course, was still knocking but nobody took any notice of that. Finding it impossible to dissuade Rhoda, and being, it would seem, reluctant to test the truth of her news by sending someone else to the gate, the brethren decided that if there was anybody there at all it must be Peter’s guardian angel—speaking apparently with Peter’s voice. “*Then said they, it is his angel.*” The early Christians had a very intense and definite belief in the existence of guardian angels, though why they should expect an angel to stand out in the street knocking for admittance does not readily appear.

“*But Peter continued knocking*”—probably definitely thunderous knocking by now, so that at last for very shame’s sake they had to open the door: “*and when they saw him, they were astonished*”. This is the only

place in all the Scriptures where a company of believers joining in supplicatory prayer are stated to have been astonished at receiving the object of their petition!

So Peter took charge of the assembly, and what had started as a prayer meeting ended in a stirring exhortation from one who by his very presence there evidenced how God can deal with the devices and plans of evil men in his own way and deliver his own people when it is his Will.

The meeting broke up; Peter, a free man, went his way; and Rhoda drops out of the story. The New Testament does not mention her again. Did she hold to the faith and in after years become one of the noble matrons who graced the Christian Church with their labours of love and good works? We do not know. Whether she lived the remainder of her days in Jerusalem and perhaps was one of the Christian community which witnessed the fall of the city when Titus besieged it some forty years later, or in later life found herself at Antioch, at Ephesus, or maybe at Alexandria in Egypt with John Mark who we know ended his days as Elder of the Church in that city, we have no idea. All we know of Rhoda is that she was the only one in that prayer meeting quick-witted enough to realise that the united fervent and unceasing prayer had been answered, and having given us that one brief glimpse of unquestioning simple faith she moves off the stage and is lost. But what we have seen is perhaps enough to give rise to some hope and expectation that in a day yet to be, when we have become citizens of the celestial land, among those whom we shall meet and recognise as our forerunners in the Narrow Way, we shall come face to face with “a damsel called Rhoda”.

AOH

CHARACTER

Character is what you are when no one is watching.

The character development of a person starts in the crib.

Character is the sum total of all our habits, whether good or bad.

Character is property; it is the noblest of possessions.

Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

FROM A PRISON CELL

4. Chosen in Him

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” (Eph. 1.4).

One of the most wonderful and astonishing of these great thoughts with which the Epistle to the Ephesians begins is that embodied in the words of the text. Quoting the small section in full, we read: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love, having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself”* (vs. 3-5 RV).

There is far too much in this short section for this present study, and we must confine attention to just the few words in the head text, for they contain much food for reflective thought. It is a wonderful and solemnising thought to realise that the faithful of this Gospel Age have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and that we, also, of these strenuous days, if found faithful unto death, may also win Christ and be found “in him” when the ever living God makes up the number of his elect.

The context tells of many great positions of authority and power created for those high heavenly beings which were brought forth to be helpers and assistants to the first-born Son of God in the great Plan entrusted to his care, and into which they will enter in the fullest sense, when all things in heaven and earth are “headed-up” by Christ. In the words of the text Paul has transcendentally great news for those from the human family who follow faithfully in the footsteps of their beloved Lord. In the unfathomable depths of ages gone by the same almighty sovereign God who framed the great all-comprehensive universal plan for the various gradations of heavenly beings also foreordained that a company of earthly beings, born as members of a fallen race, should be redeemed from the power of sin and death, and follow their Saviour and Redeemer from the confines of this terrestrial plane up into the highest place of the heavenly realms to be his own family of sons. This phase of the Divine intention took shape at the same time that Divine wisdom devised the great Plan for the heavenly

realms—that is, it took shape even before the creation of the heavenly beings, for their respective places in the Plan. By this fact we are informed that ages before man was created, God had purposed that man should be created. And by the same evidence it was foreseen that circumstances would arise among men whereby a way would be opened so that beings of a lower sentient plane could be transformed and carried up to a higher plane. There must be some deep and unique reason for this procedure, otherwise, like all the native members of the heavenly hosts, they could have been created, at first move, in those heavenly realms. To be first born as men, and then changed and adapted afterwards to heavenly conditions is an experience without parallel in the vast creative Plan. So far as one can say, there can be no other reason for such a course than to give them contact with sin, on the lowest plane where the evil moral consequences of sin could be experienced and understood; and then for some great purpose, too deep at present to understand, have been lifted up to the highest place as companions and brethren of the first-born Son. Divine foreknowledge was fully equal to the task of knowing that man would fall into sin, and be allowed to die, and framing its Plans accordingly. That knowledge would not implicate the Divine Creator as conniving in man's fall any more than that He was responsible for Satan's fall. With full knowledge of the heavenly realms and of universal law, Satan fell by deliberate choice. He exercised the freedom of his will, and decided to rebel against high authority. So also did man—though within more circumscribed circumstances.

Divine foreknowledge could foresee the fatal swing away from righteousness of man's free-will, and planned to save man from the consequences of his fatal choice, and under the same circumstances call from among man's progeny a company to be transformed and then transferred to the higher sphere. Right back there in that distant past God purposed that man should be redeemed, and at that distant time made choice of One to be man's Redeemer. That is what Peter says when he writes: "*...ye were redeemed...with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ: who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world.*" (1 Pet. 1. 18-20 RV). This statement is an exact parallel to the words of Eph. 1. 4-7. Right back there in the unfathomable depths of time God purposed that man should be redeemed, and not only so, but that from among fallen men he would invite such as were right-hearted before him to follow His well-beloved Son through death to his

heavenly throne. This is what Jesus means in his great committal prayer. *“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. . . Father, that which (those whom) thou hast given me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”* (John 17. 5 KJV and 24RV).

This is the transcendental thought that amazes all who can comprehend it, and stirs their hearts to the very depths with emotion too deep for words. It is not easy to think back into those distant times and ponder on the Divine purposing, but, whether we can comprehend it or not, this inheritance in Christ was made secure by the sovereign will of God. And, more wonderful still, the fore-ordination of this purposing actually gave God joy and delight. Long ages before He would look upon this company of sons, God found pleasure in anticipating the days of their coming, and in the good pleasure of his Will deliberately ordained and chose this company and arranged its acceptance into his presence through his well-beloved Son. That great pleasure sprang out of his great love for his unborn family, for it was “in love” that He predestined it to be adopted. That all-seeing eye of God could look forward down the long distance of time, and as He saw what would come to pass among men as the story of his grace was told, He felt the warm movements of his loving heart expand towards those who believed and responded to his call.

Full sonship and full access to the Father’s glorious presence belong to a later day, when every trace of sin and selfishness has been cleansed away, and when the clinging tendrils of this earth have been cut away once for all. No trace of unholy thought or defiling desire can be carried up into his heavenly home. Hence his future sons must be set free from these undesirable things here and now. To that end He most graciously forgives their sins—covering them with the precious blood of the worthy Lamb of God—and thus looks upon them approvingly through the abundant merit of his Son.

Then, to help them break the power of sin in their lives God has sent his Holy Spirit into their hearts, as a source of energy and strength, upon which they can draw in time of need. It is as though the Divine hand reached down to snap all the fetters of sin and to lift his prospective child over every stone and obstacle, by making every right impulse and desire

stronger every day, and impressing the minds of his beloved with firmer resolve to live always and only for this purpose of God. Thus, holiness is engendered in the adopted one's heart—first, a desire to be free from sin; next, a determined resolve to become devoted in every sense and degree to the Will and purpose of his Father and his God. Thus holiness becomes complete.

Who would not go through fire and flood, and fight down every foe, for such an inheritance as this? Who would not relinquish every earthly prize and count it as unworthy refuse to win such a place in Christ? Do we wonder that Paul writes words which glow with living fire, as he contemplates what that future inheritance will mean (Phil. 3. 17-21).

God grant this thought to lie heavily on our hearts so that in the few years of this earthly life it may penetrate and permeate us through and through with deeper longing to be accounted worthy to go up into the higher realms to see and share the glory of the worthy Lamb.

To be concluded
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THE COMING OF THE KING

1. The Purpose of the Second Advent

A series of studies concerning the Second Advent

“ . . . sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead...”

So runs the well-known Creed; most Christians pay lip-service to the words even although many give but little attention to the fundamental truth it enshrines, and some do not even believe that the event will ever happen. The doctrine of the Second Advent lies under a double cloud; in the first place the Augustinian theology, of a post-Millennial Advent requiring the world to be converted and the Church to rule the nations before Christ comes, is still, after fifteen centuries, the accepted standard. In the second place the failure of many unjustified expectations of the Advent, unjustified largely owing to incorrect systems of Biblical interpretation, has had the effect of bringing the subject into general disrepute, both among Christians and non-Christians. Despite the sincerity and fervour of the not inconsiderable body of Christian students who do maintain and preach the certainty of the Second Advent these two factors still preclude the Christian's brightest hope, as it has been called, from becoming an accepted object of prayer and expectation in Christian communities generally. Every time that the Lord's prayer is repeated the worshippers voice their plea *“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”*, but all too often they either miss the purport of the words or do not really mean them. Jesus Christ made it perfectly clear that the only means by which either element in the prayer can be realised is his personal return to the world of man to bring sin and death to an end and complete the Divine purpose for this terrestrial creation.

Much of this apathy and scorn is directly due to the failure of Christian thought to keep up-to-date. Apart from the work of a minority of ministers and students and relatively minor groups there has been no change in the understanding of the subject or in the terms in which it is visualised and expressed for upwards of a thousand years. The general idea is still, as it was in mediaeval times, that upon a certain future day Christ will appear visibly, descending from the sky in human form to the accompaniment of angelic trumpets, for the purpose of conducting the “Last Assize” when—all during the scope of a solar day of twenty-four earth hours—He will

raise the dead, examine every human being as to the deeds done in this life, take the worthy back with him to heavenly glory and consign the remainder, the unregenerate, to everlasting damnation, rounding off the process by the destruction of this earth and all material things in a universal conflagration. About the only concession to modern thought which this century has made is to express some doubt as to whether after all the fires of Hell are literal—and quite a few very sincere and worthy ministers still insist that they are! The idea of purpose in creation, or the use God will make of the redeemed after all this is over, is not so much as broached; neither is in fact that whereas the Fifth century, or the Fifteenth, for that matter, had no idea that the universe contained anything else besides this earth and the sun as its satellite, we now know that the creation is vaster by far than our minds can conceive. To think that the Deity can be satisfied with bringing into existence a handful of creatures on this speck of dust which we call earth when even men today are hoping and planning to do great things in remote parts of outer space is no evidence of Christian intelligence. It is rather an indication of unthinking egocentricism.

The necessity—that the certainty—of the Second Advent stems from the purpose of human creation. Man has been destined to occupy a definite and unique place in the Divine scheme of things. No other conceivable order of sentient beings, fitted as they might be for their own ordained place, can or will fill the position intended for man. The Bible does in fact indicate that the mode of existence we know is not the only one; that this earth is not the only scene of life, that there is at the very least one other world not perceptible by human senses, the citizens of which are always and altogether in absolute harmony with each other and with God—so much so that the ideal is set before men that God's will might eventually be universally accepted here as it is there. The main principle of the Second Advent, then, is that it is the process by which that object is to be accomplished.

The Second Advent is the logical—and necessary—sequel to the First advent. This is not the place to enter upon a consideration of the philosophy of the Atonement, and there is much in that tremendous subject which even yet is far from clear. The Scriptures are positive that enduring life can only come to man through Christ, involving intelligent acceptance of the fact and full acquiescence in the Will of God, and that in order to

recover men from the power and effect of evil it was necessary that Christ allow himself to be put to death, giving his life a willing offering for the benefit of humanity. But the death and resurrection of Christ occurred nearly two thousand years ago, and today the world seems farther from the Divine ideal than ever. Obviously there is a further chapter in the book before the finale, another scene in the drama which has to be enacted before all that was ensured by the life and death of Christ blossoms and fruits into the reality of human maturity, and the dark shadow of evil flees, to return no more. That chapter, that scene, is the Second Advent.

The intervening time, this Christian era, between the two Advents, has not been a time of inactivity. It is seeing the development, and will see the completion, of the Christian Church. There is still a lot of rather hazy thinking over this question of the Church and many still follow St. Augustine in hoping and working for the time when the whole world of man shall be included within its membership. That hope seemed logical enough in the great theologian's time when Christianity was expanding by leaps and bounds and seemed destined to assume the reins of world control, but it appears a forlorn hope now when non Christianity is increasing faster, relatively to the increase in world population, than Christianity. The whole concept is in error. The New Testament presentation defines the Church as that company of convinced and dedicated followers of Christ in this Age who will become his lieutenants and agents in the work of world conversion and reconstruction in the next—the Age of the Second Advent. Once that fact is realised it can the more easily be seen why the New Testament says that the "*saints*"—the Church—shall "*judge the world*" (1 Cor. 6. 2) in that Age; that they shall "*live and reign with Christ a thousand years*" (Rev. 20. 4). There has always been a degree of perplexity among expositors of the older school over the apparent anomaly of nations remaining on earth to be ruled *after* the Day of Judgment and the resurrection of the Church, when, according to the old theology, earth's affairs are finally wound up. Jesus' words in Matt. 19. 28 concerning his disciples ruling and administering his laws during the "regeneration", which means a giving of new life, at a time when according to medieval theology all opportunity for gaining new life had gone because the Second Coming was a matter of the past, does not easily fit into current theology. But when it is seen that the Second Advent and the Millennium are synonymous terms so far as time is concerned and that the Day of Judgment involves more, far more, than the mere arraignment of

men before a tribunal and passing judicial sentence on their past misdeeds, the door is opened to a wider and far more rational and satisfying view of God's purposes.

The Second Advent, then, should be viewed as a period, a span of time during the whole of which the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ is manifested in the earth, in power, in a manner which has not been true of preceding times. This period commences as this present Christian Age draws to its close and continues until the Divine purpose is fully realised, until every man who can be persuaded to yield himself and his life and his potentialities into full acquiescence with the will and purpose of God has so done, until every trace of sin and evil has been banished from human society, until not one remains among all of God's human creatures who is not consciously, intelligently, willingly—yea, and enthusiastically—in fullest possible accord with his plans and designs. Everlasting life is a conception almost too hard for the human mind to grasp; everlasting continuance in the growth of knowledge, in the accumulation of experience, in achievement following achievement, is an idea even more difficult to receive, but nothing less than this is the destiny of every man,—if he will, for God will coerce no man, and loyalty to him and cooperation with him must be of love and freewill not of fear and compulsion. So there may be some at the end who will not accept life in this creation which is all of God, and will deliberately cast away the blessing of conscious existence. But of those who align themselves with the Divine standards it shall be true that, as Isaiah the prophet foretold twenty-five centuries ago, "*the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*" (Isa. 35. 10). For this will be the consequence of the Second Advent.

The commencement of the Advent, the time at which it must be said that the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the earth has become a fact, obviously implies that this present world-age dominated by man is then approaching its imminent end. There is no need to tie this down to specific years and dates—the endeavour to do that in the past has led to some mass disappointments and invoked a certain amount of ridicule upon a good many quite sincere people who started as prophetic students and finished up as prophets. It is much safer and altogether more satisfactory to take note of the order of events and the nature of the

various factors which go to make up the work of the Second Advent. The first overt act—and this is stressed repeatedly in the New Testament—is the resurrection or “change” of the Church, the joining of all those dedicated believers, of whatever generation between Pentecost and the end, to the Lord in Heaven. St. Paul describes this in 1 Cor. 15 as a change from the terrestrial state of being to the celestial, a change not only of habitat but also of nature. The celestial is of a superior and totally different order of being, and the celestial world, as real to its own citizens as the earth is to humanity, is one in which powers and potentialities, and consequently activities and achievements, are upon an immensely wider basis than are those of man upon earth. Since the Church is to have a great deal to do with the work of Christ in the earth during his Advent it is obvious that this change to spiritual conditions must precede the visible establishment of the Messianic Kingdom and the commencement of the Millennium.

The second aspect of the Advent, and one that must become evident in its early days, involves that restraint and overthrow of the powers of evil in the world which must logically precede the open manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ in power. The rule of the Millennial Age is to be a righteous and just rule in which men may live their lives and go about their business in peace and security without the threats and dangers of oppression, violence and war which overshadow life as it is lived in the present. That means not only the supersession of present day political and commercial powers by the superior power of Christ but the suppression of all those harmful institutions and petty forms of evil which wreak such havoc upon the ordinary man. The Divine rule of that coming day is “*They shall not hurt nor destroy*” (Isa. 65. 25) and the power of the Prince of Peace will be abroad in the earth to ensure that condition. There must therefore be expected, at the beginning of the Advent period and therefore more or less at the ending of this present Age, a joining of battle between the incoming forces of righteousness and the doomed forces of evil in the earth. This is depicted in many a strongly metaphorical passage of Scripture—the descent of the Rider on the white horse from Heaven to do battle with the kings of all the earth in Revelation 19, the binding of Satan with a great chain in Revelation 20, the revealing of the Lord from heaven in a setting of storm and tempest to execute judgment upon all things evil, in Daniel 7 and 2 Thess. 1, the consuming and destruction of the “Man of Sin” by the spirit of the Lord’s mouth and the radiance of his presence in

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2 Thess. 2, and many others. The reality behind the Biblical “Armageddon” is nothing so grossly material as a mere blood bath of contending military forces—it is the final conflict at the end of this Age when the defenders of earth’s corrupt and doomed systems of oppression and injustice find all their boasted strength powerless against the heavenly weapons of earth’s new Ruler—weapons they can neither understand nor overcome.

It is only when this suppression of the powers of evil has been accomplished that the revelation of the returned Christ to all men can take place. This is the supreme hour when, to adopt Scriptural metaphor, the Son of Man takes his seat upon his throne of glory and before him are gathered all nations. This is the third stage of the Advent and the one which is to endure throughout the whole period of the Messianic Age, until its close when the Son shall have “*delivered up the Kingdom to...the Father...that God may be all in all*” (1 Cor. 15. 24-28). But that will be when the entire work of the Advent has been completed, when the Day of Judgment has run its course and is at an end. At the time the King takes his place upon the throne of his glory that consummation is still a thousand years away. In the meantime the whole world of man is to come under a system of education and discipline such as never has been dreamed of before, and the laws of Creation, which are the laws of God, made plain to all so that none may ever be able to plead ignorance or inability. This is the truth which lies behind all the vividly materialistic pictures of the Messianic Kingdom in the Old Testament—the lion shall lie down with the lamb and so forth—and the more sober statements of the New Testament which depict the dead of this world rising to newly awakened consciousness, hearing the voice of the Son of God calling them from their graves, and taking their stand before the Great White Throne of Rev. 20 (v.11) to have the standards of Divine Law set before them for final acceptance or rejection—the “judgment” of the “book of life”.

An adequate perception of the manner in which Christ is manifested to mankind during his Second Advent rests upon a careful consideration of much Scriptural metaphor and analogy and its relation to what is known of the celestial order of existence. Jesus Christ appeared on earth in human form in the days of his First Advent for a purpose that was at that time fulfilled. His position as supreme over the whole of Divine creation, which it were the height of conceit on man’s part to imagine could not

ultimately embrace intelligent beings physically different from man but equally children of God and made in his image and likeness, precludes the dogmatic assertion that He must of necessity retain human form or lineaments. His presence could conceivably be visibly manifested through chosen earthly instruments exerting his authority and representing him amongst men, and his Advent still be as real as if his Person was visible to human eyes. A clear understanding of the relation between the celestial and the terrestrial worlds and their respective orders of life, and of the manner as well as the purpose and time of our Lord's Return, is very necessary to the Christian who would be like the "*scribe... instructed unto the Kingdom of heaven*" mentioned by Jesus, who "*bringeth forth out of his treasure (storeroom) things new and old*" (Matt. 13. 52) and truly understand the significance of the day in which he lives and his own position in relation to the Divine Plan.

That is why Jesus laid so much stress upon watchfulness. "*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*" (Matt. 25. 13). "*What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch*" (Mark 13. 37). He likened the Second Advent to the days of Noah. Men would go about their customary pursuits, eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, heedless of the signs that a new and hitherto unknown power was coming into earth's affairs, for deliverance on the one hand, for judgment on the other, to bring an old decaying world to an end and establish a new, virile, youthful one. All too often do men think of the Deluge story as one of unreasoning Divine petulance with a sinful world and a wrathful destruction; in reality the story is one of clearing the ground for a fresh start. That is the position today. Christ comes, not to sweep the earth away with a besom (broom) of destruction and end all further hope of human development and achievement, but to replace this admittedly very unsatisfactory order of things by a "*new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3. 13), under which all who so will may attain the Divine ideal and enter upon their inheritance. Only when that consummation has been attained may it be said that "*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth and. . . every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2. 10-11). Only then will the day of the Second Advent come to an end and be merged with eternity, into which will enter the sons of men, mature at last and fitted for their destined place in creation.

The source of all this is in the Bible. To some degree it is in the Old Testament and to a much greater extent in the New. There is much of immature and old conceptions to unlearn and discard; a certain amount of unhelpful modern thought also to reject. There is a great deal to be gathered from the painstaking and careful examination of the many passages which deal with one or another of the several aspects of the Second Advent, and the relating of these to the light of modern knowledge. This will be the object of succeeding chapters. The subject is one of far-reaching importance; today, more than ever before, there is a need for clarity of vision and sound conviction on the age-old expectation of the Church—our Lord's Return.

(to be continued)

AOH



“WITH CHRIST APART”

Have you and I today
Stood silent as with Christ apart from joy or fray
Of life, to see His face
To look, if but a moment at its grace
And grow, by brief companionship more true,
More nerved to lead, to dare, to do,
For Him at any cost? Have we today
Found time in thought our hand to lay
In His, and thus compare
His will with ours, and wear
The impress of His wish? Be sure,
Such contact will endure
Throughout the day, will help us walk erect
Thru storms and flood; detect
Within the hidden life, sins dross its stains;
Revive our thoughts of love for Him again;
Steady the steps which waver; help us see
The footpath meant for you and me.

Poems of The Way

PREPARING FOR THE KINGDOM

Part 2 of 2

Serious Training as in a race

Hebrews 12. 1 (NIV) tells us to *“Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and... run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”* We must throw away the weights that handicap us, those weights that may be harmless, in themselves, but which hold us back. It may be any of the hundred and one little things in our lives that can slow us down. As Augustine said, *“beware how you regard as trifling, faults which appear of little consequence. You weigh them and think them nothing; but count them up and you would be frightened by their number.”* We MUST have a singleness of purpose. We must run—not like someone breaking into a gentle trot because they are a few minutes late for an appointment—but with the resoluteness of a sprinter who is determined that he’s going to win the gold medal at the Olympic Games.

Paul put it like this; *“Run in such a way as to get (win) the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”* (1 Cor. 9. 24 -25 NIV)

So we should look on ourselves as in training. An athlete in serious training is disciplined in all things—to an almost incredible degree; using the most rigorous self-control in food, sleep, and every indulgence: and he does this so as to be in peak condition. And, says Paul, the reason we should do this is so that we’re not disqualified for the prize. The object of the athlete’s training is to make himself as fit and as perfect in his performance as possible: and so our aim should be to work to make ourselves as perfect in our obedience to GOD as it is possible for us, as humans, to be. Paul also uses the athletic simile of striving to win the prize in Philippians 3. After warning them to ignore the Jews who were trying to persuade them that they should obey the law and be circumcised, he tells them that he once behaved like a perfect Jew but that he gave up all such ideas, because of his faith in Christ. He says; *“I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is*

through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (v.8 -9 ASV) “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus.” (v.12 ASV)

His old way of life he had found to be useless and he knew that he certainly wasn't perfect as yet but he says in verses 13 and 14; this *“one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which GOD has called me heavenward in Christ”* (Philippians 3. 13 – 14. NIV).

Like Paul, we must put behind us all those mistakes we've made in the past: mistakes for which, if we've genuinely repented, then through our faith in Jesus, God will forgive us. We must forget all the things that are behind—the things in our past life. We mustn't be content with the things we've achieved in the past, or with our present measures of grace. In the everyday routine of life it's so easy to sink into a state of lethargy, but if we're going to win a Heavenly crown we must be continually reaching forward, stretching ourselves out, even more, towards our goal, in our great concern to become more and more Christ-like.

Hebrews 12, seems to take the simile one step further by suggesting that we're taking part in a long distance race and because we have been running for a long time, we're getting tired. We don't want to lose the race, or fall out of it, so he encourages us to overcome our weakness by saying, in verses 12 and 13 (NIV), come on; *“Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet.”*

The idea here seems to be that we're so tired that just a little obstacle in our way is enough to discourage us so that we're tempted to take the easy way and go round it instead of overcoming it. Not only should we move away from our path the obstructions that might make us fall from the way, but we should also note the words at the end of verse 13 (KJV); *“lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.”*

We're not just to make things easier for ourselves, but we're to think of our weaker brethren and help them in the race, by encouraging them and by our example to them. Not that we can run it for them, but we can make sure that we don't make the race more difficult for them than it already is.

As were told in Proverbs 4. 23-27 (MKJV) *“Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from you a wicked mouth, and devious lips put far from you. Let your eyes look right on, and let your eyelids look straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right hand nor to the left; remove your foot from evil.”*

In the race for the prize of the High Calling in Christ Jesus we need light, and the way of the righteous is light; Christ is that Way, and He is the Light. We won't be perfect till we are gathered together and taken to heaven, but there we shall shine as the sun. But shining is always costly. Light comes only at the cost of that which produces it. An unlit candle doesn't shine, it must burn before it can give light. So many want to shine without with being burnt: they forget that there can be no crown unless there is first a cross. So if we're to shine we need perseverance: we must always keep our hearts and minds set on the end in view. Remember that it's the last step that wins the race: and if we think of the pilgrim's progress, there was no place where danger lurked more than in the region close by the portals of the Celestial City. It was there that Doubting Castle stood and it was there that the enchanted ground lured the weary traveller to fatal slumber. It's when the prize is almost within our grasp that the adversary is most persistent. It's then that he tries to make us say we'll never be good enough to gain the prize. But remember the words of the apostle in Ephesians 2. 6-10 (MKJV) that God; *“has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

It's not we who are good enough, we're God's workmanship. He is moulding us and if we say we aren't good enough then we're questioning God's ability to do what He purposed and we're giving Satan a victory. We must place our full confidence in the Father knowing that, as we're told in Ephesians 3. 20 (MKJV), He *“is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”*. Our great aim must be to run and not to faint because as the Lord told Habakkuk to write, *“The vision is still for*

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an appointed time, but it speaks to the end, and it does not lie. Though it lingers, wait for it; because it will surely come. It will not tarry” (Hab. 2.3 MKJV), which means that victory will come provided that we hold on to the end.

Be Ready

There’s an urgency needed in making our preparations if we’re to gain the prize of the high Calling in Christ Jesus because Matthew records that Jesus Himself said; *“Therefore watch; for you do not know what hour your Lord comes.”* (Matt. 24.42 MKJV)

In the past, many have said that Jesus might have come even before now. Their emphasis on the warning given in Matt. 24. 44 that you must, *“be ready, for in that hour you think not, the Son of Man comes,”* were very honestly given because, according to their reading of the scriptures, they were quite certain that He COULD come at any minute, although they would also, had they been asked, have said that He didn’t HAVE to come quite so quickly. It’s true that there are scriptures that tell us that there are a number of events that have to occur before He comes to the earth with His Saints. However there are no scriptures that say exactly when He is going to come for His Church: we only know that when He does come the world will be absorbed in its usual occupations, and that it will be at a time when we think it can’t happen. So because no intelligent believer can be expected to be constantly on the alert so as to be ready for our Lord’s imminent return when that event cannot be anything but a long way off, it must be obvious that since Jesus repeatedly said that we must be ready because; *“you do not know what hour your Lord comes,”* then His coming for the Church has to be an unexpected occurrence. In fact this instruction to be ready is so important that Jesus told no fewer than six parables warning us of its urgency.

However there’s another reason why we should always be ready. Think for a moment about our Lord’s story of the prosperous farmer, told in Luke 12. 16-20. This man, either by his own efforts or through the providence of God, had amassed a very considerable fortune from his farming and now he planned to sit back with his feet up and spend the rest of his life in luxury. He had no thought for anything but his own peace and comfort. What he didn’t allow for was the uncertainty of life, because that night he died. That is why we should always be ready.

The message, in this parable, is a powerful warning to examine our behaviour so that whether the footsteps coming to our door are those of Our Lord or those of the Angel of death, when the knock comes we're ready for the door to be opened. We must be prepared, as the brothers of many years ago said, to meet Him NOW. Those old brothers weren't mistaken when they taught that we must always be ready. The ones who are mistaken are those who think that our Lord's coming for His Church is so far away that they let it have no effect on their lives. They forget that no one really knows if we'll see another day before our time is up.

Talking about Jesus coming again for His Bride, John tells us in Chapter 14, that Jesus said; *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? And if I am going away to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will welcome you into my presence, so that you may be where I am”*. (vs. 1-3 ISV) There are three words here of which we should take special note. The words your, **heart** and **troubled**. Our Lord is telling us that however much others may be overwhelmed with the sorrows of this present time, we need not be concerned. His followers, more than any others, should keep their minds peaceful, when everyone else is uneasy. Then we're reminded that our minds should always be full of trust in God and His provision for us and that He gives perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in Him. Lastly, the word troubled tells us that whatever happens to us, there is no need for us to be cast down and agitated because we have a Saviour—our Lord Jesus—who loves us and who gave His life for us.

He is preparing a place

We have a truly precious promise, from the very lips of our Lord Himself. Not only is He going to come again, but all those who have become adopted children of God and joint heirs with Christ, He will take back with Him to His Father's house where He is preparing a place for them. Our Lord is, once more, using the picture of the eastern custom of marriage that He gave in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, who were waiting for the bridegroom to come to collect his bride and then take her back to his father's house. He says that in His Father's house there are many rooms. There are many to be taken there: and rooms represent lasting dwelling places. This promise of our Lord can be one of our

greatest comforts, because we know that He will finish that which He starts. But there is something else in His promise. It also means that if He has prepared a place for us, He will also prepare us so that we're fit for the great privilege of being in that place.

Speaking about this promise of our Lord's, John tells us; "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope on him purifies himself, even as that One is pure." (1 John 3.2-3 MKJV)

But as we try to obey our LORD'S commands and seek to do His will, so as to be ready and to be fit to be a part of His Bride, we get setbacks. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that we shouldn't worry about these, since they are a part of the Lord's discipline. We are disciples of our Lord, and discipline and discipleship are two sides of the same forward movement of the mind. The disciple is not a mere follower as so many imagine. Thousands followed, and still follow Christ, without being disciples. The disciple puts himself under the discipline of the Master in order that he might learn from him. Jesus taught His followers to be humble and contrite of heart: trusting God for everything, whether it be for our daily bodily needs or the virtues that are to be developed in our character.

Our Heavenly Father doesn't cause our troubles but He does allow them to happen, according to HIS will and knowledge of what is needed for the further development of our Spiritual lives. These disciplines may come in the shape of illness, the loss of a loved one, or of our job, or any of the thousand and one disappointments and griefs which come into our lives. And although we almost certainly don't like them, they are a very necessary part of our character building and are an evidence that our Heavenly Father loves us and that, through our faith in Jesus, He has accepted us as a son because; "The Lord corrects the people he loves and disciplines those he calls his own." (Hebrews 12. 6 CEV).

The sons of God must walk by the faith for which we are to earnestly contend and live by the hope and the earnest desire, for the revelation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Then the fact that we are the sons of God will become obvious by our likeness to our Head. We shall be transformed into the same image as Jesus. We shall be like Him, and just

as all sons have a substantial resemblance to their father, and Christ, whom we shall be like, is “*the express image of our heavenly Father’s person*” it means that in resembling Christ, we shall also resemble the Father.

Paul says “*We all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord’s Spirit.*” (2 Cor. 3.18 MKJV) Which means that this transforming process is already taking place in us because the veil of ignorance has been taken away by our belief in Jesus.

This tells us that the work of building our character is going on all the time. From a thousand sources come the influences that make it grow: The lessons we get from others, the influences that friends exert on us, the truths we discover in our reading, the impressions which life leaves on us, and most of all, the inspiration we receive from the Holy Spirit. The work never stops from the time we first believe until the time we fall asleep. So; “*Consider it pure joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask GOD, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1.2-5 NIV) Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that GOD has promised to those who love Him.*” (James 1.12 NIV)

JH

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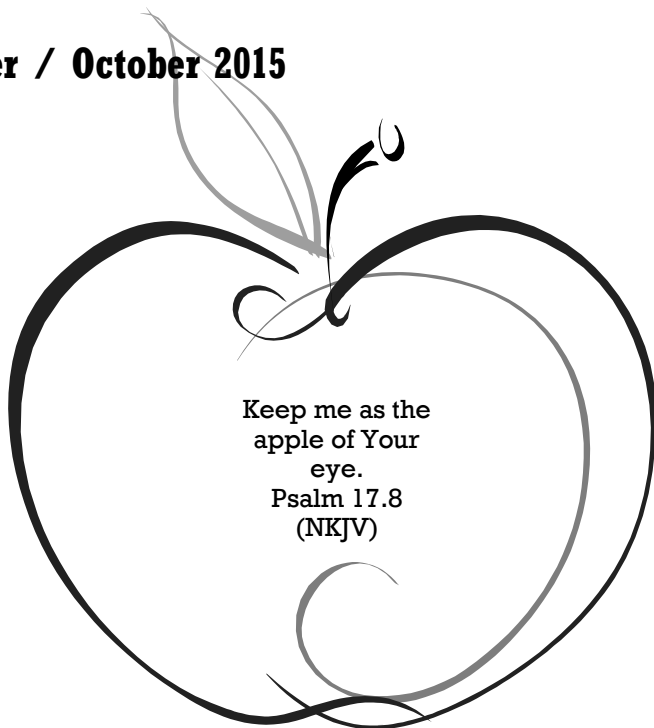
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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Keep me as the
apple of Your
eye.

Psalm 17.8
(NKJV)

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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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 APPLE OF HIS EYE

To be the apple of someone's eye, according to the urban dictionary is to be someone's 'favourite person' or the 'one you love the most'. The expression or saying is used a number of times in the Old Testament such as the scripture in Psalm 17 on the front cover of this issue. It appears to be an idiom or saying that would have been used in the Hebrew language too. A more literal definition of this is as a 'pupil' as in the eye. This ties up well with the old English expression where the pupil of the eye was called the 'apple of the eye'.

Israel and the progeny of Jacob are also 'the apple of his eye' (Deut. 32. 9 -10). They were preserved and survived bondage in Egypt and the forty years they wandered the wilderness in Sinai. In later years they were protected like King David was and given hope for the future by prophets such as Habakkuk and Obadiah. They survive today in the lot of land we know now as Israel and that was in previous generations called Palestine and prosper there today despite the unfavourable circumstances they found themselves in 1945. Nowadays they export fruit as well as other goods and services.

The pupil of the eye is a very remarkable part of the body. Sight is one of the five senses. The eye is also vulnerable which is why there are eyelids and eyelashes to protect it at night and during the day. Perhaps this element of protection was in David's mind when writing Psalm 17?

It is also possible to see your own image in someone else's eye if you are close enough. Perhaps this is just coincidental. But this shows the closeness of the relationship one may have with the other. Men and women generally are not comfortable letting another person to invade their personal space unless they are emotionally close to that person. It would imply that there is love in the relationship whether that basis be as a family member or close friend. The twelve disciples of Jesus had a close relationship to their Master. John is usually mentioned at this point but there were others like Simon the Canaanite.

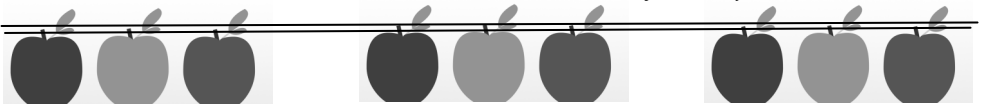
Proverbs 7.2 tells us to keep God's commandments and law as the apple of our eye. This may seem a surprising instruction unless it is related to God's attribute of love and reminding us that we are commanded to love the Lord our God, one another and our neighbour. This is an uplifting commandment in this day and age when we listen to and read reports of gun crime, terrorist attacks in all continents against foreigners and fellow citizens for many apparent reasons. Yet the message to keep close in this day and age is simply to love.

THE STRONGER LOVE

All earthly love is as a thread of gold,
Most fair but what the touch of time may sever:
But His is a cable sure, of strength untold
O, His love, it lasteth ever!

And this great love he will on thee bestow
The fullness of his grace make known,
Earnest of glory grant thee here below
If thou wilt be his own! Mal. 3.6

Poems of the Way



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.

PROSPERITY - ADVERSITY

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity (evil) consider. God also hath set the one over against the other, to the intent that man should discover somewhat at his latter end” (Eccl. 7. 14).

The final phrase in that verse is not as rendered in the A.V. As there presented, it declares that God has arranged prosperity and adversity in order that man should find nothing at the end. That does not make sense, and in consequence this verse has been one of the obscure statements of Scripture. But modern Hebrew Bibles omit the prefix *lo* which is the negative, so that *lo-meumah*, meaning “nothing”, becomes *meumah* which means “something, anything, somewhat”. Now this opens the way to a notable reflection on the Divine way with man and the permission of evil. Prosperity and adversity have been set by God “*the one against the other*”, as though effecting the balancing of a scale by equal weights, “*to the intent that man should discover somewhat at his latter end*”. Prosperity and adversity in the Old Testament are indistinguishable from good and evil; the same Hebrew words—*tob* and *ra*—do duty for both ideas. The age-old question “Why does evil exist; why does God permit evil?” is answered in this verse, but man does not find the answer until his “latter end”.

In the day of prosperity be joyful! There is good reason for accepting such of the good things of this life as come our way with joy and thanksgiving, and making use of them to the fullest degree. These things are the gifts of God, part of the design He has drawn up for the life of man. There is nothing meritorious in rejecting them for the sake of a too sombre view of religious devotion. And they can be means in our hands for the greater benefit of others. The Divine intention is for the happiness of mankind and in the final outworking that intention will be fully achieved. In the meantime we do well to make full use of such means of happiness as are afforded us by life as it is.

In the day of adversity be thoughtful and reflective! At such times life is of necessity lived in a minor key. The outward signs of exuberance can hardly be expected and are perhaps not appropriate, even although there is peace and content in the heart. This is the time for a more than usual quiet

contemplation of the work of God both in the individual life and in the world. Adversity can develop character in a manner that the mere bestowment of gifts and blessings can never do. The fires of affliction can purify and temper a man's inner being so that he emerges at the end a better man than he would ever have been otherwise. Adversity tests and proves a man's inward strength; as Solomon said in Prov. 24. 10 "*If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.*"

After this acceptance of the sunshine and shadow of life's experiences, the man is still left without the final achievement or even the final answer. There is a Divine law of recompense as there is one of retribution—what a man soweth that shall he also reap—but in neither case does the final balancing of accounts take place in this life. That must wait until man's latter end—which is of course really a new beginning, for there is much to come beyond the present proverbial threescore years and ten. One might ask why God does not give a more evident revelation of these things to man and so save the doubt and perplexity and unbelief. The answer to that is surely that too clear a revelation now would stultify (impede) man's progress toward that understanding which alone will make him fit for the life of the eternal ages. Like the emerging butterfly, struggling to free itself from the encumbering chrysalis, a struggle essential to bring its newly developed organs of flight into operation, so must man develop under the twin forces of prosperity and adversity if one day he is to emerge into the "glorious liberty of the children of God". In that manner, at last, man will "*discover somewhat at his latter end*". AOH



*By night and day I weave for thee
A golden, gleaming net of prayer,
Its shining mark you may not see,
But it surrounds you everywhere.*

*God bless your peaceful sleep by night,
God guide your busy steps by day,
Keep faith within your head alight
In clouds and sunshine.
This I pray.*

songs of the nightingale

THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

Harvest Thoughts

Reference to this feast of the people of Israel first occurs in Exodus 23. 16 *“Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field”*. (NIV) Later in Leviticus 23. 34, more specific instruction is given, *“Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days”*. This was one of the three great feasts of Israel when the people were expected to appear before the Lord. It is so referred to in John 7. 37,38 when *“Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”*

In the King James version along with other translations this festival is referred to as the Feast of Tabernacles. This is not exactly a wrong translation but it is a little confusing since the Hebrew word used for God’s dwelling place among his people when they travelled through the wilderness is not the same as the one used for this feast. Rotherham and Strong use the word ‘booth’ in their translation and so does the R.S.V. and the new Revised English Bible. So what were these ‘booths’ or ‘tabernacles’ or tents, and why did God instruct the people of Israel to make them?

Leviticus 23. 40-43 answers these questions when it says *“On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days...live in booths for seven days:...so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God”*. At the dedication of the Temple (2 Chron. 8. 13) Solomon reminded the people of the law which bade them attend the Temple three times a year including the Feast of Booths. After the Jews returned from exile in Babylon they rediscovered the Feast of Booths and there is reference to this in Nehemiah 8. 14-18 where the people went into the countryside surrounding Jerusalem and their towns and brought in branches of olive, myrtle and palm. This was healthy pruning of the trees and not acts of vandalism. We are also told in Nehemiah’s account that it was a time of ‘very great rejoicing’. This kind of celebration continued right up until the coming of Jesus at his First Advent to which reference

has already been made. By that time the idea of pouring water out and giving thanks for rain, had developed, and Jesus used the idea to convey what he had to offer to those who would come to him. There may also be a reference back to the experiences in the wilderness when God miraculously gave water to Israel. When a large proportion of the population live just above the 'bread-line' any slight variation in climate and harvest can make all the difference to whether one's family lives or dies of starvation. It is then that this kind of thanksgiving has real meaning.

This festival included camping out on the roof tops and in the court yards. One can well imagine the excitement of the younger members of the family. But the making of such a 'shelter' required the strength and skill of the older members of the family. These were shelters not from rain or snow, but from the sun and its heat.

At these festivals work stopped and they became truly seven Holy Days. They lived close to neighbouring Canaanite peoples who worshipped the Baal. It was so easy for Israel in it's early days to slip from the true worship of the LORD into the fertility rites of the pagan worship. These festivals, appointed by their God, were intended to direct the thoughts of God's people to the one great almighty Creator of the Universe upon whom they were dependant. But this God was not one to be manipulated. They could not perform certain rituals and say particular formulae and expect that God would do just what they asked. Israel was a trusting family, which looked to God in love for all that He had done for them.

In the beginning God had made all things well. Everything was beautiful and functioned perfectly. God had given to mankind the privilege of being stewards of his Creation. *"And God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food'."* Genesis 1. 28-30 RSV. By these words God had provided the wonderful gifts of creation for the blessing of mankind and at the same time had established the relationship between all living things on the

earth. Rebellion against God did not alter the privileges which God had given except inasmuch as mankind was deficient in ability to do the work properly. Man's failure to trust God had undermined his thankfulness for all that He had done and given. Through the ages mankind has abused these gifts and in recent centuries due to the misuse of increased knowledge, has done such harm to the planet that it is reaching a state of being uninhabitable. God's people cannot approve of such desecration of his workmanship. The Old Testament abounds with references to the wonder and the beauty of the earth and all that lives here. The clear relationship of all things that draw breath and the acknowledgement of God's creative goodness is echoed many times. Taking our cue from Israel of old there is scope for God's people to join their hearts and voices in adoration and praise and thankfulness for all that God has given in the natural world. Then to go forth into the world and express those sentiments in our lives. The way we perform our acts of daily worship in the handling of the physical creation and in the use of the wonderful things God has made, is the truest reflection of our heart's devotion to the living God who made us. God's loving protection and provision for his creatures are revealed in the tiny particles from which all things are made to the mighty forces of nature, wind and water, sun and snow.

That God will restore to full function the wonders of his creation is shown by Paul in his letter to the Colossians, for Christ is not only head of the Church but supreme over all creation. *"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth. . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."* Col. 1. 16-20 (NIV). Human alienation from God has caused disruption throughout all creation. Man's failed stewardship has brought a return in part, to pre-creation chaos in which animal and plant life have shared the results of man's folly. Jesus has been appointed to put that right. The discord in nature, the plagues and epidemics are part of human ignorance and greed. Paul's words indicate that all creation shall be restored to harmony and the blessings of integration of purpose and abounding fruitfulness will bring lasting peace, joy and blessing.

So Jesus, in the Temple at the time the Feast of Booths was being celebrated, cried out his invitation to those in Jerusalem, pilgrims and

citizens alike, to come to the water of life. There was spiritual drought among God’s people and their Messiah was offering them the soul reviving opportunity to come to him. But there was much more to his invitation than personal salvation, great as that is. The invitation was for the Spirit of God to flow out from them to the nations, a work which has only just started. It must go on till God’s gifts in the natural world are shared fairly and none hunger and thirst. In the last chapter of the Bible we see that work continuing as the river of the water of life flows out from the throne of God, producing flourishing trees which will spiritually heal and feed the nations. The curse, now upon the natural orders of life on earth, will be removed for ever and mankind will enjoy the fruit of the labours of Christ.

Let us Thank the Lord for all his love.

DN



The Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah)
14 September 2015



Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)
23 September 2015



Sukot (Tabernacles)
Begins 28 September 2015

Sukot is a Hebrew word meaning “booths” or “huts”. Sukot begins five days after Yom Kippur, on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. The holiday, which falls in either September or October of the secular calendar, is observed for seven days by Israeli and Reform Jews and for eight days by traditional Jews living outside of Israel.

What happened to Sukot after the destruction of the Temple? After 70 C.E., when temple sacrifices were no longer possible, Sukot underwent the same sort of metamorphosis that enabled other Jewish festivals to survive and retain their religious power. Sukot became a synagogue and home celebration, marked by unique rituals and symbols.

The Jewish Home, Daniel B. Syme

This compendium of various translators of Obadiah brings out the dramatic emphasis of the narrative and can be used when reading the instalments.

I have received a declaration from the Lord, and He has sent forth a message to the nations, to rise and make war upon her.

“Behold I will make you small among the nations; you will be completely dishonoured. The pride of your heart has deceived you, living as you do in the fastnesses of the rocks, building your home on high, and saying in your heart ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though you set your nest among the very stars, yet even from there will I pull you down,” says God.

What a downfall is yours!

“If thieves and robbers came to you by night would they have stolen more than they required? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not have left some gleanings?

But now, what a pillaging of Esau there has been, what a rifling of all his treasures!

Your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground; your accomplices have deceived you and overcome you, and your most trusted friends have set a trap for you that you had not the sense to perceive.”

“In that day,” says God, “I will destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off. Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever.

“On the day that you stood aside when aliens carried off Jacob’s possessions and foreigners entered his land, casting lots for the possession of Jerusalem, you allied yourself with them. You should not have exulted over your brother’s fate in his day of misfortune or rejoice at the ruin of the people of Judah, nor have boasted yourself in the day of their distress, nor taken possession of My people’s territory in the day of their calamity, nor robbed them of their goods, nor stood in the road to intercept the fugitives, nor delivered the survivors into the hands of their enemies.

And now the day of the Lord is at hand upon all the nations. As you have done, so it shall be done unto you; your deeds will return upon your own head. As you have drunk the intoxicating cup upon My holy mountain, so shall all the nations round about drink, and stagger, and be as if they no longer exist.

But on Mount Zion there shall be those who have escaped, and it shall be a sanctuary, and the House of Jacob shall possess it in peace.

“The House of Jacob shall be a fire, the House of Joseph a flame, and the House of Esau shall be as stubble, which they shall ignite and consume until nothing is left of the House of Esau.”

That is what God has decreed!

Then the people of the southern desert shall inherit the Mount of Esau, and the people of the sea-side plain, the land of the Philistines. Ephraim shall inherit Samaria, and Benjamin shall inherit Gilead. The Israelite exiles in Halah shall inherit Phoenicia as far as Zarephath, and the Jerusalem exiles in Sepharad shall inherit the cities of the desert.

And those who have escaped shall come from Mount Zion to rule the Mount of Esau, and the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s.

OBADIAH—MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

2. Declaration of War

“The Vision of Obadiah”.

It is a simple and unpretentious beginning. Appearing as it does in our Bibles, as the opening sentence of the first verse, much of its force is lost. It is really the heading of the prophecy, the title of the book. Were the writings of Obadiah to be printed by themselves, these four words would stand upon the front cover, limned in letters of gold. There is no attempt at anonymity but at the same time no self laudation nor obtrusion of the man’s own personality. Obadiah has the courage of his convictions and is not afraid to attach his name to the message he proclaims and for which he stands. It is not his own message and he does not pretend that it is. It is a vision, something that he has seen and which he wants others to see also. So, simply, he pinpoints the whole of what he has to say and stands in the background, the servant who saw the vision and played the part, first of the scribe who wrote it down and then the herald who proclaimed it abroad.

Good it were for us if we could capture this same simplicity. Sometimes we make our own names and personalities too prominent in the work we are privileged to do for the Lord, sometimes we tend to retire into obscurity and leave the work altogether nameless. There was a well-known and well-loved disciple of the Master, long since finished his course—Benjamin Barton—who used to say “Humility is *not thinking too much of one-self*; humility is *not thinking too little of oneself*; humility is *not thinking of oneself at all*.” There is a world of truth in that simple observation. Obadiah came to his commission with mind and heart so full of the revelation that had been made to him that he had no thought for himself at all; he just announced in quiet sincerity and warm-hearted zeal “the vision of Obadiah” and proceeded to say what had been laid upon his heart.

“Thus says the Lord God about Edom.”

Another simple statement. The message is from God and it concerns Edom. The reverence of the prophet is revealed in his use of the term “the Lord God”. To him, God is supreme and there can be no other object of worship and adoration. Obadiah himself is but a voice, to declare what the Lord has said. The message is not man-made. It is not born of the

prophet's own wisdom or intellectual acumen, nor yet of any insight he may have into the affairs of the nations. It is a message from the Most High God, the one who ruleth among the children of men, and as such it must be respected.

We must not leave this simple and reverent use of the expression “the Lord God” without recalling the example Israel has set us in this connection. The sacred Name was never pronounced by them; they used a substitute. Christians generally have followed that example and use the expressions “the Lord” or “God” when referring to the Deity. Still more reverent but the more truly expressive term is “the Father”, and this is one that is in the highest degree appropriate on the lips of those who by reason of full consecration to his service have become “sons of God”. An enthusiasm verging on fanaticism in the case of one Christian group has led to the widespread use of the Anglicised form of the Name—Jehovah—as an appellation for the Deity to be used on every possible occasion; the very frequency of its use begets a familiarity which is the antithesis of that reverence which we should seek to preserve when speaking of the Most High. The translators of the Authorised Version were rightly guided when they decided to translate the Hebrew YHWH—the Hebrew word for the sacred Name—by “LORD” in practically all cases, and we in our day do well to follow some such example as that of Dr. Moffat who renders it “the Eternal”. We cannot be too careful when we take upon ourselves to speak and write of the great Creator and Father of all. It is the height of irreverence to address him as one would address an immediate superior upon earth with whom one is on terms of easy familiarity. Obadiah possessed an intense consciousness of the overwhelming might and majesty of the One who had spoken to him, and it must have been in tones that we can be sure were hushed with awe that he declared his message “Thus says the Lord God”.

The message is about Edom. In Obadiah's own day such reference to Israel's brother-nation, the children of Esau, would be quite enough to arouse interest and command attention. We today must associate Edom with all in this world who together form the worldly-minded kinsmen of the true disciples of Jesus, all who claim a degree of kinship with Christ but have no share in his Spirit. This Age has produced many spiritual Edomites and they have been and are scattered among all the denominations of Christendom. This word of the Lord God is for them and it is a

word of judgment. In this end of the Age the fact that spiritual Israelites are to be gathered together into the “general assembly of the Church of the Firstborn” implies that spiritual Edomites are to suffer the judgment that puts an end to their pretensions for ever. In the new Age there will be no Edomites.

“I have received a declaration from the Lord, and He has sent forth a message to the nations, to rise and make war upon her.”

There are two important factors in this opening announcement. One concerns the Church in the flesh and the other concerns the world in general. Obadiah is the Lord’s servant and he has received intimation of the Lord’s command and intention. To no one else but his own servants does the Father reveal his will, at this or any time. “The Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets to his servants the prophets and them that trust him.” In every age has God had his witnesses, who, because of whole-hearted consecration and complete dedication of life are able to interpret, by reason of the indwelling Spirit, that which He will tell them. So when judgment is to come upon the world or any part of it in consequence of sin, the servants of God are the ones to whom are entrusted the knowledge of what is impending and the duty of proclaiming it.

This does not include the duty of executing it! Christians are not empowered to act as executors of judgment whilst they are still in the flesh. Some there are who exultantly chant together “let the saints be joyful in glory... to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written. This honour have all his saints.” (Psa. 149. 5-9). They claim the right by virtue of that text to arrogate to themselves powers that belong of right only to the Lord the Head, and in thus exceeding the commission given to the disciples of Christ at the first they stray into grievous error to their own spiritual hurt. There is more than a suspicion of the desire to exact revenge for past indifference or opposition when Christians conceive it their solemn duty to inflict Divinely approved chastisement upon those whom they esteem fitting subjects for judgment.

Here in this verse the implication is plain. The other nations, not Israel, are to rise and make war upon Edom. Obadiah’s mission was to proclaim the inevitability of judgment but the execution of that judgment was to be left to the nations round about. So it was in fact. Although in later days Israel

did absorb the Edomites into themselves and extinguish Edom as a nation, the fulfilment of the prophecy really belongs to the Babylonians who forced the Edomites out of their mountain fortress not long after Obadiah's day, and after them the Nabatheans, another Arab people, who completed the work and occupied the Edomites' land until in the early centuries of the Christian era they in turn were dispossessed by the Saracens. The nations did indeed rise and make war upon Edom, and fulfilled every word of Obadiah to the letter.

So too in the larger fulfilment. Spiritual Edom is destroyed by the very nations of the world whose favours she solicited and for whose sake she denied and ignored, and oftentimes persecuted, spiritual Israel. Hear the Divine sentence expressed in words directly applicable to the Edom of this Age, "The ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." (Rev. 17. 16). That is not an isolated instance of the Divine revelation as to God's intentions, John gave but a brief word but what he saw took its inspiration from a far more detailed prophecy spoken by the prophet Ezekiel and recorded in his 16th chapter. The picture there is of apostate Jerusalem, meeting at last the penalty of her unfaithfulness to her God. Referring to those whom she had preferred to God, He says "I will give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places...they shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgements upon thee..." (Ezek. 16. 39-41). There is a Divine law of retribution which we might call, in the language of men, "poetic justice", which decrees that those who are apostates from God, unfaithful to their profession for the sake of worldly honour and interests or the approval of men, shall receive judgment at the very hands of those for whose sake they rejected God. The nations of this world will, at the last, in Obadiah's language, "rise and make war upon" spiritual Edom, and at their hands will the Edom of this Age suffer, and fall, and be no more.

"Behold, I will make you small among the nations; you will be completely dishonoured." (vs. 2).

Small among the nations! That is a very apt description of the true Church in the flesh, the disciples of Jesus. It is also an apt description of "spiritual

Edom”, the nominal professors of Christianity, but for a different reason. True Christianity is at a discount because the nations of the world “will not have this man to reign over us”. They do not want Christ and they are not prepared to pay the price that consecration to his service demands. So they treat the appeal of the Gospel with indifference. The Edomites know that, and they have endeavoured to compromise with the world by rejecting all there is in Christianity that runs counter to the world. For a time, in past ages, that course of action brought results. Organised Christianity was a very useful ally to kings with turbulent subjects. State and Church found many common interests and between them they ruled the common people with a rod of iron. Today all is different. Men and women are no longer driven by fear; the State has found other and more effective means of keeping the masses in check, or at least, in these days when the masses themselves wield much power, of making those same masses serve the interests of the State. The former assistance is no longer needed.

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, living as you do in the fastnesses of the rocks, building your home on high, and saying in your heart ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’” (vs. 3).

How like is this expression to the words in Rev. 18. 7 “She saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow”. The pride of the Edomites was in their lofty dwellings high up among the pinnacles and crags of their mountain city. They were supremely confident that no enemy would ever be able to dislodge them, and they sat there in arrogant pride. So with all in this Age who have had any part or lot in that which is symbolised in the Book of Revelation by this woman seated upon the scarlet beast, arrogant in her pride and proud in the power she wields over the kings of the earth, never dreaming that the end of that power is shortly to come. Jeremiah the prophet saw something of this when in his splendid vision of the fall of great Babylon he was shown by the Holy Spirit God’s judgment. “Behold, I am against thee, O thou most proud, saith the Lord GOD of hosts: for thy day is come, the time that I will visit thee. And the most proud shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up: and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all round about him.” (Jer. 50. 31-32). Babylon was the proudest and greatest city of antiquity; with her massive walls and mighty Tower it must have seemed as if she could never be overthrown, but overthrown she was, and she lies today a waste of broken brickwork inhabited only by jackals and lizards. AOH

(To be continued)

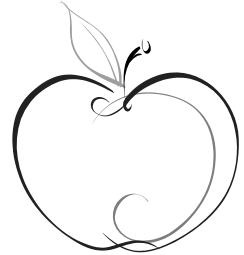
AS THE DEER PANTS FOR THE WATER

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship You.



*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship You.*

I want You more than gold or silver,
only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye.



You're my friend and You're my brother,
even though You are a king.
I love You more than any other,
so much more than anything.

Mission Praise 37

Here are some Scriptures that may have inspired the writer—
Psalm 42:1-2 (NKJV) *As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

Psalm 18:30-35 (NKJV) *As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. For who is God, except the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? It is God who arms me with strength, And makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, And sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.*
You have also given me the shield of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great.

Isaiah 55:1 (KJV) *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

Psalm 19:9-10 (KJV) The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Ephesians 3:17-19 (KJV) That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Psalm 17:8 (NKJV) Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings.

Song of Solomon 2:3 (KJV) As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Lamentations 2:18 (KJV) Their heart cried unto the LORD, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease.

Psalm 37:4 (NKJV) Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Isaiah 27:13 (NKJV) So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

John 15:13-15 (NKJV) Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

John 21:15-17 (NKJV) Jesus...said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

FROM A PRISON CELL

Part 5. The Adoption of Sons
Reflections on the "Prison Epistles"

"Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself." (Eph. 1. 5 RV). There are two viewpoints in the Word of God concerning the mode whereby we become sons of God. One of these is based upon the process of spirit-begetting and ultimate spirit-birth. This thought originates from the words of Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus. *"Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"* (John 3. 3 & 5 RV). This is the viewpoint also of Peter and John (1 Pet. 1. 23; 1 John 5. 1, 4, 18). Paul presents another view. He speaks not of begetting, but of adoption into the family of God. This view is based on a Roman custom which allowed a man of noble birth and standing to take into his family and account as his own son a youth of lowlier birth. This was all done in proper legal form. The first step was to take the intended son before a public notary and there give due note of the intention, subject to certain conditions being forthcoming at a future specified time. These centred in the response of the young man himself to the training and tuition, necessary for his prospective position, to which in the meantime he would be subjected. If he responded satisfactorily, then at the appointed day the status of full sonship would be publicly conferred, and from that day the adopted son was accounted as fully a son as though he was a child by birth.

But at the time when the father intimated his intention to adopt, a public token of his good faith in the matter was made in the presentation of a robe or ring or other gift to the intended son—a kind of pledge that he would be faithful to his promise, provided the young "adoptee" had so improved in education and general bearing as to be a credit to the house and standing of his kindly benefactor.

The Greek word here translated "adoption" literally means "placing as a son". It is the "placing as a son" one who is not such by birth, and entitling him to the peculiar privileges of such a connection, as fully and completely as a child by birth. Thus there were two stages to the legal process of adoption. First a provisional stage, with certain conditions applicable to both parties, but mainly contingent upon the good conduct

and progress of the intended son. Thence forth the whole Roman world would treat him as the father's true son in every act in which duty caused him to become involved.

This illustration is the scaffolding upon which Paul builds his great theme of Divine Fatherhood and saintly sonship. God is the beneficent and kindly Master of a great house, who desires to find fitting companions for his one true Son. It was in his own unchallengeable prerogative to choose to do this thing. Nothing could compel or obligate him so to do, had He willed it otherwise. To him belongs the right to say who shall be invited, and on what terms they may be acceptable before him. It is for him to determine what tuition, and of what kind, every invited candidate must receive to make them fitting companions for his only begotten Son. And to him belongs the right finally to decide who among the invited ones had reached up to the standard of worthiness sufficient to qualify for the position involved.

To whom did God make this gracious offer of adoption into the closest circle of his family? To the resplendent sons of the morning? No! They could not be a spectacle to man. Humankind could never have understood all that this most intimate sonship means if God had adopted his sons from them. It was from the lower plebeian level of men, and not from the patrician (noble) ranks of heaven, that God condescended to choose his sons.

As proof of the Divine good faith, the worthy Father decided to give a pledge, in the bestowment of his own Spirit, to all who among men should respond to his call. This was to be accounted as an “earnest”—“a pledge-gift”—to every responding soul, assuring them that if they diligently applied themselves to the necessary education and refinement to fit themselves for acceptance into this elect position in God's great house, the gracious Father would be true to his promise and pledge and accept them as his own true sons.

The Greek word for “*earnest*”—“*arrhabon*”—primarily had to do with “exchange”, and so had reference to a mutual pledge exchanged between two parties when making an agreement; a token payment when the transaction was first agreed, to be returned to each party on fulfilment. But later usage changed its meaning to an “earnest”—a part price, given

as a tangible promise that the whole would be paid in due time. Paul tells us that the “earnest” which God bestowed upon his invited sons is his Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit of promise—which is a pledge to stand good until the day of redemption of God’s own—translated in the A. V. as “*until the redemption of the purchased possession*”. This privilege of sonship belonged primarily to Israel, as Paul states in Rom. 9. 4 (RV) “*...whose is the adoption...*”; this same thought is asserted again in Gal. 4. 4-6 (RV) “*When the fulness of the time came (was come), God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons (first-stage sons) God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba Father’*”

The Galatians were sons of fathers who had at one time been under the law, but were divorced from it for unfaithfulness. Some among them were in danger of being enticed back under the law by Judaizing teachers. Paul wanted them to realise that God was now calling “sons”, not servants; children of the free-woman, not of the bondwoman. Only a remnant of Israel was found sufficiently responsive to heed the heavenly call, and thus the privilege was extended to the Gentiles. It is in this larger sense that Paul describes the privileges of the sonship of Rom. 8. 14-16. Here he writes to a mixed church in a Gentile city, in which Gentile believers predominate. To these he says, “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father*”. The full thought concerning this spirit of adoption is brought out in the words of Eph. 1. 14. It is the promise of God that those faithful souls who mortify the deeds of the body (Rom. 8. 13) thus responding to Divine tuition and refinement, shall receive, in due time, the full inheritance of sonship as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Deep in the counsels of eternity God purposed to win from among men a company of sons who should be raised to the highest place in the heavenly realm. The fall of man into sin necessitated the descent to earth of his firstborn Son to become man’s Redeemer, and after that, the princely-Leader of “many brethren” up to those heavenly heights. The great privilege of sonship in this exalted closer sense was offered first to the sons of Abraham. As a people they rejected the invitation, only a remnant “according to the election of grace” being found in Israel. The invitation

was then offered to those among the Gentiles whose hearts the Lord opened (Acts 16. 14). To such as made response with good and honest heart God gave the pledge-gift of his Holy Spirit, to be at once the earnest of their inheritance, and the transforming power within, to enable them to become trained and transformed, and thus made ready to become companions in full and complete sonship with his well-beloved Son. That is the story of adoption, planned before time began, but worked out in the little lives of such among men as have been found responsive to the love of an all-wise creator and Father.

Brethren in the Lord! Your calling is no small hole-in-the-corner affair in the sight of God. It is an integral part of a great plan spanning ages for its sphere. It is part of a plan which includes angels as well as men, and which, when complete, will place creatures which once were sinful human dust among and above the spirits which surround the heavenly throne. The eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, long ages ago looked down the long distances of time, and with joy and delight anticipated the homecoming of his sons. The door to that heavenly home still stands open today, for all who are ready to follow in the steps of our beloved Lord. What do you think of it all, dear brethren in the Lord? What do you think of such a benefactor-Father, and of such a call? And, if you have received the earnest of your inheritance, the Holy Spirit of promise, are you still assured that this is the token of your future sonship and joint-heirship with the Lord?

There need not be any doubt, for "*He is faithful that promised*". Think it out again, and let that thought inspire to greater faithfulness day by day. Put your present little day into its insignificant relationship with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory which that heavenly invitation opens up! Then thank God for his unspeakable gifts and calling!

The End

TH



what, if we are Christ's,
Is earthly shame or loss?
Bright shall the crown of glory be
When we have born the cross.

Poems of Dawn

THE BIBLE HELL

Although in practice only a few sects now hold to the doctrine of eternal torment, there is still a widespread belief amongst Christians that God does intend to punish sinners everlastingly, and that to all eternity they will remain in a state of conscious misery. Believing that this is the Bible teaching, many hold to this dogma whilst knowing that it is quite irreconcilable with the character of a God of love.

In point of fact, the Bible does not teach that the penalty for sin is eternal conscious misery of any kind. It does teach that the penalty for sin is death and that death is the extinction of life.

“Hell” in the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew word *sheol*, the death state. There are certain symbolic passages where *sheol* is depicted as a state of consciousness, but the metaphorical character of these texts is easily appreciated upon examination. *Sheol*, translated “hell,” “grave,” and “pit,” is in reality the unconscious condition of the dead, knowing nothing and feeling nothing.

New Testament teaching is the same. “Hell” is translated from *hades* and *gehenna*. *Hades* was the death state, and although in New Testament days the infiltration of Greek thought had made general belief in *hades* as a conscious state much more common, its usage in the New Testament, especially as the word for *sheol* in quotations from the Old Testament, show that Jesus and the apostles looked upon it as did their ancestors. “Gehenna” was the name of a valley to the south of Jerusalem where perpetual fires were kept burning to destroy the refuse of the city, and in the New Testament is used to describe the ultimate death, the “Second Death,” which overtakes those who refuse to come into harmony with God after all the opportunities of the coming Age, the “Millennial Age,” have been offered.

Job prayed to be hidden in *sheol*. David was left in *hades*. Our Lord Himself descended into *hades* and on the third day “rose again *from the dead*.” All such references can only be understood by realising that the Bible Hell is the death state; that when men die they go into the death state, *hades* or *sheol*, awaiting the resurrection, and that when the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is set up and all return from death to be offered the way of everlasting life, the wilfully wicked will again go into the death state, *gehenna*, from which there is no resurrection. Thus seen, there is a real penalty for sin, but it is not torment. It is the withdrawal of that life which God gave, but of which the recipient will not make rightful use.

AOH

6 OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN FATHERS

Clement of Rome. It is usually thought that Clement of Rome is the one referred to by the Apostle Paul in Phil. 4. 3. He wrote an Epistle to the Corinthians which is bound up with the New Testament volume of the Alexandrian Manuscript (Codex A). In it are copious references to passages in the New Testament and the general tenor bears a striking resemblance to Holy Writ. This, incidentally, is a very valuable chain of evidence in relation to the authenticity of the Scriptures for it proves that the New Testament as we know it was in existence at that time.

Polycarp. His name is probably one of the best known of the Christian Fathers and was Bishop of Smyrna which was not very far from Ephesus. He was born in A.D. 70 and martyred at the age of 86 in the year A.D. 156. The witness before the Roman Pro-Consul who tried to persuade him to recant is well known “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any wrong: how can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?” Only one of his letters remains, but it throws much light upon his character and pious outlook. He was a disciple of John and had had the advantage of early Christian training like Timothy who had from a child known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make wise unto salvation. Here is an extract from his letter (to the Philippians) “Polycarp and the presbyters that are with him, to the church of God at Philippi: Mercy unto you, and peace, from God Almighty, and the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, be multiplied...Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, serve the Lord with fear, and in truth; laying aside all empty and vain speech, and the error of many, believing in Him that raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and hath given Him glory...But He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also raise up us in like manner, if we do His will, and walk according to his commandments, and love those things which He loved; abstaining from all unrighteousness, inordinate affection, from evil speaking, false witness, nor rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, or striking for striking, or cursing for cursing; but remembering what the Lord has taught us, saying, “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”

Papias. He was another saint of the early period of the Gospel church, who knew at least two of the Lord’s disciples and also the daughters of the Apostle Philip. We do not know so much about him as of the others

because his works are only found by extracts from those of others—the actual writings being either hidden or destroyed. It is evident, however, that he was well versed in the Scriptures and boldly took his stand on the Lord's side.

Tertullian. This Christian came of heathen parents in the days of Pagan Rome; his father was a centurion, that is, the commander of a hundred men. He was brought up and educated along orthodox lines and was skilled in law and history.

Like the Apostle Paul, he was not converted until of mature years; he was probably forty years old when this vital step was taken and he was not “disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” It cannot be over-emphasised that he and those like him were intensely earnest or they would never have espoused the cause of Christianity, for it entailed so much suffering and loss of reputation. He wrote much, often in Latin, and those writings reveal his deeply spiritual outlook, for he brought his great scholarship to bear upon the mine of Christian truth which is available to those who are guided by the Holy Spirit. Incidentally, it appears that Tertullian was the first to introduce the phrase “New Testament.”

Irenaeus. This Father was a disciple of both Papias and Polycarp and was born about A.D. 130 in Asia Minor. We associate him particularly with his Christian work at Lyons where he held office in the church during the fierce Pagan persecutions of Christians, especially under Marcus Aurelius towards the end of the second century. Pothinus was imprisoned and died A.D. 177 and Irenaeus succeeded him as Bishop of the church at Lyons. Once again, our insight into his character is obtained mainly from his own writings which are fully in harmony with the calling of this Age.

Clement of Alexandria. Alexandria was a very famous city in the world of that time being next in importance after Rome as regards wealth and after Athens as regards literature and science. Tradition has it that Mark preached the Gospel in Egypt and founded the church in Alexandria. It possessed a University and famous library. Clement lived in these surroundings and was a scholarly man who contributed his due share to the cultural life of the city, being president of a noted school of thought. He embraced Christianity in adulthood and his conversion without doubt had a marked influence on many, just as Paul's testimony a century or so

before when in front of King Agrippa was so convincing that “almost thou persuades me to be a Christian.” His writings are full of references to the Scriptures and his life was brought fully in conformity thereto.

Selected

SIMON THE CANAANITE

Simon Zelotes the Apostle (Luke 6. 15; Acts 1. 13), one of the Twelve is the same as “Simon the Canaanite” in Matt. 10. 4 and Mark 3. 18, but he was a Jew, not a Canaanite. “*Zelotes*” is the word transliterated into English as “Zealot”. The Zealots were members of a political party sworn to overthrow the Roman power by violent means; Simon must have been associated with this group before his call to discipleship, hence the name. The expression “Canaanite” in the other two texts is an error; the word in Greek is *Kananites*, mistranslated Canaanite. It denotes an inhabitant of Cana the Galilean village. It could also be a transliteration of the Hebrew *ginah*, meaning “zealous”, so bringing the word in line with the first two texts. Cana was near Nazareth and there is nothing unlikely in Jesus having chosen one of his twelve disciples from that village.

“Who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” 1 Timothy 6.17



ur Lord Jesus is ever giving, and does not for a solitary instant withdraw his hand.

He is a sun ever-shining: He is manna always falling round the camp; He is a rock in the desert, ever sending out streams of life from His smitten side; the rain of His grace is always dropping; the river of His bounty ever-flowing, and the wellspring of his love is constantly overflowing. Daily we pluck His fruit, and daily His branches bend down to our hand with a fresh store of mercy.

The Way to Peace, C.H. Spurgeon

THE COMING OF THE KING

2. As in the days of Noah

Students are well aware that there exist apparently conflicting Scripture statements respecting the manner of the Second Advent. Upon the one hand there are passages which depict the coming of the Lord as quiet, unobtrusive, like a thief breaking into a house at dead of night so that only those who are awake and watching know of his arrival. On the other hand there are vivid descriptions of a spectacular descent from Heaven in the full view of all mankind, accompanied by the heavenly hosts to the sound of trumpets and shouting so that no one can be ignorant of the event. It is said in some places that his Church will be waiting on earth to be gathered to him as He arrives, and in others that they will already be with him as He journeys to earth and participate in the glory of his coming. Some pictures show him coming for judgment and destruction, men crawling into the caves and holes of the rocks to escape his accusing eye; others present a coming for blessing and reconstruction, whilst men and all Nature rejoice at the prospect. A rational and accurate view of the Second Advent has to take into account and give proper weight to all these varying descriptions and weave them into a harmonious whole.

The short answer to these apparent paradoxes is that the Second Advent spans a period of time within which a number of widely dissimilar events find place. When this fact is accepted it becomes possible to build an understanding of the subject in which each plain statement, each vivid metaphor, each Old Testament allusion, can make its contribution to the complete picture.

Within such a framework it is obvious that the aspect of the Advent which is described as sensed only by the few, the “Watchers”, and not realised by the many, must come first before any kind of spectacular revelation to all men. Likewise the statements that He comes to gather his saints to himself and close the career of the “Church in the flesh” must have their fulfilment before there can be any possibility of those same saints returning with him to be openly revealed to all. This unobtrusive and generally unheeded aspect of the Advent is therefore logically the first to be considered.

The commencement of the Second Advent is marked by a condition in which the Lord comes “as a thief”, recognised only by his own. The basis

of this is to be found in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the most complete exposition of the Advent in the New Testament. *"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh"*. (Matt. 24. 42- 44). Referring back to this warning in his letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul said *"yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night....but ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief...therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch"* (1 Thess. 5. 2-6). Rev 16. 15-16 associates this thief-like coming with the gathering of the nations to Armageddon, the period which leads up to the end of this present Age. This exhortation to watchfulness for an expected event, the time of which is not known, has its basis in the Old Testament where the city watchmen are pictured as straining their eyes for evidences of the near approach of the expected King. *"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are the LORD's remembrancers keep not silence...till he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth"* (Isa. 62. 6-7 AV & RV) and its ecstatic climax *"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice;...for they shall see, eye to (meeting) eye, when the LORD shall bring again (returning to) Zion...and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God"* (Isa. 52. 8-10).

That this watchfulness of the faithful, rewarded by realisation of the Coming One's presence in the earth to execute the Divine purpose, is accompanied by ignorance and indifference on the part of the world in general at this early stage of the Advent is shewn by means of two striking parallels in history to which our Lord drew attention. *"Of that day and hour"* He said *"knoweth no man...but as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be...they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"*. *"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is (shall be) revealed"*. (Matt. 24. 36-39. Luke 17. 28-30). The truth behind

these allusions is a very important one. It enshrines the Divine principle that before judgment descends there is proclamation of the coming crisis, and an opportunity to repent and be delivered. The stories of Noah and Lot have one thing in common. A man of God is made cognisant of the coming event; he accepts the fact and proclaims it. His contemporaries in general are indifferent and unbelieving until after the prophet and those who share his faith are delivered into a place of safety. Then the indifferent multitude is overtaken by the event and their world comes to an end. It is not only the unexpectedness of the catastrophe to which our Lord alluded but the fact that a few knew about it in advance and were thereby delivered.

The natural forces which were to bring to an end the antediluvian world were present in the earth whilst Noah was building his Ark, but only he and the few with him knew and believed. "*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet...prepared an ark to the saving of his house*" (Heb. 11. 7). The time came when God called him into the Ark "*and*" says the old historian "*the LORD shut him in*" (Gen. 7. 16). Seven days elapsed during which there appeared no physical evidence to substantiate his belief and prediction; nevertheless those forces were working silently behind the scenes. On the eighth day the heavens opened and the deeps heaved up their waters and that world came to an end.

So with the case of Lot. According to St. Peter (2 Pet. 2. 7-8) Lot was a just and righteous man continually distressed in spirit by the lawlessness with which he was surrounded. Like Noah, he was apprised in advance of the fate overshadowing Sodom; in just the same manner the subterranean powers which were shortly to blow the Cities of the Plain sky high were gathering strength. Lot and his daughters, the only ones who believed, were led out of the doomed city by the celestial messenger to a place of safety. As with Noah, there was a short lull, this time a space of six or seven hours apparent inactivity, and then Sodom blew up.

There is one apparently casual word in the story of Sodom's destruction which establishes that six or seven hours and provides a parallel to the most famous of our Lord's allusions to his Second Coming, the one in which He likened it to the "*astrape*", the emergence of dawn from the East rapidly growing into full meridian day. The account says that the Divine messengers gave the word to leave the doomed city "*when the*
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morning arose”, “*shachar alah*”—“when the dawn came up”, denoting the moment of dawn when, in that latitude, the first shafts of light appear on the eastern horizon, always within an hour of 6 a.m. (The same word for the same phenomenon appears variously in the Old Testament as “*dayspring*” (Job 38. 12) “*wings of the morning*” (Psa. 139. 9) “*eyelids of the morning*” (Job 41.18) etc. The messengers bade Lot “flee to the mountain” for refuge; he obtained permission to take refuge instead in the “little city” of Zoar because it was nearer and more convenient. He was to make haste; the threatened destruction could not be initiated until he and his daughters were safely within Zoar. The narrative continues “*the sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar*” (Gen. 19. 23). Here the words are “*shemesh yatsa*”, “the sun had gone forth over the land”; this refers to the full blaze of the solar orb at the meridian—noonday. The implication is that Lot’s flight from Sodom to Zoar extended from dawn to noon—six or seven hours. Comparison of the topography of the district with details given in the narrative favours the conclusion that the cities lay some twelve to sixteen miles apart so that several hours journey on foot is indicated.

Jesus may well have used this illustration in relation to his Advent in knowledge of this fact. The Divine messenger, come for deliverance and also for judgment, was present in person and in plenitude of power, when the dawn—the “*astrape*” of the New Testament—rose over the mountains of Moab to the east of Sodom, but his first work was to deliver the faithful; the rest were ignorant and unbelieving. That deliverance effected, the messenger returned to the city for judgment “*then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven*” (Gen. 19.24). The analogy with the order of events of the Second Advent is perfect.

Some such picture, then, may have been in our Lord’s mind when He made his historic reply to the disciples’ question put to him shortly before his death: “*when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the Age?*” (Matt. 24. 3 R.V. & Diaglott). After a fairly extensive preamble covering the period between the First and Second Advents, with allusion to the tribulations which were to come upon the Jewish people (vss. 5-22) and a brief intimation that only after the Gospel had been preached in all the world “*for a witness*” (vs. 14) would the end come, He sketched briefly the evidences of the successive

phases of his Advent. The first of these is contained in vss. 23-28 and the gist of this is that claims would be made for the appearance of Christ in this spot or that spot, as though He could be located within earthly limitations as in the days of his First Advent, and that such claims were not to be believed. *“If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not”* (vs. 26). The word for “desert” here means a solitary or uninhabited place, but not necessarily arid; it could equally well be green and pleasant and in fact refers mainly to the wilderness east of Jordan where John the Baptist and some of the old Hebrew prophets lived and conducted their work, and into which the people went in order to hear them. The initial coming of Christ is not to be in the style of those men, as the visible centre of a multitude, plainly to be viewed before them and known of all, as were John, Elijah, Moses and others. Neither is He to be manifested in the “secret chambers”. The A.V. rendering gives a misleading impression. The word is “*tameion*” which is used in the New Testament, the Apocrypha and the Septuagint for the family private or inner apartment of the house (Matt. 6. 6, Luke 12. 3)—particularly of the bride chamber (Tobit 7. 16); sometimes of the storeroom or barn (Luke 12. 24, Deut. 28. 8). This was the room in which honoured guests were received to meet the invited company as in the feasts which Jesus attended in the houses of Matthew, Zaccheus and Simon of Bethany. Just as on the one hand this initial phase of his Coming is not a general public spectacle, equally so it is not a private physical appearance to a selected circle of intimate followers reminiscent of the days when they sat at a feast and listened to his words. And in one eloquent metaphor Jesus lifted the whole conception of his Coming to the plane of celestial values by likening the first phase of his Advent to the oncoming dawn, which in the latitude of Jerusalem is seen at first only by those watching for its onset, and by the sleeping masses in general only after it has already measurably flooded the skies with light.

“As the brightness” (“lightning” A.V.) *“cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the presence”* (“coming” A.V.) *“of the Son of man be”* (vs.27). This refers without any doubt to the dawn; “*astrape*”, here rendered “lightning”, refers to any brilliant or blinding radiance, whether lightning or not, as in Luke 9. 29 (*glistering raiment*) Luke 11. 36 (*bright shining candle*) Luke 24. 4 (*shining garments*) Acts 9. 3 (*shined a light from heaven*) Acts 22. 6 (*there shone a great light*) Deut. 32. 41 (*glittering sword*) Hab. 3. 11 (*glittering spear*) 4 Macc. 4. 10

(*angels all radiant in armour*) but the sun's light is the only such radiance that originates in the east and passes to the west. In thus comparing his Coming with this light of dawn in the east Jesus associated the idea with watchfulness. Only those who watched would be aware that his Coming had become a fact, just as only the watchmen in Israel ever actually witnessed the rising light of the "*astrape*" in the east indicating that the night was past and day had come. "*Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*" (Matt. 25.13).

The full force of our Lord's meaning can only be grasped when the nature of sunrise in Middle Eastern latitudes is appreciated. Dawn is a fairly leisurely process in this country but the nearer to the tropics, the more rapid is the transition from total darkness to full daylight. A few quotations from travellers who have actually witnessed sunrise in and near the latitude of the Holy Land illuminate the words of Jesus in Matthew 24.

H. V. Morton, in his book "*In the steps of the Master*" says: "As I sat on the stone thinking of these things, a light began to fill the sky. The sun rises over Jerusalem from behind the Mount of Olives. I turned my back on the city and, looking up over the Mount, saw a great fan of light pulsing up from the east. The fire filled the sky and turned the little clouds in its path to pink and gold, but the high ridge of the Mount, almost black against the palpitating light, hid the sun from view....The sun topped the crest of the Mount of Olives, and, looking again towards Jerusalem, I saw the highest buildings gilded with light though the wall was yet unlit. In a few seconds a flood of light fell over the city, ran down the wall and into the valley of the Kedron. It swept up the stony flanks of the opposite valley, and I felt my face and my hands warm in its light."

"How often must Jesus and the disciples have watched this splendid sight from the Mount of Olives. They must have seen the city ramparts light up with the first rays of the sun. They must have seen, just above the Garden of Gethsemane, the towering white and gold mass of the Temple. They must have seen a priest come out on a pinnacle, as he came every morning, to look towards the east and report, before the first sacrifice of the day, 'The sun shineth already!' They might even have heard in the still air of dawn the daily cry from the assembled priests: 'Is the sky lit up as far as Hebron?', and the daily response of the watcher from the pinnacle: 'It is lit up as far as Hebron!' "

The same writer describes sunrise at Gaza, a little to the south of Jerusalem. “And now, as we went onward, I saw a gathering tumult in the east. A white, palpitating light was filling the sky. It was like something approaching at great speed, a mighty army with its chariots and its horsemen. Swords of light thrust their way upwards, catching stray clouds and turning them to banners of pink and gold. Then, like an orange flung into the air, the sun leapt up, fully armed, into the sky: it was warm, and the dead earth was instantly, vividly, and rather violently, alive.”

Lord James Bryce, describing his ascent of Mount Ararat in 1876, thus describes sunrise as seen from his position halfway up the mountain (*Transcaucasia and Ararat*): “About 3 a.m. there suddenly sprang up, from behind the Median mountains, the morning star, shedding a light such as no star ever gives in these northern climes of ours, a light that almost outshone the moon. An hour later it began to pale in the first faint flush of yellowish light that spread over the eastern heaven, and first the rocky masses above us, then Little Ararat, throwing behind him a gigantic shadow, then the long lines of mountains beyond the Araxes, became revealed, while the wide Araxes plains still lay dim and shadowy below. One by one the stars died out as the yellow turned to a deeper glow that shot forth in long streamers, rosy fingers hovering above the snows on the mighty cone; till at last there came upon the topmost slope, six thousand feet above us, a sudden blush of pink. Swiftly it floated down the eastern face, and touched and kindled the rocks just above us. Then the sun flamed out, and in a moment the Araxes valley and all the hollows of the savage ridges we were crossing were flooded with overpowering light.”

Helen McLeod, recording her life in New Guinea (“*Cannibals are Human*”, 1962) describes dawn at Port Moresby. “The eastern quadrant of the sky flushed rosily, shafts of sunlight burst through and the clouds were alight with flame. Then the tropical sun blazed forth, flooding the bay with colour and light.”

In everyday life few of the people in Jesus’ day actually witnessed this wonderful phenomenon, for their sleep was broken only by the full blaze of the sun as its light swept over the sky. Hence the Scriptural association of the coming of day with the “watchers” and that somewhat cryptic message in Isa. 21. 11-12 “*Watchman, how far gone is the night?*” (Rotherham) and the watchman’s reply “*The morning cometh* (is at 192

hand)”. Only the watchers saw this glorious effulgence of golden light rising fan-wise in the east and moving visibly across the sky towards the west, turning the clouds in its path to pink and white and bathing the whole land in its glow. The watching priest, stationed on a pinnacle of the Temple, cried out in a loud voice that the light was come and his colleagues below immediately commenced the ritual of the morning sacrifice. Presently the full blaze of day would be shining upon the people as they awoke from sleep and betook themselves to their accustomed tasks. This emergence of light from the east, followed quickly by the sun itself is referred to in Mal. 4. 2 the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings—the great fan of light spreading over the sky being likened to the wings of some great celestial creature. It must be remembered that Mal. 4 is a prophecy of the Second Advent and that it is only to “*you that fear my name*” that the Sun of righteousness thus arises, and not to all, thus confirming the implication of Matt. 24 that not humanity in general, but only the watching Church, perceives this first phase of the Advent. It is here that every reference to the need for watchfulness and to his Coming as a thief in the night, silently and unobtrusively, finds full application without doing any violence to those other Scriptures which picture the later phases of the Advent as outwardly spectacular and universally known.

The fact of the Advent is discerned, not by the natural senses but the spiritual, not by the eyes and ears of flesh but by those of faith, faith which is soundly based upon an understanding of the essential differences between the natural and spiritual worlds, and knows that his celestial being and glory is one that “*no man hath seen, nor can see*” (1 Tim. 6. 16). But although unseen by man, that glory and that world is none the less a real glory and a real world. In some manner, we know not how, the powers of the celestial realm approach and make contact with this terrestrial order as the purpose of God progresses towards the elimination of evil and the supremacy of good. It may be that what we call the beginning of the Second Advent is the initial contact which that world makes with this; the Power directing that contact, and thereby setting in motion the forces which are eventually to result in the kingdoms of this world giving place to the power of the Kingdom of God, in Person the One who promised his disciples so long ago “*If I go away, I will come again*”. So, like the dawn flaming over the mountains in the sight of his watchmen while the world is still asleep, He comes. AOH

WAITING ON THE LORD

People do not find waiting easy. They naturally want more, like Eve in Eden. The commandment ‘not to covet’ indicates mankind wishes to ‘keep up with the Jones’ as the saying goes in this materialistic country. Modern day advertising feeds that desire by every type of media possible.

The scripture says “The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the person who searches for him. It is good to hope and wait patiently for the LORD’s salvation.” (Lam. 3:25-26 ISV) The words recorded in Lamentations remind us that those who wait on our Heavenly Father, putting their full trust in his providence, will not be disappointed.

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him as the Psalmist writes “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made” (Psa. 145:8-9 NRSV). He is good to all his creation but especially to those who wait on him.

At times it may appear that the troubles that Christian brethren experience, as well as the world, are being prolonged and that the deliverance has been delayed, and yet we are encouraged to wait patiently. Peter reminds us that “The Lord is not slow to fulfil His promise” (2 Pet. 3.9 ESV) and that those who remain faithful will gain their reward in due time.

We have to wait for Him in faith, seeking His direction through prayer. We must make sure that our requests are in accordance with His plans and not just a request for what might be considered earthly pleasures. As James warns: “You ask for something but do not get it, because you ask for the wrong reason” (James 4:3 ISV). We have to have our hearts in the right condition, continually studying and searching the scriptures so as to grasp a better knowledge of our Lord and master and our Heavenly Father. Our seeking will help to keep us focussed on spiritual matters.

“It is good that he waits patiently” has more the thought that it is our duty to wait, and that through study and prayer we will be rewarded with the peace of God which passes all understanding and which helps guard our hearts and minds in Christ. At times the difficulties that we encounter on

the narrow way can appear to be insurmountable; they are for a purpose, training us to patiently wait to do our Lord's work in the Millennial Age, remembering the words "Father, thy will be done".

The Holy Spirit

Can we make the same plea that the Psalmist David made "Make me know Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; For You I wait all day long" (Psalm 25:4-5 NRSV). We have the wonderful promise from Christ "But the Helper (comforter), the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name; shall teach You all things, and remind you of all things which I said to you" (John 14:26 Diaglott). What a privilege we have to have that the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and to give us a greater understanding of the scriptures.

There are many wonderful helps giving us the Plan of God, showing us how all the aspects of God's love, wisdom, justice and power are met through his plan to bring as many of the human race that will respond during the Millennial Age back into harmony with Him and how this Christian era is for the calling out of the Church, those who will reign with his Son who paid the ransom price for all people. As well as dictionaries and concordances, which have been made available to Christians at this end of the Gospel Age (Christian era). We have the privilege of receiving the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, without which we would still be struggling to understand his plan and the reason why we have to wait for His time not our time.

Moses

One ancient worthy sticks out as an example to us, on why the Lord may have us to wait for His directions. That person was Moses who lived for 120 years. His life can be divided into three 40 year periods of waiting for the Lord's direction.

- i. For 40 years Moses was considered to be an Egyptian

Stephen gives us a wonderful insight into this period of Moses' life when speaking before the High Priest. "At the time Moses was born, he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; and then he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. So Moses was instructed in all the

wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds. ‘When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites. When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand’.” (Acts 7:20-25 NRSV).

This period of his life gave Moses the training that he would need to turn a nation of slaves into a nation of free people with a set of laws and a religious system of worship provided by God. The last verse shows that Moses felt that the time was right for him to deliver the people and yet we were told they were not ready and it was not God’s time for Israel’s deliverance.

Moses had believed that the time had come for the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery. He knew of his miraculous preservation, and had the assurance of God’s Promise that this signified that God had a special work for him to do. He was ready and anxious to begin that work. He did not know that he was not ready and that he would require forty years more of further education.

- ii. For 40 years he wandered in the wilderness as a Shepherd.

Fearing for his life, Moses fled to the wilderness of Midian. It looked as though his loyalty and his forty years of education had gone to waste. He had supposed that he was being prepared to be a leader amongst God’s people. In an hour his hopes were unfulfilled and he was a fugitive, fearing to be seen in the Egyptian palace or amongst his own blood family. In Midian Moses married one of Jethro’s daughters, and became a humble shepherd for forty years. He did not at the time understand the Lord’s providence in his affairs, however he was learning meekness and submitted.

- iii. The 40 year journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

Moses needed all the lessons that he learnt through his first two 40 year periods to lead the fledgling nation to the Promised Land. Even with all the lessons he had learnt he still struggled with an obstinate people and, through disobedience to God’s order, was denied access to the Promised Land. He would have to wait for the Millennial Age.

Another Biblical example of waiting

Elkanah had two wives Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah had many sons and daughters but Hannah none. This grieved Hannah and Peninnah appears to have taken every opportunity to remind her of their differing situations. So Hannah in distress prayed for a child at Shiloh while Eli was sitting beside the doorpost of the Temple. How often he did this we do not know and it's not recorded why he sat there. Eli saw her and talked to her. Eli answered 'Go in peace, the God of Israel grant your petition'.....her countenance was not sad any more—hence Samuel was born to Hannah.

The primary example of waiting was shown by Hannah, who waited and prayed to the Lord. But the secondary example was Eli waiting in the right place at a good time and he was able to be of assistance and comfort to Hannah.

Waiting through Difficult Circumstances

Job is well-known for his patient endurance. God permitted that he would suffer through the death of his children, the loss of his material assets as well as losing his health while being falsely accused by his friends of sins he did not commit. He did have the hope of the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:14). Job seemed prepared to wait until the resurrection of the dead for him to be delivered from his trials, although to some degree, much was restored to him as the Lord gave Job twice as much as before and he had ten more children by the end of the book

What to do while we are waiting

Waiting does not necessarily imply inactivity. There may be opportunities to talk to others about our Christian faith which can be prepared for. As it says in 1 Peter 3:15 (NKJV) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. In Luke 19:13 we are told to "Occupy till I come" to put into use those pounds (talents) in the way our master would have us do. If a list were to be written of things useful in the Lord's service, it would be a very long one and even if some become impossible there would be others that could be a possibility.

The World

What about the rest of the world, are they waiting for anything? Paul tells us the world is waiting, if only it knew it, for the church to be complete (Rom. 8.19-23).

When is waiting not necessary

Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13 & 14) could see that waiting was not necessary and the twelve tribes could enter into Canaan, the promised land, as the land was good and the Lord, He was able to give it to them.

In the news (Daily Mail 5 March 2014) a Christian couple kept praying about the health of their sick baby son till he died. Common sense says with a free healthcare system provided by taxes paid that they should have availed themselves of the doctor or hospital, the Lord having already provided.

An example of not waiting on the Lord?

In Genesis 27 there is the account of Rebekah and Jacob deceiving Isaac to obtain the blessing. She already had the promise that her younger son would have precedence over her firstborn, Esau. When they found that Isaac was planning to give Esau the blessing they colluded to get Jacob to receive the blessing as if he was Esau. This naturally made Esau angry enough that Jacob was forced to flee to his mother's family in Haran hundreds of miles away. There is no record that mother and son ever met again, which given their close bond would have been sad for them. Did the Heavenly Father really need their help to fulfil his promise? Did they pay a price for not waiting on the Lord?

Conclusion

Waiting is not a mere concept but something Christian brethren do on a daily basis. But the scriptures tell us it is a good thing. It gives time to develop a spiritual life and an understanding of the word of God and time to apply it to their daily lives. The Bible gives many examples of waiting with good lessons for all who read the accounts. In due time there will be no more waiting when the kingdom is set up on earth in the Millennial age.

Today I seem to understand
That pain and trial, grief and care,
Are chisels in an unseen Hand
That round us into statues fair.

Poems of Dawn

Bible Students Seminar Day
Saturday 3 October 2015
Crick Village Hall, Crick, Northamptonshire
Start 11 a.m.
Theme—Faithfulness & Self Control as Fruits of the Spirit
For a programme please contact—nick.charcharos@btinternet.com

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OUR COMFORT IN SORROW

There is no book like the Bible for the sorrowful. It tells of the Comforter; it points to the perfect plan according to which God is working out our blessedness: it insists that all things are working together for good; it opens the vista of the blessed future, where all the griefs and tears of men shall be put away for ever.

Gone from us
Gwen Boyle (Billinge)



APPLES OF GOLD (apricot)

Prunus armenaica (Rosaceae)

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold *in pictures of silver*” (*Proverbs 25.11*).

The ‘apple’ of the Bible is not, in spite of the illustration, our common apple, *Pyrus malus*. What it actually is has long been the subject of debate. The argument against the common apple is that it is not a native of Palestine; in the wild state its fruit was small and bitter and it would have taken many years of cultivation before it could begin to resemble the fruit described so glowingly by Old Testament writers.

Neither were Solomon’s ‘apples of gold’ oranges. Although oranges are one of Palestine’s main exports, they are not indigenous and, in fact, have not been there all that long. There were no oranges in Palestine at the time of Solomon.

Other candidates have been the citron (*Citrus medica*), which was ruled out owing to its bitter taste, and the quince (*Cydonia oblonga*), which fails to qualify for the same reason.

The apricot (*Prunus armenaica*) is now believed to be the ‘apple’ of the Bible. References to ‘apple’ tree tell us that it offered shade, and that its fruits were sweet-tasting, fragrant, gold in colour and set in silvery leaves. This seems to point to the apricot, one of the most abundant fruits of the Holy Land.

‘As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste’ (*Song of Solomon 2. 3*).

The Flowers and Fruits of the Bible
John Chancellor



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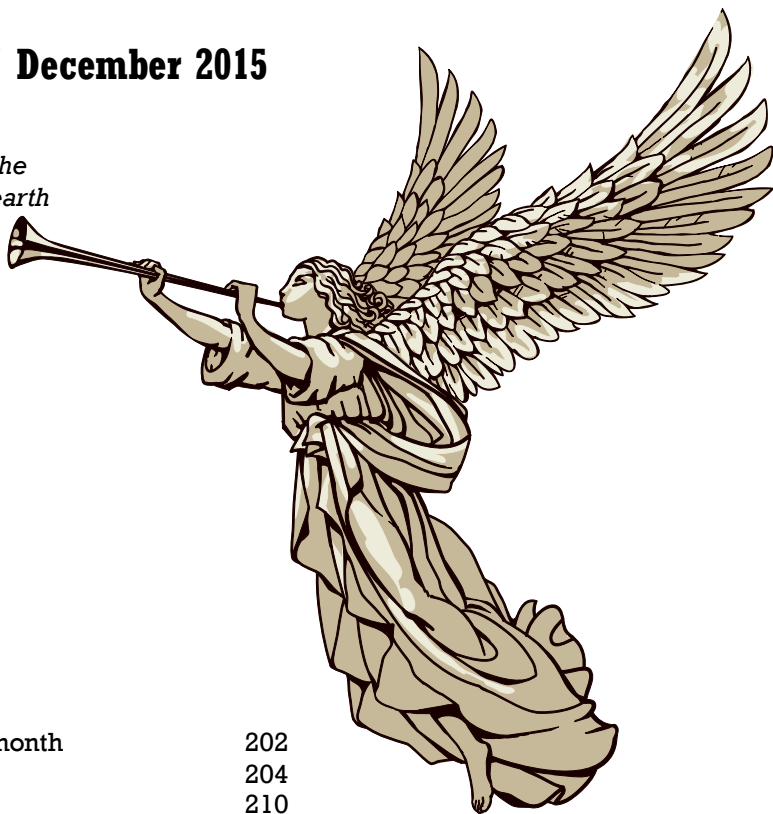
BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Volume 92 Issue 6

November / December 2015

*Glory to God in the
highest, and on earth
peace, goodwill
toward men.*

Luke 2.14



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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)

The Bible Study Monthly is sent free of charge on request to all who are genuinely interested.

(Please renew your request each year.)

It is supported entirely by the gifts of its readers, and these are sincerely appreciated.

Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

OPTIMISM, PESSIMISM

The message for the end of this Christian era is an optimistic one. It is one of coming 'peace on earth' and 'goodwill'. There are so many scriptural promises waiting to be fulfilled that the Christian message is one of hope.

Pessimism seems to be at the heart of the message of the bemusement park 'Dismaland'. It is the work of the well-known modern artist Banksy. The park has been set up in Weston-super-Mare on the site of an old lido by the Bristol Channel that divides South Wales from England. His statement says, 'Sorry kids—sorry about the lack of meaningful jobs, global injustice. The fairytale is over, the world is sleepwalking towards climate catastrophe' and 'maybe all that escapism will have to wait'. He has managed to get 50 artists from 17 nations to 'toil under the darkening clouds'. Perhaps this quote is an accurate assessment of the world in which we presently live. Perhaps there has been too much escapism rather than facing up to longer term issues.

In the Bible there is the promise of the 'times of restitution of all things' which was spoken of by the prophets (Acts 3.21). That includes the restoration of the land for the 'desolate land will become like the garden

of Eden' (Ezekiel 36. 35) where 'the desert shall blossom as the rose' and 'the parched ground shall become a pool'. Ordinary men and women will be restored to good health and the lame will leap, the blind will have their sight restored and the deaf will be able to hear again (Isa. 35.).

Escapism is something that seems important to many people in this country in this generation, whether this be a visit to a theme park like Disneyland, a holiday resort, computer games or television and films. Banksy appears to have noticed this too. In one sense the Christian has also escaped and now rests in the many precious promises of God and has a new life free from the pursuit of worldly ambition and accumulation of wealth. (2 Peter 1. 4)

In some ways no wonder people seek escape from the toil and strife of life that has gone on for the last two thousand years, as the writer of the hymn 'It came upon the midnight clear' noted there have been so many wars. Even now there is prolonged conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria that is causing hundreds of thousands to emigrate, sometimes taking great risks to resettle in European countries. Thousands are leaving other troubles in North Africa. The message of the Psalmist says "He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire" (Psalm 46. 9 NKJV). This is the message of the Bible that God will make wars stop. It is one of optimism.

The artist also mentions 'the darkening clouds'. This imagery is used in the Bible too. Joel speaks of "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thickness, as the morning spread upon the mountains" (Joel 2. 1,2). John the Revelator says "Behold, he (Christ) is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him" (Rev. 1.7 Diaglott) Clouds usually means trouble of some sort but this trouble comes with the second advent of Christ to end the crisis and bring blessing. The darkness preceding the light that shall be revealed to all in due time.

Therefore there is much to be optimistic about as we look forward to a time of 'peace on earth' a phrase which will be read, sung and listened to many times over this festive season. The message brought by the angel by night.



(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.)

THE ARCHANGELS

There is a very general impression that the Bible asserts the real existence of two chief angelic beings—archangels—named respectively Michael and Gabriel. It may come as something of a surprise therefore to learn that the word “archangel”—chief angel—occurs only twice in the New Testament and not at all in the Old. In point of fact very little is said about these two personalities, the only two members of the celestial world identified by name, although what little is said is full of significance.

Much more is related about these two in the apocryphal Book of 1 Enoch; although it must be remembered that this only enshrines Jewish tradition of the 2nd century B.C., when that book was written, and its value assessed accordingly. In that book—which does not use the term archangel, this being confined to the New Testament—Gabriel is pictured as the messenger of God, standing in his presence continually to receive his commissions and hastening then to carry them out. Michael is the warrior and guardian of Israel, always at hand when danger threatens the chosen nation, to defend and deliver. The Bible, for all its brevity on the subject, supports these positions so that to this extent at least the old Jewish traditions appear to be well founded.

Of the two, only Gabriel is recorded as having actually intervened in human history and held converse with certain human beings, and that on three occasions only. He is said to have appeared to Daniel (Dan. 8. 16 & 9. 21) to convey information to the prophet regarding God’s future plans for mankind and the manner in which future world history would be affected; to Zacharias (Luke 1. 19) to apprise him of the forthcoming birth of his son, John the Baptist, with details of the mission for which John was destined; and to Mary of Nazareth (Luke 1.26) to tell her that she was to be the mother of Jesus. The veracity of the latter two instances rest on the reliability of that very sober historian, Luke, and the truthfulness of his informants, and on one other factor. That factor is the overriding power of the Holy Spirit superintending the composition of the Book which is the Divine revelation to man. It is unthinkable that God would have allowed two such vital happenings as the birth of Jesus and his herald John to be associated with alleged circumstances which never really happened and it is essential therefore to believe that the conversations related by Luke really did take place and that the messenger really did come from the

celestial world and really is known—so far as humankind at any rate is concerned—as the angel Gabriel.

The fact that nobody in modern times can vouch for having been visited by an angel from heaven and the possibility should be denied therefore is irrelevant. No one in Europe in the Fifteenth Century believed that there was another world of intelligent beings on the other side of the Atlantic but it was there all the same and eventually Columbus reached it. The Bible is a very reliable authority on a great many things which lie completely outside the range of present human experience but are not necessarily untrue on that account.

Gabriel is nowhere referred to as an archangel. The reference in 1 Thess. 4. 16 to the “voice of the archangel” and “the trump of God”, which heralds the Second Advent of our Lord, is very generally accredited to Gabriel—from which is derived the expression “Gabriel’s trumpet” as applied to the Last Day—but the only foundation for this impression is the general belief that Gabriel is the Divine messenger to men on earth. It may be a true impression: it may well be that there is one particular celestial being high in honour in the courts of God, whose specific duty is the discharge of special commissions to mankind in connection with the onward progress of the Divine plan. If such be indeed the case it might well be that other occasions of angelic visitation recorded in the Scriptures, such as those to Paul and Peter, to Abraham, Balaam, Gideon, Manoah and so on, were examples of the coming of this Gabriel to earth to discharge some specific duty. His appearing in the form of a human being upon such occasions is consistent with the necessity of the case; Gabriel in his normal state would be impossible of perception by human senses, and he must needs temporarily assume a body of human flesh in order to communicate.

Gabriel’s most spectacular appearances, to use the term, were to the prophet Daniel. It has long been recognised that of all the Biblical writers Daniel received the most detailed and comprehensive view of the manner in which human history would develop and culminate in the collapse of earthly power and the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom upon earth. Fourteen years before the fall of Babylon at the hands of Cyrus of Persia Daniel was the recipient of a Divine revelation relating to the yet future clash between the empires of Persia and Greece, with the triumph of the

latter (Dan. 8). Gabriel stood beside him and explained the whole matter. Fifteen years later, in answer to Daniel's earnest prayer that the Babylonian captivity be ended and the Jewish people allowed to return to their own land, Gabriel again visited the prophet and extended the foreview of "things to come" to include the coming of Christ, at that time still five centuries future (Dan. 9). Two years after that he came again, for the third and last time, to carry the story still farther to the consummation of all things at the Second Advent and the Messianic reign (Dan. 10-12).

It was at the time of this last visit that Gabriel passed a remark which represents one of the most intriguing problems of the Old Testament. Daniel had been in prayer session with God for three full weeks, interceding for his people and awaiting the reply. Gabriel now explains the reason for the delay. "*The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained (left him) there with the kings of Persia*" (Ch. 10. 13). Who was this "prince of the kingdom of Persia" possessing power to withstand the archangel of God on his way to execute his Divine commission? Who or what is it that can obstruct the answer of God to the sincere prayer of one of his children? This whole subject is so momentous as to require separate treatment; suffice here to say that the general conclusion is that Gabriel was referring to some conflict with unknown spiritual powers behind the scenes of the political stage of Persia and that his involvement in this conflict—which might well have been one for the influencing of the mind of Cyrus king of Persia for or against Israel—had to take precedence over his coming to Daniel. The impasse, he says, was resolved by the coming of Michael, "one of the chief princes", to his aid so that he was able to proceed to the execution of his mission.

Michael was looked upon as the great warrior-champion of Israel, working behind the scenes to defend and deliver the nation from its enemies whenever by reason of loyalty to the Covenant they had merited such deliverance. As with Gabriel, he is mentioned by name only a few times, three times in the book of Daniel and twice in the N. T. Here in Daniel he is pictured in Ch. 10 as holding off the enemy forces which would forbid the restoration of Israel after the Babylonian captivity, and then again in Ch. 12. 1 as "standing up" to overthrow the world forces of evil at the end of this Age which would oppose the incoming Messianic

Kingdom. Whilst in Ch. 10. 13 there is no doubt that Michael is as literally real a personage as is Gabriel, it may be that in the metaphorical narrative of Ch. 12 his name is a nom-de-plume for the Person of the Lord Christ who is to take his great power at his Second Advent and bring to an end the powers of this world—unless, of course one can envisage this celestial warrior for righteousness being appointed to some active duty in the whole catalogue of events which are to comprise the end of this world and the beginning of the next.

An unknown incident involving Michael is alluded to in Jude 9. “*Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee*”. No book now extant includes any reference to this incident; according to Origen (De Princip 3. 2. 1) it was derived from a work called the Assumption of Moses but that book is not now known to be in existence. The Targum of Jonathan, commenting on Deut. 34. 6, says that Michael was appointed to be guardian of Moses’ grave but this is most certainly a Jewish fable. Since, according to the Bible account, no man knew the place of Moses’ burial there would seem singularly little point in detaching a celestial dignitary of high rank from his normal duties to look after it. The reason for Michael’s reputed dispute with the devil in Jude does not emerge; it has been suggested that the Devil wanted the body to make it an object of idolatry but this looks like another story invented to fit the case. Jude may have had access to some historical document since lost; on the other hand he may merely have been alluding to some popular First Century tradition familiar to his readers without necessarily endorsing it as true history, to illustrate the point he was making.

There is another possible explanation, which involves the conclusion that Jude was not talking about the death of Moses at all.

Moses, on the way back to Egypt to deliver Israel, accompanied by his wife and child, met with some unexplained threat to his life. The narrative runs (Exo. 4. 24) that in “*the way in the inn, the LORD met him, and sought to kill him*”. His wife took a knife and circumcised their son—apparently the rite had not been carried out—whereupon the threat was removed and the Lord “*let him go*”. Why the Lord should thus seek the death of the man upon whom he had just conferred the responsibility of leading the people of Israel out of Egypt does not appear and is difficult to

understand. It so happens, however, that the apocryphal “Book of Jubilees”, written about 250 B.C. and from internal evidence believed to be based upon a Hebrew text of the Old Testament differing somewhat from both the Masoretic and the Septuagint, says that it was Satan who thus sought to kill Moses. (It is not unknown in the Old Testament for deeds inspired by Satan to be accredited to the Lord in recognition of his overruling responsibility for all that He permits— compare 2 Sam. 24. 1 with 1 Chron. 21.1). It is usually thought that Moses was seized with some sudden illness which threatened his life. Now if it be surmised that Satan, in the endeavour to frustrate the plan for Israel’s deliverance, was the one who sought thus to kill Moses, and was withstood by Michael the archangel “behind the scenes”, as it were, maybe this rather perplexing incident would be better understood and Jude’s allusion with it. The word in Jude for “body”—*soma*—means equally well a living body and does not necessarily imply a corpse.

The only other allusion to Michael is in Rev. 12. 7 where it is clearly metaphorical. After the catching up to heaven of the “man child”, away from the gasp of the “dragon”, we are told that “Michael and his angels” fought the dragon and his angels, who were in consequence expelled from heaven. The dragon is symbolic of a strong earthly power—Pagan Rome; this much at least is agreed by most expositors—and Michael, with his angels, must be symbolic of the power which engages the dragon in combat and expels him from his position of rule and authority. A complete exposition of Rev. 12 would be out of place here; let it suffice to say that here, as in Dan. 12, the name of Michael is used as a symbol to convey a definite idea—the uprising of a righteous power to challenge and overthrow the forces of evil at a time of great need.

It is often stated that the meaning of the name “Michael” is “One who is like God” and on this rather slender basis it is sometimes suggested that “Michael the archangel” is in fact identical in person with our Lord Jesus Christ in his pre-human state. This is really not justified. Assuming that the name is of Hebrew origin—which is not necessarily the case—the meaning is an interrogative expression “Who is like God?” the implication being, of course, that no creature can be like God. The prefix “*micha*” is derived from the interrogative personal pronoun “*mi*”, and appears in other names such as “Micah” and “Micaiah”, meaning “who is like Jehovah?”.

Jewish tradition held that there were seven archangels. In addition to Gabriel, the messenger of God, and Michael, whose special care was Israel, there were Raphael, who looked after the remainder of mankind, Saraquel, who had authority over the fallen angels, Uriel, who looked after the torrential earth and the nether regions (tartarus), Remiel, the sun and moon, and Raquel, custodian of the five planets. All of this was probably derived from Babylonian mythology. The Babylonians have seven "Watchers" who were the intermediaries between the gods and the human race. These "watchers" are referred to in Dan. 4. 17 in connection with Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree. No trace of this is found prior to the Babylonian captivity, neither are the angelic visitants to earth then distinguished by specific names. The early Israelites were content to recognise the fact that when the occasion so demanded an emissary from heaven would come to earth for some specific purpose. The names first appear in Daniel; perhaps it was from that time that it began to be recognised that there are in the courts of heaven two greatly honoured personal beings, Michael and Gabriel, chief angels among the angels, who have intimate connection with earthly affairs. They may even take a much greater part in the supervision and direction of events in our own day than we realise. The brief glimpses that the Scriptures afford us do at least indicate that there must be great activity going on "behind the veil" in respect to the forces which are working together to achieve mankind's deliverance from sin and death.

AOH

Job 38. 7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.

Prov. 8. 22-23 The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

Heb. 1.4-6 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

Heb. 5. 5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

3. Voice of the Watchman

“Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though you set your nest among the very stars, yet even from there will I pull you down,” says God. *What a downfall is yours!*” (vs. 4). The supreme example of this overweening ambition is that of Lucifer, the Morning Star, related in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah. The coming downfall of the king of Babylon is made the symbol of the splendid vision of Lucifer’s doom. One who aspired to share the throne of God is cast down to the lowermost hell. “I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will be like the Most High.” That was Lucifer’s aim and intent. But he refused to believe that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he pleaseth.” The One who was exalted above all and made to sit at the right hand of God was One who humbled himself, became of no reputation, and was obedient to the Father’s Will, even unto death. Here is a contrast which the Edomites of this Age have utterly failed to grasp. They have followed the way of Lucifer rather than the way of Christ. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel of old time, they have sought to build their own edifice and storm the gates of heaven, entering the presence of God in the might of their own power, knowing not that against the restraining hand of God the whole of their puny efforts are as nothing. There is only one way into the celestial realm and only one avenue of approach to the throne of God; it is by the strait gate, and narrow way, that leadeth unto life. Jesus said “Few there be that find it”. He knew men, and He knew that so many would attempt the way of Lucifer; few would understand the depths of his own teaching.

One is led to wonder if our Lord’s foreview of the powers of the heavens being shaken, (Matt. 24. 29) has not something to do with this threatened “pulling down” of Obadiah 4. During this present Age the “powers of the heavens”, the principalities and authorities of the merely nominally Christian institutions and systems, have had matters very much their own way. One of their number, one of the most infamous of Popes, is reported to have said on one occasion *“This Christianity, how profitable a farce it has been to us.”* That is the type of man from which these “powers of the heavens” have been built up. The ecclesiastical leader whose faith has been truly in Christ, who has endeavoured, however imperfectly, to lead his flock in the way of the Lord, and has honoured his Master above him-

self, has never been part of these “powers of the heavens”. There have been many such throughout the Age and they have exercised a spiritually beneficent influence and in many cases left their mark on history. But many in high positions have sooner or later yielded to the seductive influences of the world around them and forsaken the narrow way for one that offered greater ease and more of the plaudits of men. And in so doing they have incurred the Divine sentence “From there will I pull thee down, says God”.

It is a noticeable thing in this present time, when the powers of the heavens are being shaken, that the pronouncements of ecclesiastical leaders on world affairs are given less and less attention by secular leaders, politicians, and the masses whom they lead. If a dignitary of the Church does venture to express an opinion on a political or social matter he is as often as not told, by the Press or otherwise, to confine his remarks to religion and leave other matters to people who understand them. Such treatment would have been unthinkable in earlier generations. Nothing can be more obvious than that the day of earthly power of “princes of the Church” is past.

Though they attempted to exalt themselves as the stars—the stars have fallen from heaven. “What a downfall is yours!” says the prophet, wonderingly, as he contemplates the ruin of what was once a mighty power. So it is in this Age when the great ones of the earth cry out “Alas, alas, that great city...for in one hour so great riches is come to nought.” (Rev. 18. 16-17).

“If thieves and robbers came to you by night, would they have stolen more than they required? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not have left some gleanings? But now what a pillaging of Esau there has been, what a rifling of all his treasures! Your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground; your accomplices have deceived you and overcome you, and your most trusted friends have set a trap for you that you had not the sense to perceive.” (vs. 5-7).

In these words Obadiah shows the futility of that trust which Edom has placed in her worldly allies. Notwithstanding many services rendered to the kings of this world and her allegiance to them in opposition to God, they have no hesitation whatever in discarding her completely when she

has served their purposes and can be of no further use. Not only so, but they have no scruples about taking from her such possessions as she holds, leaving her poor and naked. If ordinary thieves enter a house by night, says Obadiah, they take what they want and leave the rest. The hapless householder does not waken in the morning to find himself bereft of all his possessions; he still has something left. When the vineyard labourers gather in the grape harvest, they do not strip the vines completely bare; they leave some of the grapes for the gleaners. But not so with Edom's erstwhile friends when they become her enemies. They rifle as they will and pillage her treasures. Sorry indeed is the condition of those who have forsaken God and trusted to Mammon, whilst retaining the name of God on their lips. They finish up by being miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3. 17). "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help" said the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. All through the Gospel Age (Christian era) there have been those who have gone down to Egypt for help, putting their trust in the arm of the flesh, and although for a time they have appeared to prosper in the things of this material world, it has been at the expense of their standing before God. When it has been a so-called Christian institution that has so allied itself with the world, then sooner or later the word is fulfilled "your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground".

"In that day' says God, 'I will destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off. Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever'." (vs. 8-10). The men of Teman were renowned for their wisdom. It is not clear from the Scriptures just why; there is a cryptic note in Jer. 49. 7 in which the Lord asks "Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom vanished?" and the prophet goes on very evidently to quote from Obadiah's prophecy. This alleged wisdom of Teman is that which is to be destroyed when the Lord executes judgment against Edom, for Teman and Edom were intimately connected and from the prophetic point of view are taken as one. Teman was the grandson of Esau, and even in his natural descent affords a picture of the worldly wisdom which is thus to perish, for the father and mother of Teman were Eliphaz the son of Esau, descended thus from Abraham the faithful, and Timna the daughter of Seir the aboriginal inhabitant of the land and the one who gave his name to "Mount Seir". Thus Teman was

the fruit of an alliance between the favoured line of Abraham which held the promise and the truth of God, and the earthly line of Seir having nothing in common with the promise and no share in the purposes of God. What more apt picture could we have of this alliance between the apostate ones described in this prophecy under the general title of “Edom” and the powers of this world with which they have allied themselves? Very truly Teman is a symbol of the worldly wisdom which is foolishness with God and which will be revealed at the end to be without firm foundation and doomed to be swept away as God arises to put the last great phase of his Plan into effect. *“I will destroy the wise men out of Edom and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off.”*

It is in this verse that we are brought back to the vision of Isaiah where he saw a mighty conqueror coming from afar, bearing the signs of a great conflict upon his person. “Who is this that cometh from Edom” asks the prophet wonderingly “with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?” Swift and confident comes the answer “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” “Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?” Again the strong reply “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.” (Isa. 63. 1-4). The glowing passage goes on to describe how the victorious Lord in his own power and by the might of his own right hand overcomes his enemies and crushes all opposition to his incoming Kingdom. That is a prophecy of the end of the Age, the time when all that is opposed to the Kingdom of light and peace is to be scattered, as the vision of Daniel shows it to be, like the chaff upon the summer threshing floors. This passage alone is sufficient to assure us how completely and thoroughly the Lord will banish false religion from the earth at the time of his Kingdom, how the men of hypocrisy and deceit will find themselves, like their prototypes in the days of the First Advent, thrust out of the Kingdom in which Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets and the faithful of Gospel Age times too, will have entered. Isaiah shows this work as an accomplished thing. Obadiah takes an earlier view and depicts the Lord as viewing Edom and decreeing its eventual and early destruction.

If we want further assurance of the intensity of God's determination to make an end of false worship and set the true faith of Jesus supreme in the earth we have it in Isaiah's 21st chapter, where we have additional indication that the end of the Age, when the faithful are watching with ardour for their returning Lord, is the time when these things take place. In that vision the prophet is bidden to set a watchman and tell him to declare what he sees. The watchman has his eyes fixed on the great desert which lies between Judah and Babylonia, and in the vision he sees, crossing that desert and advancing in the direction of Judah, and therefore coming away from Babylon, a strange procession. He sees, first, a horse-drawn chariot, followed by one drawn by asses and finally one drawn by camels. That is symbolic. The horse-drawn chariot is indicative of the military conqueror returning in triumph from the scene of his conquest; the chariot drawn by asses contains the captives who have been taken prisoner and are being transported to a strange land, and the chariot or waggon drawn by camels contains the spoil and booty that has been plundered from the defeated city. The whole tableau, for that is what it is, tells of a great and overwhelming defeat inflicted upon the city of Babylon by the victorious forces of Judah, and how the watchman sees the triumphant soldiery returning with their captives and booty.

Needless to say no such thing ever occurred in history. At no time did Judah ever overthrow Babylon. So the watchman's triumphant shout must refer to something of which these things are but figures. It is the downfall of symbolic Babylon at the hands of the returned Christ that is pictured in Isaiah 21, and the watchman who discerns these things pictures the Church in the flesh, living at the time they are imminent and fully aware of their significance. To the watchman's cry comes an answer from heaven "Babylon is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground." That is a cry which has already gone out but has yet to be justified to the full; the fall of great Babylon is not completed and will not be until the final cataclysm of this present Time of the End. But in the meantime the message has been given to a people able to understand it. There has been a Harvest of the Age and those who have been subjects of that Harvest realise these things. "O my threshing, and the corn of my floor" cries the watchman "that which I have heard of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you." In this end of the Age those who can rightfully be described as the watchman's "threshing," the "corn of his floor" have had this message given to them in no uncertain terms

and are in consequence “not in darkness” that the day should overtake them as a thief.

There is a passage in Isaiah 21, a charming picture of the earnest watcher for the Lord’s coming and his kingdom, imprisoned still among the Edomites, but longing for enlightenment and the means of escape. “*The burden (message) of Dumah*” (Idumea, Edom) cries the prophet (vs. 11). “*Unto me, is one crying out of Seir (Edom) ‘Watchman! how far gone is the night?’*” That is Rotherham’s rendering and it is most eloquent in its appeal. Here is one, imprisoned in the darkness and worldliness of modern Edom, longing for the morning when the Kingdom of light and love shall take control and the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, calling to the Watchman for enlightenment and comfort. “*Said the watchman ‘There cometh a morning, but also a night. If ye will enquire, enquire ye—come again’.*” Truly, says the watchman, the Millennial morning is at hand but there must first be the dark night of trouble which closes this Age. But if you will know more, says the Watchman, keep on enquiring. Come again and learn of the gracious Plan of God which is to bring blessing to all families of the earth. Come out of Edom and rejoice in the light of the Truth. Separate yourself from the worldliness and hypocrisy and Christlessness of the Edomites and be joined to those who are truly one in Christ Jesus.

This is a theme on which we can speedily find ourselves in error. It is all too customary to assume that the “coming out” is the separating from one body of Christians where the Divine light has burned low and joining another body where at the moment it burns more brightly. So very many thus placed have later found that in the fellowship of their choice the light has in its turn burned low again and they have had to make another move, and the Christian lives of some have been characterised by a succession of such changes. In point of fact the call to come out of Edom is one to relinquish the last vestiges of the spirit of Edom and to live in that maturity of Christian character which recognises the true servants of Christ happily and faithfully in just that sphere to which He may guide. Many have taken up fellowship and service within a new circle of Christians under claim of having thus “come out of Edom” but without relinquishing the spirit of Edom, and their influence has tended toward disunity and the degrading of spiritual experience rather than the opposite. What we need to do above all other things is to see to it that we do not come under the condemnation

of this tenth verse of Obadiah “*Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever.*”

That is what it means. If we have failed to partake of the spirit of Christ and treat his brethren as He treated them; if we, like the unfaithful steward in the parable, begin to smite our fellow-servants, then we shall be cut off from future participation in the glories of the glorified New Creation, and that without remedy. That “cutting off for ever” does not mean eternal death or anything like that—such thought is absurd—but it does mean that, having failed to attain the high degree of character-likeness to our Lord which is necessary before we can be afforded the “abundant entrance”, we shall be like the unworthy of so many parables, found unfit for the high responsibility of association with Christ in his work for humanity in the next Age.

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

(To be continued) AOH

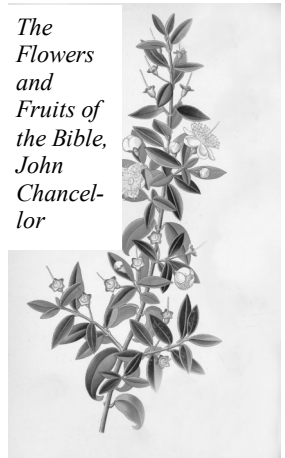
MYRTLE

Myrtus communis (Myrtaceae)

Zechariah in his vision speaks of “the angel of the LORD that stood among the myrtle trees.” (Zechariah 1. 11)

The myrtle is common in Galilee and Samaria. It was esteemed by the Jews for its beautiful snow-white flowers, dark green foliage and pleasant scent. Its buds and berries were used as spices and distilled water was prepared from its flowers.

*The
Flowers
and
Fruits of
the Bible,
John
Chancel-
lor*



THE SON OF GOD

The earthly life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitutes the foundation of the Christian faith. He came from above, was born of a virgin, lived as a man, and after His Resurrection returned whence He came. He said of Himself “I and My Father are one” but that this did not imply a unity of personality is evident from His words on other occasions. He referred to God as His Father and declared Himself to be the Son of God.

John refers to Him as the “Word” Who, from being with the Father, was made flesh and dwelt amongst men. The “Word” (Greek *Logos*) had been with the Father from before the beginning of creation, the Father’s agent in all that was subsequently made. He laid aside that glory which He had with the Father “before the world was” and became man—perfect and sinless but nevertheless man—“for the Suffering of death.” Thus He became “God manifest in the flesh” the only manner in which God, invisible to human sight, could be discerned by the natural senses. This was how Jesus could say “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

Having thus taken hold of human nature, Jesus fulfilled His purpose in coming to earth, that of dying for man’s salvation. The Apostle Paul says “the man Christ Jesus...gave himself a ransom (*anti-lutron*—corresponding price) for all.” The precise manner in which the death of Jesus constituted man’s ransom has been the subject of theological debates for centuries, but the Scriptures should be sufficient when they say “As by *man* came death, so by *man* came also the resurrection of the dead.” “As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” It was Adam that sinned, and the human race was condemned in him. It was Christ Who gave His humanity a corresponding price for Adam and the human race are delivered in Him.

He lay in the grave for three days and on the third day God raised Him from the dead, not in the form of a man, for His humanity had been given on the cross, a ransom, but to the glory of spiritual being which He had possessed before coming to earth. He appeared a few times to His disciples, under different forms, such as that of a gardener to Mary, but after the fortieth day He appeared no more. He was set down at the Father’s right hand, from whence He comes, at His Second Advent, not as a man, but in the spiritual glory of His Divinity, to establish His Kingdom upon earth.

JEREMIAH AND JOSIAH

About 650 years before the birth of Jesus two boys grew up in Judah who were to have a profound effect upon the spiritual life of God's people. They were born during the long reign of Judah's king Manasseh. It was at a time when the pagan empire of Assyria greatly influenced the people of Israel. Sacrifices to idols became a major part of the worship of God's people. When Manasseh died, his son Amon did not reign for long and was quickly assassinated by men of the royal court. But ordinary folk of Judah were determined to keep David's family on the throne and by common consent the boy prince Josiah was made king (2 Chron. 33. 21-25).

All this happened about the year BC 639 and Josiah ruled in Jerusalem for three decades. Just before this, in the town of Anathoth in Benjamin, Jeremiah was born and grew up in the traditions of a provincial priest. He was of the family of Abiathar. While still in his teen-years Jeremiah was called by God to become a prophet. At the beginning of his prophetic writings Jeremiah tells us that he felt too inexperienced to speak on God's behalf because of his youthfulness (Jer. 1. 6).

As Assyrian influence in the Middle East started to weaken, the 16-year old Josiah began the process of reform and the cleansing of the land from foreign idolatry (2 Chron. 34. 3). The young king, like Hezekiah before him, resolutely returned to the true faith of Israel in the steps of his ancestor David. The pagan altars and images were destroyed. The work of reform spread beyond the borders of Judah into the whole land of Israel. A century before, the Assyrians had captured Samaria and deported a large proportion of the Ten Tribes of Israel to Assyria (2 Kings 17. 18-23). However, much of the social life continued in Israel because the King of Assyria colonised the land with peoples from Babylonia. These were the beginnings of the Samaritans about whom we hear in Jesus' day.

So radical was this reformation that Bethel, an ancient northern shrine was destroyed. It had possibly been used by Abram, (Gen. 12. 7-8); and by Jacob (Gen. 31. 13 & 35. 7). Jeroboam converted these 'high places' to Baal worship. It was there that a man of God came from Judah and denounced the northern king's idolatry. It was there also that the man of God was buried along with the old prophet who had led him into disobedience. The story is recalled in 2 Kings 23. 15-18 when Josiah

fulfilled the prophecy about the altar at Bethel one hundred years later. He gave orders that the men of God should be untouched while the rest of the high place was desecrated. No place or object or ritual remains sacred if it is abused by false worship.

While the purifying of the land proceeded, the Temple which Solomon had built was undergoing repairs. During the renovations the priest found an old document which later was identified as the Book of Deuteronomy. During the periods of unrest and foreign worship the ancient books of the Law had been forgotten or perhaps hidden. This was the book which required the worship of Israel to be central at Jerusalem. It began to take serious effect in the days of King David and later when the Temple was being built in the reign of Solomon.

Josiah was alarmed at the contents of the newly found scroll. He realised how far short Israel were in measuring up to the Law given by Moses. He told his courtiers to discover God's will in the matter. The request seems to have been communicated to the priests. They in turn consulted with the prophetess Huldah who was the wife of a court official (2 Kings 22. 14). Her answer was not flattering to the people of Judah. She made it clear that God would judge his people because of their disobedience to his law and their outrageous idolatry. She in fact recalled what had been written in the books of the Law, and was to be reiterated again and again more specifically by Jeremiah throughout his time of prophesying.

Why was Jeremiah not consulted as the prophet of God? He was still very young. He had no court connections and his family background may have disqualified him from any favour from the Temple priesthood. But the words of Huldah, along with the prophecies of Jeremiah in the years to come were confirmation; "out the mouth of two witnesses"! God's messages are not confined to the expected channels.

During the reign of Solomon, Zadok's family displaced that of Abiathar as High Priests. The young Samuel had prophesied that Eli's family would not be allowed to continue in that high office. A feud lingered between the two families and became more apparent at the time of Josiah. The family of Abiathar, like many other provincial priestly families, must have lost their work during the reform period. It was to have serious consequences for Jeremiah.

Josiah was deeply concerned about the contents of the book which had been found. He realised how greatly Israel had sinned and broken the covenant with their God. The covenant relationship between the Lord and his people was to become the theme of Jeremiah's great prophetic speeches. How much the prophet and the king met and discussed the reform we may never know, but there are remarkable similarities in their outlook, obviously inspired by the same spirit.

Josiah's work of reform was not only negative in the pulling down of idols and altars. There is a very strong connection between the moral values of a nation and its religious attitudes. Israel's law which had been so badly neglected was very much about their relationship to God and to each other. Justice and kindness had been neglected and in their place cruelty and murder had developed.

Real reform meant that the people must learn how to behave in the manner that God wanted them to, so Josiah ordered the people to assemble and hear the Word of God read to them. To this was added the re-establishment of the covenant between God and his people. From this must come a desire to remember how God had redeemed his people. Thus, after many long years, they at last kept the Passover. These were all signal events of true reform. Knowing what God wants from us by studying the Scriptures and recalling the way he reconciles his people to himself are vital elements in practising the true faith. They provide a standard and pattern for God's people in every Age by which they must measure their own need of repentance. To these principles Paul drew attention when he wrote "*Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*" (1 Cor.11.28 RSV).

Whatever Jeremiah's part in the reform during the life of Josiah, he was to continue the work among the people of Judah long after the king was killed in the fateful battle against the Egyptians (2 Kings 23. 29). Josiah's action against Neco is puzzling. God had made a promise by covenant with David and reinforced it in the triumph of Hezekiah. Many in Judah believed that however evil Jerusalem became, nothing could overthrow God's city, its Temple and its king. If Josiah became so arrogant that he thought he could tempt God, (Matt. 4. 7) he discovered his mistake too late.

In his “Temple” sermon, (chapter 7) Jeremiah told God’s people the consequences of relying upon a material shrine like the Temple to save them, instead of genuine faith in God. Their worship was false, their religious ritual and sacrifice based on hypocrisy. True salvation produces right behaviour. Jeremiah was grief stricken at the hollow attitudes of Israel’s piety. Religious observances and sacrifices have no value unless those who practice such things, really come to know their God. Evidence of this relationship is not demonstrated in academic knowledge but in the way people live. Thus Jeremiah was able to write of Josiah “*He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the LORD*” (Jer. 22. 16 RSV). The laws by which followers of Jesus today are judged are based on active justice and compassion; they spring from knowing God personally. When the father of lies and hypocrisy has no influence in the Age to come, those same principles will be the foundation of the judgment of all people. Such law is written not on stone tablets but on the pages of the human heart.

DN

The beam that shines from Zion’s hill
Shall lighten every land;
The King who reigns in Salem’s tow’rs
Shall all the world command. *Poems of Dawn*

So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God. (2 Chron. 5. 14)

Christian! Seek not yet repose,
Hear thy guardian angel say;
Thou art in the midst of foes -
‘Watch and Pray!’ *Charlotte Elliott*

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. (Ezek. 43. 1-5)

IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth,
 good will to men,
From heaven’s all-gracious King”;
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies
 they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O’er all the weary world:
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o’er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long,
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man,
 hears not
The love-song which they bring—
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life’s crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow—
Look up! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing;
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world
 send back the song
Which now the angels sing.



Edward Hamilton Sears (1810-1876) penned these words. He was an American preacher who wrote this 5 stanza poem, which first appeared in the 29 December 1849 issue of the ‘Christian Register’, after a breakdown and reflecting also on the Mexican war from 1846 to 1848 and various other wars affecting European countries.

Here are some scriptures which are reckoned to have inspired the poem;
Luke 2: 8-14 There were...shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them...said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Gen. 11: 8-9 The LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name... Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon...all the earth.

Mark 13: 7-8 (NKJV) When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end *is* not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

Hebrews 1: 6 (RSV) And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

Isaiah 35: 4 Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *even* God *with* a recompence; he will come and save you.

Isaiah 61: 1-3 The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,...that he might be glorified.

2 Peter 3: 13 (NKJV) Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Matthew 25: 31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

Acts 2: 3 There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

Rev. 21: 1-4 (NKJV) I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

A PORTRAIT OF ST. LUKE

Luke, the Evangelist, physician and historian, is said by tradition to have been a painter, and perhaps in the picturesque qualities of his writing we may trace the origin of this pious opinion. There is a legend that he painted the portrait of the Virgin, and certainly the greater part of the little we know of our Lord's mother is due to St. Luke, who preserved for us the Magnificat, and drew in words that poetic picture of the Nativity adorned with the Nunc Dimittis and the Benedictus which pictorial art has never ceased to reproduce. There is always a widespread desire to discover the personalities of great writers, and surely there is no one who has any feeling for Christianity but must regret our ignorance about the four Evangelists. Luke is the only one of whose character it is possible to form any definite idea. Even in his case we must rely mainly upon conjecture, for the modest chronicler of the Acts of the Apostles has purposely withdrawn himself from the gaze of his readers. He never tells us who he was, nor asks for our sympathy or our praise for the many hardships which he and Paul bore, and the many heroisms they displayed together. He never even betrays his presence except by the use of the pronoun "we". All we know for certain is that the "beloved physician" never failed his friend, but was alone with him when he made "ready to be offered". There is no direct evidence as to whether he was a Jew or a Greek, but many authorities adhere to the latter conclusion. Luke shows little sympathy with the Jews as a nation, and always paints them as hindering the work of the Church. On the other hand, he betrays some tolerance for the heathen religion around him, and a just and sympathetic comprehension of the attitude of the Roman Governors towards the new faith.

But whether he belonged to "the people" or "the nations", the historian was an artist—a man of great literary genius, whose heaven-instilled purpose, while it inspired his work, never for a moment obscured his artistic skill. The object of the book of the Acts is, as we read it, twofold. First, the author desires to draw a picture of the early Church while it was still but an offshoot of Judaism; and secondly, to describe the bursting of the Judaic bonds by the real hero of the book—Paul. Inspired by his wonderful—we are tempted to say his Greek—love of beauty and happiness, Luke begins with an exquisite picture of the early Christian community. An ideal social life prevailed among the brethren. "*No man*

lacked anything", for *"they had but one heart and one mind"*. No one *"called anything his own, but they had all things in common"*, and *"breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart"*. We are told that *"a great peace was upon them all"*, and that they possessed singular gifts of healing. Their increasing influence with the people disquieted the authorities, who, *"doubting how far this would grow"*, summoned the apostles to appear before them and tried to bind them over to silence. Peter and John, however, replied to their accusers with light-hearted courage saying, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than to God, judge ye"*, and so far impressed the learned Gamaliel with their assurance that he begged his brethren to let them alone lest they themselves should be found fighting against God. When persecution threatened them Luke shows us the disciples assembling themselves together and praying that God, seeing their peril, would grant unto his servants that with all boldness they might speak his word by stretching out his hand to heal, that signs and wonders might be done by the might of his holy child. In the next picture which Luke puts before us the state of the Church is somewhat changed. The brotherhood has been greatly enlarged, and we trace some diminution in the early simplicity and joyousness. There arose, we are told, a murmuring among the Christian poor because some were bettered cared for than others;—evidently there is no longer community of goods. Certain men are chosen for the work of practical philanthropy, among them Stephen, who by giving offence to the orthodox Jews, becomes the first martyr. In presenting Stephen to his readers Luke departs a little from his ordinary method of character-drawing. Generally he adheres strictly to the dramatic method, and allows his characters to reveal themselves by their own words. But in the case of Stephen it is not so, and the world knows Stephen better by what Luke tells us than by the long discourse which is reported as his. We are convinced by his biographer rather than by his eloquence that *"he was full of faith and power"*, and that his hearers *"were not able to resist the wisdom and power by which he spake"*, so that *"all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel"*. By the description of his actual martyrdom this impression of spiritual fascination is confirmed in the reader's mind and perhaps the picture of Stephen *"looking into heaven"*, seeing the *"glory of God"*; and forgiving his enemies, while they, *"cut to the heart, gnashed upon him with their teeth"*, is for mere beauty of depiction the finest passage in the Acts. This moment of tragedy is the one which Luke

chooses as the one in which to present Paul “*The witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul*”.

Once more the scene changes. Henceforward the reader’s interest centres round Paul,—his conversion, his perils, his trials and his defences. As we read Paul’s words as recorded by his friend it is impossible not to wonder to what extent they have been modified by passing through the medium of another mind. Was Luke’s report always accurate? Verbal accuracy was surely impossible. It is out of the question. If a speech took some hours to deliver it is not possible to compress it into a short paragraph and maintain verbal accuracy. All the same, the short report may be a true one. A man may give in ten minutes an account of a speech he has heard in the House of Commons, and may convey truly both the subject matter of what was spoken, and also the manner and mental characteristics of the speaker, though he give up all attempts at a literal repetition of the sentences. Such a report could not be called imaginary, though it makes of necessity some tax upon the understanding and imagination of the reporter. The account would remain essentially true, and in this matter of essential truth, so far as Paul is concerned, every reader of the Bible who has the smallest grasp of character is in a position to verify Luke’s account. Is the Paul whose adventures we follow in the Acts the same perfectly original character who reveals himself to us so unreservedly in his letters? Undoubtedly he is. No one could fail to recognise the great Apostle.

Nevertheless, every portrait reveals the painter to some degree, and in all of Luke’s sketches of character we see the same aversion to dogmatism, and the same fair attitude toward “those of the contrary part”. He dwells particularly upon any sympathetic allusion to the classical standpoint made by the apostles, repeating with evident sympathy the words spoken by Paul suggesting the nearness of God toward those philosophers who had “felt after him”; and again, when Paul prevents the populace from worshipping him, we catch a glimpse of Luke’s artistic appreciation of the joyousness inherent in a point of view which, however erroneous, bore testimony to the goodness of God, “*who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not himself without a witness in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*”

All through his book Luke shows the characteristics of a man of much education. He seems almost to share the High Priest's surprise at the eloquence and force of Peter and John, "*seeing that they were unlearned and ignorant men*", and he displays that distrust of the multitude so common in men of exceptional gifts exceptionally cultivated. Witness his allusions to "*fellows of the baser sort*", and his account of the mass meeting of the Ephesian silversmiths, where "*some cried one thing and some another, for the more part knew not why they were come together*". The sudden changes of mind observable in crowds strikes the historian's notice. He describes how the barbarians of the island on which Paul was shipwrecked, on seeing him bitten by a snake, concluded that he must be some murderer flying from justice whom vengeance had overtaken. "*They looked that he should have swollen and fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while and seen no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.*" Again we see a trace of the same feeling in the almost satirical account of the behaviour of the Jewish rabble before Gallio, when with utter inconsequence they beat Sosthenes in the Judgment Hall because they could not be revenged on Paul, and we feel that Luke is not wholly out of sympathy with the supercilious Gallio, who looked on at what he considered a quarrel "*about words and names and their law*", and "*cared for none of these things*". To Gallio himself it can never have occurred that his name would be known two thousand years later solely in connection with a petty riot he hardly noticed, any more than it occurred to Festus how bitterly the course of history would satirise his contemptuous summing up of Christianity as a question of Jewish "superstition" and of "one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive". Man has a treacherous memory. It is hopeless to say what he may remember, or to gauge how much he will forget. Agrippa, Felix, Festus, Gallio would have been as dead men out of mind but for Luke's pencil. Luke showed wherein lies "*the artist's vantage o'er the king.*"

AOH

God has a plan for every man
Who has the mind to see—
If you will go
Where He will show,
His best is yet to be.

Maurice Cox—The God of All Grace and Me

THE COMING OF THE KING

3. "He cometh with clouds"

Several times is it said of our Lord's Second Advent that He comes in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This imagery is taken from the seventh chapter of Daniel where "one like the Son of man" comes thus and is brought near before the "Ancient of days" to receive the dominion of earth and an everlasting kingdom that shall never pass away. Behind this lay the memory, deeply engraved on Israel's national consciousness, of the cloud and fire of Mount Sinai where God first revealed himself to them and fixed for ever in their minds the idea that his presence and power, his judgments and his blessings, were concealed in and revealed by the dark storm clouds and the fiery radiance that crowned the Mount.

It is probable that the early Christians, familiar as they were with the symbolism of Old Testament prophecy (technically called "apocalyptic") understood these allusions in a metaphorical sense, but it was perhaps inevitable in later centuries, as the interpretation of Old and New Testament passed increasingly into the hands of Western theologians unfamiliar with ancient Hebrew thought-forms and influenced greatly by the limited knowledge of the physical universe characteristic of the Middle Ages, that men should tend to understand them in a purely literal manner. Examples of mediaeval art abound in which the Lord is depicted descending towards the earth seated or standing upon a cloud, or cleaving the skies with an attendant train of angels surrounded by a mass of storm clouds interspersed with strokes of lightning. It becomes necessary in this our day to re-examine this conception with great care if the true purport of these statements is to be understood. The Old Testament is full of allusions to the power and presence of God as manifested in cloud and fire. The majesty and solemnity of massive storm-cloud formations with their attendant crashing thunder and brilliant lightning—so much more intense in tropical latitudes—must have suggested to men at a very early date the idea of God coming upon them for judgment. The spectacular scenes at Mount Sinai during the Exodus, where for some three months the Israelites, encamped in the plain below, saw the summit of the mountain shrouded by masses of clouds from which appeared lightning and fire accompanied by thunder, and knew that within that fearsome place Moses was as it were face to face with God, was sufficient to fix this conception of the Deity in the minds of all Israel for ever. So the

“pillar of cloud by day and the flaming fire by night” which was with them through all the forty years’ wanderings, and led them at last to the Promised Land, was in truth a manifestation of God to them. The same visible Divine glory which gave them blessings of confidence and leadership in the wilderness was the executor of judgment upon the rebellious, as in the case of Korah and his followers, when the same glory blazed out from the Sanctuary and destroyed the enemies of the Lord. So the cloud and fire very soon became both symbol and manifestation of the invisible God moving into action for blessing and judgment.

The same idea is exemplified in the recorded visions of God seen by some of the Hebrew prophets. Ezekiel, beholding in the open desert the glory of the Lord, saw it against a background of cloud and dazzling light—so intense that he could see little else but the shining cherubim, attendant upon the chariot of God. (Ezek. 10). Isaiah, seeing a parallel vision in the Temple at Jerusalem, experienced the same combination of radiant glory and obscuring cloud—the Temple was filled with smoke, he says, remembering how in earlier times the Divine Presence was a “*cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night*” (Isa. 4. 5). But the most eloquent exposition of this poetic representation of God arising to action is surely that in Psalm 18 (7-12), especially impressive as rendered by the R.S.V. “*the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled...Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet...He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire.*” This is what the prophet Joel had in mind when he described the coming of the Day of the Lord. “*I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke*” (Joel 2. 30), the piled up masses of dark cumulus thunder-cloud being the “pillars of smoke” to which he referred.

This is the foundation upon which is built Daniel’s vision of the coming of the Son of Man as described in the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel. The same background of storm-cloud and fire surrounding the majesty of God Most High, the fire darting out from before him to consume the powers of evil represented by the mystic “beasts” of the vision, and the clouds providing a setting for the resplendent figure of the

triumphant Son of Man coming before the Most High to be formally invested with the Kingdom of earth and to receive the allegiance of all its inhabitants. The same combination of judgment and blessing, in fire and cloud; the same basic idea that the majesty and the Person of Deity, not to be perceived directly by mortal man, is both concealed by, and manifested in, the cloud and the fire. And this same conception is carried into the New Testament, for the prophetic words of Jesus, and the ecstatic outburst of John the Revelator, both take their inspiration from this vision of Daniel. *"I say unto you"* declared Jesus to the High Priest at his arraignment *"hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"* (Matt. 26. 64) and at that the High Priest rent his clothes, and cried out *"He hath spoken blasphemy"*. Caiaphas knew full well what the words implied, that Jesus laid claim to being in his own person the fulfilment of Daniel 7, that He himself was the "Son of Man" seen in vision by the ancient prophet. And because Caiaphas knew that the prophetic vision was of the Messiah and he would not admit that the prisoner before him could possibly be Israel's Messiah, he charged him, logically enough from his own standpoint, with blasphemy. A few days earlier Jesus had said a very similar thing to his own disciples. Describing to them the order of events of his Advent, and following that aspect of the Advent which concerns his revelation of himself *"as a thief"* to his own watchful adherents prior to the general revelation to all, He said *"and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* (Matt. 24. 30). John's outburst in the Book of Revelation is very similar, *"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."* (Rev. 1. 7). Now both of these statements combine the symbolism of Daniel 7 with that of Zech. 12, in which at the Last Day the people look upon the One whom they rejected and break down in an agony of mourning and repentance for their blindness and folly. The prophetic visions of Daniel 7 and Zech. 12-14 are thus linked together as having joint reference to this outwardly spectacular aspect of the Second Advent and it is because of this that a clear understanding of these "clouds of heaven" is so important.

It will not fail to be noticed that in these references to the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven the picture is that of something that is

universally seen or discerned. Whereas the returning Lord comes first to his own followers, the Church, “as a thief”, in such fashion that only the “watchers” are appraised of his coming and the world in general see and hear nothing untoward and know not what is going on, when He comes “in the clouds of heaven” the whole world will know about it. There will be no doubt as to the fact of his Advent; moreover, there will be obvious signs of repentance and acceptance of him as Lord, and that denotes what may be termed an advanced stage in the succession of events which comprise the full range of the Advent. It is very important to note here that the “mourning” of Matt. 24. 30 and the “wailing” of Rev. 1. 7 is not, as is sometimes thought, a sign of terror or consternation but one of repentance and acceptance. Both these texts derive from Zech. 12 and must therefore bear the same meaning as the “mourning” of that chapter, and that quite clearly is a mourning of repentance. The coming in the clouds of heaven therefore must refer to a point in the end of the Age when resistance to the incoming Messianic Kingdom has measurably subsided and the time has come for earth’s new King openly to take his power and commence his beneficent administration. There is a factor in Jesus’ words to Caiaphas which highlights this point. Caiaphas himself, and presumably the members of the Sanhedrin sitting with him, are “*hereafter*” to see him coming in the clouds of heaven. To do that they must be here on earth, alive and in possession of their normal senses, and Caiaphas and all his colleagues are dead, have been dead for nearly two thousand years, not to be raised from the dead until the “resurrection at the last day”, to use the words of Martha attesting her faith at the awakening of Lazarus. There must therefore be a sense in which the “coming in the clouds” is continuing even after the general resurrection of the dead has commenced, and this itself is a process which does not begin until the earliest phases of the Advent have become a fact and the power of the Messianic Kingdom is operating in the earth.

Notwithstanding this consideration, it is clear that the coming in the clouds must at least begin to have its fulfilment before the general resurrection, for there is one more New Testament allusion back to Dan. 7, and that is the description in Revelation 14 of the harvest of the earth. Here, in a definite “Second Advent” sequence, the Revelator sees “*a white cloud, and upon the cloud one like unto a Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle*”. (Rev. 14. 14). This visitant from the skies proceeds to reap the harvest of the earth and

immediately thereafter follows the treading of the winepress of the wrath of God, clear symbols of the man-made strife and turmoil which forms so great a part of the judgment with which this Age will end. The “white” cloud is one that is gleaming and glistening—the same allusion appears in Matt. 17. 2 and several other instances—and here there is the same association of cloud and light, betokening coming judgment and blessing, that we have in the Old Testament. It is to be noted here that the A.V. has incorrectly rendered verse 14 “one like unto *the* Son of Man” as it has in Dan. 7, whereas in both instances the Greek and Hebrew is in the singular “*a* son of man”, a man-like being, one of the sons of men. The application of the expression to our Lord, who called himself “the Son of Man” is correct, but it is a matter of interpretation and not of translation. John saw a resplendent king-like figure in the form of a man on that cloud; like Daniel, who saw the same human figure in his vision, he knew it to be a symbol for the personal coming and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, resplendent in his Divinity, without any reference to whether the appearance is literally visible to the natural sight or not. Every element in the vision is a symbol of a more profound underlying reality.

This fact helps to illuminate 1 Thess. 4. 17 where the members of Christ’s Church, at the time of their resurrection, are said to join the Lord “in the clouds”. It is a fundamental of Second Advent theology that the first event of the Advent is the raising of the “dead in Christ” and the “change” of the living saints that they might together be translated into the clouds to meet the Lord. In olden times when Heaven was believed to be “just beyond the bright blue sky” it was natural to think of these as the literal clouds, and the meeting as taking place in space just beyond those clouds, en route to that heaven. Now that it is more generally realised that the resurrection of the “saints” is a “change” to a celestial state and a totally different order of being in which terrestrial objects and conditions have no place, that conception is not so fitting. There may well be thought something incongruous in the idea of that wonderful meeting with our Lord in all the glory and power of celestial nature having to take place within the confines of a bank of fog floating only a mile or so above the surface of our planet. When it is seen that the usage of the symbol is to indicate that the meeting takes place out of the view of men and within the bounds of that period of combined judgment and blessing which is pictured by this “coming in the clouds” the way is open to a more spiritual and satisfying view of the “rapture of the Church”. *To be continued*

TREASURES OF THE SNOW

“Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?
Hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I
Have reserved against the time of
Trouble, against the day of battle and war?” (Job 38. 22-23)

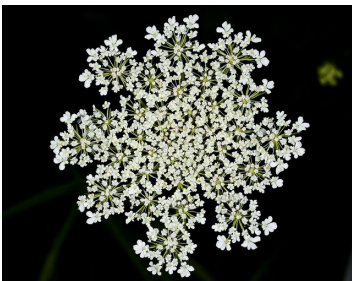
Snowflakes under a microscope are a marvellous sight. Each crystallized rain-drop—for such is snow—have definite symmetrical designs of innumerable variations.

The Scriptures speak of rain as symbolizing Divine Truth (Deut. 32. 2; Isa. 55. 10-11), therefore, the variable star-like gems falling from the heavens in the form of snow brings to mind the thousands of God-given harmonious and well-ordered illustrative incidents found in the Bible, and which incite the consecrated to faith and good works. Forceful and consolidated truths, are represented by hail.—Isa. 28. 17.

It is significant also that snow reflects sunlight in its purity, and is therefore an emblem of love, righteousness and goodness. Black objects, on the other hand, absorb all light, thereby picturing established wickedness, selfishness and destruction.—Jude 11-13.

Red denotes blood, and tokens Adamic condemnation and death. How magnanimous and gracious, therefore, the message addressed to each one of us— “Come now, and let US reason together, saith the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”—Isa. 1. 18.

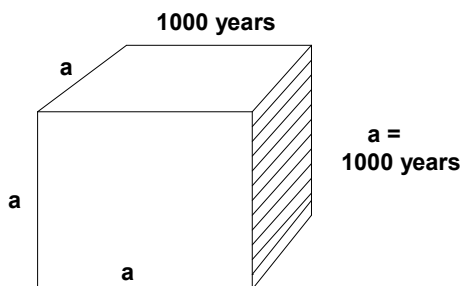
FL



GOD'S KINGDOM TO-BE

In Revelation 21: 9-27 God's Kingdom to-be is described in very interesting metaphorical language. In order to be brief we ask the readers to read these passages themselves. The city—Christ's government on earth—is compared to a cube with the sidelines = 12,000 furlongs. It was surrounded by a wall that was 144 cubits—"according to the measures of a man, which is of the angel".

The cube is a symbol of perfection, a perfect righteous government of mankind.



Since all people on earth according to Rev. 21: 24 during the next age will get into contact with this symbolical cube, it is important to start studying the matter at once. "The kings of the earth do bring glory and honour into it."

In Revelation 22: 2 the thousand years are divided into months. The prophetic word counts 12 months in a year (Rev. 11: 2, 3 etc). In the Great Pyramid time is represented by measures of length. Therefore we may assume that each furlong represent one month. 12000 months will then, according to the above, be 1000 years (because 1000 years with each year = 12 months will be $1000 \times 12 = 12000$ months or here furlongs).

Thus the cube shows a perfect just government on earth during "one thousand years". This is, however, only the beginning of a symbolic description in detail of that time. In the wall there are twelve gates, three in each point of the compass, and every several gate was of one pearl. The street of the city "was pure gold, as it was transparent glass". The foundation-stones of the wall were beautifully laid and were constituted of all kinds of precious stones. The first was a jasper, the second sapphire,

the third a chalcedony; the fourth an emerald; the fifth sardonyx; the sixth sardius; the seventh chrysolite; the eight beryl; the ninth a topaz; the tenth a chrysoprasus; the eleventh a jacinth; the twelfth an amethyst.

We have said that this is a symbolic language, and we shall continue to interpret further. All people during the next age who want to get an everlasting life under most happy conditions—everlasting life on earth as human beings, the dead will be raised from their graves—have to go into this cube, which is to subordinate themselves to Christ’s government.

“And the city had no need of the sun, (the truth of the New Testament intended only for the church of the Gospel age) neither of the moon, (the law and its directions in detail given to the Jews) to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb (Jesus Christ) is the light thereof. And the nations...shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.” (Rev. 21: 23-24). “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem (divine government of the people on earth), descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God (the fulfilment of all God’s promises about the liberation of mankind from transgression and its consequences: suffering and death): and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone (possibly diamond) clear as crystal (righteousness). (Rev. 21: 10- 11).

The city had a wall great and high,—government (=Jesus and the church selected during the Gospel age)—and had twelve gates (conditions for entrance in the city), and over the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel (the city thus represents the New Covenant, which will be made with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; that is with the twelve tribes of the children of Israel).—Jer. 31: 31-34. But while the New Covenant will be made only with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, the entrance nevertheless will be free for all nations on earth, which if so must become Israelites that is children of Abraham THROUGH BELIEF IN GOD. They shall not become Abraham’s fleshly children as the natural Jews are. That all people, without respect to persons, will have admittance to the “cube”, the city, the New Covenant, is shown by the fact that three gates opened out at each point of the compass. The angel at each gate represents old and

young worthies, who will teach the human beings conditions for entering the city.

The foundation-stones of the wall with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb represent the main theme of the testimony of the apostles in the New Testament. The golden reed to measure the city and its gates and its wall is the word of God.

We have interpreted Revelation 21: 12-16 above. Additionally the city does not only represent Christ's government on earth during one thousand years but also the New Covenant, as said above.

The wall was "an hundred and forty and four cubits" – if broad or high is not said. Therefore the question here is only about spiritual symbology. But the cubits should be according to the measures of Adam was one thousand years long, the judgement of mankind shall be 1000 years long and the same space of time, namely one thousand years long, is allotted for the fallen angels. Christ's government shall also consist of $144 \times 1000 = 144,000$ members, which is the selected church during the Gospel age.

The wall of the city which was built of jasper (possibly diamond) was thoroughly righteous, but the city itself was pure gold—Christ's government and the New Covenant are from God—like unto clear glass, that is God's will shall be clearly and distinctly understood by all at that time. See Jer. 31: 34. The foundation stones of the wall of the city were constituted of all kinds of precious stones = characters, which all members of the heavenly government must have: Jasper—righteousness; sapphire—faithfulness; chalcedony—humility; emerald—obedience; sardonyx—capacity as administrator (sense of responsibility, honesty); sardius=cornelian—love of mankind (neighbourly love); chrysolite—divine wisdom; beryl (possibly goldberyl)—love to God; topaz—goodwill; chrysoprasus—judgement (capacity to tell the difference between right and wrong); jacinth—self-control (patience) and at last amethyst—obligingness.

Concerning the amethyst it has a deep blue as well as a deep red color, close to purple. This means that only those who are unwavering to divine truths and who have a strong love to those are suited for ruling over others (in the millennium kingdom). And in our days no others have true love to God and his plan for a better state of things on earth than the carriers of

the mental quality of the amethyst, a willingness to serve God and the still rising light over His word. Belief without it is dead, of no value. The purple in the amethyst symbolizes the longing to bless all people on earth. Everybody lacking purple in his soul may want to be blessed himself and helped by God, but does not ask what will happen to other people.—

The twelve gates consisted of twelve pearls; each gate consisted of only one pearl—one precious truth: He “gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time” (next age by the angels, the old and young worthies at the gates). —1 Tim. 2:6.

There is, of course, much more to tell about the precious stones, about the city, the gates and the wall, but what is said so far is a supervising introduction. The fact that precious stones symbolize valuable characters can probably not be denied by anybody with common sense.

The exchange of one stone to another does not mean so much, since all precious stones symbolize good characters. Different translators, however, do not always have one and the same precious stone for the corresponding word in the original text.

Precious stones = jewels = individuals = characters, see Malachi 3: 17.

HK

THE HOLY CITY

We dream of thy beauty,
It cannot be told,
The glory for those
Who enter its fold.

How can it be pictured,
With our finite mind,
The home of Jehovah,
Our Father so kind.

Its walls are of crystal
Its dwellings are love.
Oh strive then to enter
This blest home above.

Oh city of beauty
Dear home of the blest,
Come help us dear Father,
To enter its rest.

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A SONG FOR SIMEON

Lord, the Roman hyacinths are blooming in bowls and
The winter sun creeps by the snow hills;
The stubborn season has made stand.
My life is light, waiting for the death wind,
Like a feather on the back of my hand.
Dust in sunlight and memory in corners
Wait for the wind that chills towards the dead land.

Grant us thy peace.

I have walked many years in this city,
Kept faith and fast, provided for the poor,
Have given and taken honour and ease.
There went never any rejected from my door.
Who shall remember my house, where shall live my children's children
When the time of sorrow is come?
They will take to the goat's path, and the fox's home,
Fleeing from foreign faces and the foreign swords.

Before the time of cords and scourges and lamentation
Grant us thy peace.

Before the stations of the mountain of desolation,
Before the certain hour of maternal sorrow,
Now at this birth season of decease,
Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,
Grant Israel's consolation
To one who has eighty years and no tomorrow.

According to thy word.

They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation
With glory and derision,
Light upon light, mounting the saints' stair.
Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,
Not for me the ultimate vision.

Grant me thy peace.

(And a sword shall pierce thy heart,
Thine also).

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.
Let thy servant depart,
Having seen thy salvation.

T.S. Eliot

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