

BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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*Praise ye the LORD. Praise
God in his sanctuary:
praise him in the
firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty
acts: praise him
according to his excellent
greatness....
Praise ye the LORD.
Psalm 150*



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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

A SEASONAL THOUGHT

What a better way to start a new year than by praising the Heavenly Father. A spirit of thankfulness and acknowledgement of blessings, big and small, is timely whether it is looking backwards or moving forwards.

Music and singing is ever present in today's society from the factories, the large open plan offices to shopping centres. Talent shows have filled the TV schedules with mainly young men and women eager to make a name for themselves or a living out of singing and those who succeed have their every move reported in online and offline media.

Songs and hymns can be one of our earliest Christian memories. The one way a child can take an active part on a Sunday is in hymn or chorus singing. How often the remark 'we used to sing that at school'. As time passes by the scene reverses and one becomes the one teaching a chorus to a child. What a blessing that can be.

Psalms provide many, 150 to be exact, of the hymns in the Bible. There are others too like the Song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15.

But the earliest record of music in the Bible is recorded in Genesis 4. 21-22. This passage is solely as a record of what happened to Cain's descendants after he had killed Abel. Jubal is accredited as being the father of stringed and woodwind instruments. He was the son of Lamech who was the son of Methusael. They are not to be confused with the progeny of Seth whose progeny included Methuselah, his son Lamech and his son Noah.



Methuselah brings us to the subject of old age when the singing voice goes, the top notes can no longer be reached and one is left nevertheless with the consolations that it is still possible to 'make a joyful noise unto the Lord' nevertheless until the day comes when all will worship and praise the Lord (Psalm 148. 12-13).

Come, soul, here is music fit for heaven in this your portion, for God is the Maker of Heaven. Not all the music blown from sweet instruments, or drawn from living strings, can yield such melody as this sweet promise, "I will be their God."

The Way to Faith

Revelation 18:22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee.

Daniel 3:5-7 (NKJV) "...that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, *and* lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down *and* worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up."

A SONG OF VICTORY

A Meditation on the 22nd Psalm

We read that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. They were permitted to pass through certain experiences and then to write of them, and so leave on record certain features to attend another set of circumstances which God would provide at some future date. Thus, the experiences they went through became prophetic pictures of the experiences of someone else. Often they picture those of Jesus, and so become Messianic prophecies. Sometimes they prefigure and illustrate the sufferings of the larger Christ—Head and Body—or perhaps to some extent the terrible experiences that the Jewish nation has passed through during the centuries. It is not always easy to make a proper distinction. The Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isa. 53 asked in perplexity: “Of whom writeth the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?” It was explained to him by Philip that the prophet was describing the sufferings of the One who had recently been put to death at Jerusalem. The Jews, however, to this day suppose that Isa. 53 has reference to their own terrible history as a nation.

It is probable that the eunuch would likewise have been perplexed respecting the application of Psalm 22; was the writer describing his own experiences, or did he speak of another? The Psalm is described as a Psalm of David. Whether that be so or not, it seems quite probable that the writer began to write about himself. Before he had got very far the Holy Spirit comes upon him, and he commences describing, with a wealth of detail, circumstances which could not possibly have happened to himself. With a poet’s imagination he writes of One who suffers intense agony of mind and body. With the skill of an artist he portrays a very vivid drama which grows more intense every moment, until it mounts to a climax and then abruptly terminates. After a pause the curtain is raised again, and a happier scene is presented. The Victim has become the Hero; the Suppliant Sufferer has given place to the Joyous Victor.

It seems quite evident that the Sufferer in the Psalm is an individual and not a nation, for verse 14 refers to his heart, bones and body, verse 15 to his tongue and jaws, verse 16 to hands and feet, and verse 18 to clothing. In verses 9 and 10 He looks back to childhood, and forward to death in verse 15. His situation is described with minuteness; He is exposed to the

public view (verse 7), apparently He is fixed to one spot, for his enemies gather around him (verse 12), He is deprived of his clothing, for He can count his bones (verse 17), He sees his garments distributed (verse 18), and He has been subjected to violence, for his feet and hands have been bored through (verse 16). Inasmuch as Rotherham translates verse 17, “they, look for—they behold me,” it may well be that either He has companions in suffering from whom it would seem to the onlookers desirable to distinguish him, or else that darkness has gathered and it is difficult to discern him. He is either absolutely friendless, or his friends are so few and feeble that they do not count, hence his repeated cries for Divine pity and succour (verse 11). Nevertheless, verse 22 shows that He has friends in the background, amounting to a large assembly, but they do not come into view till the sufferings are ended. His enemies are many; mankind in general reproach him, his own people despise him, beholders deride (verses 6, 7 and 8). Meanwhile, his sufferings are intense, his strength flows away like water, and physical courage fails like wax (verses 14 and 15). He struggles to maintain faith in God, who seems to him to be far away and slow to rescue. Crying to him day and night brings no answer—the delay to help is all very mysterious. The fathers had trusted and been delivered in their adversities, He had trusted and not been delivered; indeed, verse 11 implies almost that He had been handed over to his enemies by permission of God. The sufferings grow in intensity, and his appeals for Divine aid are louder (verses 19 and 20), but the face of God seems turned away and in anguish He cries, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (verse 1). His heart is bursting, He had never anticipated such intense mental suffering as that which these words imply. There is a last cry (verse 21): “Save me from the lion’s mouth”—then silence reigns....

There is a sudden calm; all at once the strain of sorrow ceases with the “Yea” of verse 21 (Rotherham)...“Thou hast delivered me.” There is no recurrence of pain, no further trace of a single sob, the voice is hushed in death, but, marvel of marvels, suddenly the voice is heard again and on a note of praise. It is the same voice—the same metre—the same direct address to God; despair has given place to praise, keenest suffering has given way to ecstatic joy, all is changed! Deliverance has come! So great is his gratitude that He must shout his deliverance abroad (verses 21 and 22). His own deliverance is a matter of the deepest interest to the world at large. He calls upon Jew and Gentile to praise Jehovah, “For He hath not

despised nor abhorred the humbling of the patient one, neither hath He hid his face from him, but, when he cried for help unto him, he heard. Of thee, is my praise in the great convocation, My vows, will I pay, before them who revere him” (verses 24 and 25, Rotherham).

As we go through this Psalm there is in our minds one name only: JESUS. Surely, it is the crucifixion of our Saviour which is here portrayed with such a depth of feeling and wealth of pathos. It could not be anyone else. We seem to hear the appealing cry: *“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger”* (Lam. 1. 12). We cannot pass by, we are arrested and gaze at that sublime exhibition of sacrifice and suffering, we marvel and silently meditate upon the Mystery of Divine Love. It is much to us—nay, it is EVERYTHING to us.

Did the Father hear when Jesus cried unto him? Yes, He heard, and showed that He heard by mercifully cutting short those sufferings and eventually raising Jesus again from the grave. Because of his trust in God, He came forth an overcomer, a hero—a conqueror.

The lesson is an inspiring one. Often God does not answer prayer for deliverance exactly the way we expect; we have to descend into the very depths first before He puts forth his power to rescue, and then aid comes in an unforeseen manner. His ways are manifold, wise and loving and just, as He rescued our Lord and Saviour from the power of death, so He can and will rescue all who put their confidence in him. “For He hath not despised nor abhorred the humbling of the Patient One, neither hath He hid his face from him, but when He cried for help unto him He heard.”

What a very fitting sequel the last few verses present. Only through the Redeemer’s death—the one and only great sacrifice for sin, can mankind obtain life. There is no salvation except through Jesus, and we have the assurance that when the knowledge of God’s way of salvation is known in all the earth, then all the ends of the world will turn unto the Lord. All shall worship before him and recognise that apart from Jesus none can keep alive his own soul. Through all the coming ages the story of this great sacrifice will be told, and the exulting shout of praise to God will pass from mouth to mouth: *“He hath done it, He hath done it!”* Truly, it

will then be fulfilled that Jesus shall “*see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.*” (Isaiah 53. 11)

BIBLE STUDENTS SEMINAR DAY

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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

Kenneth Guard (Dorset, formerly Forest Gate)

OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

An exposition of the Book of Obadiah

4. The Day of the Lord

“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 rejoiced 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” (Vss. 11-14 see Sept/Oct 15 issue).

“He that is not with me is against me” said Jesus (Matt. 12. 30). Here is an example of that truth. The sin of Edom at the first was not that they manifested open and active hostility to the children of Israel but that they stood aside when their brethren were attacked by the alien and did nothing to help. Not the active doing of wrong, but the abstaining from doing right. That in itself is sin in God’s sight. The Edomites could have rendered assistance to Israel at the time of the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar; instead they preferred to stand aside and witness the agony of Jacob, waiting until the tragedy was over so that they might have some share in the spoils.

This, perhaps, is the explanation of the apparent contradiction between the words of Jesus above quoted and that other saying of his, *“He that is not against us is for us”* (Luke 9. 50). In this latter case He was talking about those who were found casting out demons in his Name yet not outwardly or professedly following him. They were actively doing good works in the name of the Author of all good works, and Jesus gave them credit for their sincerity and good intentions. So that in the sight of God it is better to do good without acknowledging God than it is to stand aside from doing good works whilst professing a show of righteousness. Jesus gave a parable of two sons, each of whom received an instruction from their father. One said “I go”, but went not; the other, “I will not go”, but he went. Which one did the will of the father? We all know the answer. So the Edomites, no doubt smug in their own self-righteousness, and reflecting, with good reason, that the Israelites had brought all their

troubles upon themselves by their apostasy and unbelief, were condemned in the sight of God because they had failed to remember one very important point; Israel and Edom were brothers.

Much the same has been true with spiritual Edom in this Gospel Age. There has never been a century since the death of the Apostles when some, professed followers of the Master, have not stood by and seen their more earnest and Christ-like brethren hounded and persecuted and done nothing to help them. "*Perils from false brethren*" said Paul; yea, and false brethren there have been ever since. The "spoils" that could be gained by standing aloof and in the end becoming allied with the ravening wolves who have despoiled the true Church has so often tempted the cupidity (greed) of spiritual Edom and led them to betray their brethren.

All these verses, up to verse 14, together comprise a vivid picture of base betrayal. "*The brother shall deliver the brother to death*" said Jesus, speaking precisely of those same things in this Age. And it can be brought very near home to us. Not all the spiritual Edomites are to be found in what some are pleased to call "the systems". How many of us find cause to dissent from our brother or brethren on some matter of doctrine, of activity or of conduct, and allow that dissent to lead us into a condition of active or passive hostility? How many of us exult over our brother's fate in his day of misfortune, or boast ourselves and our superior position in his day of distress, or take possession of that which is rightly his when he is in no position to defend himself, or even hinder and obstruct him in his efforts to deliver himself from his calamities? If in any way we have been guilty of such things, whether materially, or much more likely, spiritually, then the condemnation of these verses is upon us and this is how God views us.

This gives a new viewpoint on the searching question "Who shall be able to stand in the evil day?" Obadiah's prophecy goes straight on from this point to announce the advent of the day of the Lord upon all the nations. The Edomites are to receive retribution in that day for all the wrongs they have committed. In the literal history that day came when Nebuchadnezzar, having completed his ravaging of Judea, turned his attention to the other nations round about and made them tributary also. That was the beginning of the end for Edom as a nation. In this Gospel Age it comes when at the end the great Time of Trouble breaks upon the nations, "*and*

all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble” (Mal. 4. 1). It is in his final destruction of the powers of this world that spiritual Edom suffers. If then any who in the past have been blessed with the light of Truth have allowed themselves to become spiritual Edomites then they will share in this judgment, and fall, and lose the great reward. Who will stand in the evil day? Only those who with clean hands and a pure heart have maintained their consciousness of kinship and affinity with those who in sincerity and truth have maintained their consecration to God and their standing as true sons in his sight.

“And now the day of the Lord is at hand upon all the nations. As you have done, so shall it 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.” (vs. 15-16).

This is the grand climax to the book of Obadiah. All the pretensions and all the schemings of the Edomites have availed them nothing. The day of retribution comes at length when Divine judgment sweeps away all that is out of accord with God’s holiness and leaves only his own true people standing approved. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.” Long, weary centuries have had to run their course before this final vindication could be, but now it has come and all the ends of the earth see the salvation of God.

There is a tendency, at times, to think of this Divine judgment in the Day of the Lord as an arbitrary infliction of punishment upon the world for all their sins, as though God had at length lost patience and summarily cut short the reign of evil by a series of catastrophic visitations emanating directly and solely from his own Almighty power. “The Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity” is the kind of text that would form the theme of such a sermon. But we have to look deeper into the nature of things before we can accurately understand the underlying causes of this Day of judgment. “*Your deeds shall return upon your own head.*” There is a law of creation at work here which is at the same time, as are all the laws of creation, the Law of God. Natural retribution, or what men now call “poetic justice”, overtakes the world at the last. The judgments of the Last Day are nothing more or less than the inevitable consequences and harvest of mankind’s course in history

through the ages. As men have sown, so shall they reap, and there is no escape from that destiny. It is not that God *would* not relent. It is that God *could* not relent. The coming of the Day of the Lord, with all its attendant judgments, was made inevitable on the day that Adam sinned, and as the gates of Eden closed behind the guilty pair it became only a question of time before that Day should dawn.

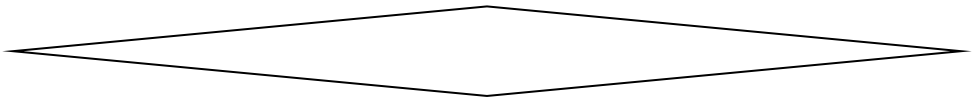
So all the vivid language describing the impact of this Day of the Lord upon the nations is but the poetic expression of God's own attitude toward the sin and evil which the Day of the Lord will bring to an end. The catastrophic ending of the power of man in a Time of Trouble such as was not since there was a nation is an outward and visible witness to God's abhorrence of sin and the determination that it shall be banished forever from his creation. So we have the vivid metaphor in Isa. 34. "*The indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter...For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment...for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea...For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.*" (Isa. 34. 2-8). The final and absolute character of this last judgment upon "this present evil world" can hardly be described more eloquently than in this picture of the Divine sword sweeping the heavens as it flashes over and down upon the guilty earth waiting to receive the death-stroke. But although it is thus described, the world has brought its trouble upon itself, and no other end is possible.

"*As you have drunk the intoxicating cup upon my holy mountain.*" The idea behind this phrase is that after the children of Israel had been taken into captivity and Jerusalem itself left ruined and desolate, the Edomites took possession of the land, entered into the city—the "holy mountain"—and gave themselves over to all kinds of excesses on the site where Israel had formerly worshipped God. In the larger fulfilment this pictures false professors of Christianity usurping the place which ought to have been occupied by the true Church in the sight of the nations, and indulging in a riot of false doctrines and blasphemous representations of the Divine character. "*He, as God, sitteth in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God*" is St. Paul's definition of one such aspect of this usurpation.

“Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD’s hand, that made all the earth drunken.” (Jer. 51. 7). How true it is that many who do believe in Christ hold a miserably distorted conception of the Christian faith and the character of God. How true it is that the golden cup of stupefying liquor with which Babylon has intoxicated not only herself but all around her is responsible for that conception. Men are stupefied, bemused, unable properly to comprehend what God is saying to them at the hand of his ambassadors, and it is all because of the stupefying cup. So it is very true, as God says by the mouth of Obadiah, that the nations round about “drink, and stagger, and be as if they no longer exist”—not “be as though they had not been” as in the Authorised Version. This verse does not teach, as some would make it teach, that those therein spoken of are condemned in the moment of drinking the cup to eternal annihilation, the Second Death. The verse is not talking about the ultimate penalty for sin at all. It is talking about the condition of the world, both professing Christendom and everyday paganism, at the Time of the End. The expression “they shall be as if they no longer exist” is merely the definition of extreme intoxication. They drink, they stagger, and they lose consciousness altogether—a drunken sleep. Thank God it is a sleep from which they are to be awakened in God’s good time, when they will be introduced to a world in which no golden cup of intoxication is found any more, when Babylon has fallen and vanished away, when the Edomites are no longer in possession of God’s holy mountain. They will come forth to a world in which saviours have come up upon Mount Zion and the Kingdom has become the Lord’s. That is the final sunlit scene of Obadiah’s prophecy, a scene which is illumined by the Son of righteousness shining down upon a vast concourse of liberated captives returning to take possession of their heritage. After judgement comes conversion, reconciliation to God, and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

AOH

(To be concluded)



God bids us, then, by past mercies, by present grace, by fears of coming ill, by hopes in His goodness, earnestly, with our whole hearts, seek Him and His righteousness, and all these things all ye need for soul and body, peace, comfort, joy, the overflowing of His consolations, shall be added over and above to you.

Edward Bouverie Pusey

THE CREATOR AND HIS WORK

The works of creation speak of a Creator. Great as is Creation, the Creator must be far greater. Look at the flowers in the garden or meadows. Notice their variety and different colours. They all spring out of the same soil, each according to its own kind. Out of the soil grow the many kinds of trees, each having its own distinctive form or shape, bringing forth leaves, flowers, or fruit according to its own kind, and according to the season of the year. Think of the many birds, all beautiful, some beautiful to look upon, some beautiful in song. Look up into the heavens on a clear night and behold the countless millions of stars, far greater than our earth. Each is in its place and moves in an orderly fashion and noiselessly in its own orbit. These things, all the works of creation, have not come by chance, but are the handiwork of the great Creator, whose power and wisdom is far superior to that of man. He is the great First-Cause, who made and put into action all things in the universe.

*“Author of Nature’s wondrous laws,
Preserver of its glorious grace,
We own thee as the great First Cause,
And here delight Thy ways to trace”.*

Who is this great First Cause - The Creator? The prophet answers: “The everlasting God, the LORD (Isa. 40. 28). His “name...is JEHOVAH” (Psalm 83. 18).

It is reasonable to expect that Almighty God would give to man something that would reveal His eternal purpose in respect to those things created. He has given a revelation of His plans and purposes in the Bible. It is believed that all Christians will, in accord with Christ’s own words, believe all that the prophets have spoken. (Luke 24. 25). The prophets spake as they were moved by God’s Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1. 21). Hence all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3. 16-17). The writers of both the Old and the New Testaments wrote under Divine inspiration. The Bible is the only basis for true Christian faith; therefore we will note certain passages of Scripture in proof of that which will be set forth in the following short statements. We will seek to make them truly Bible talks, putting on one side the creeds and doctrines of men, which are often confusing and misleading.

CREATION

The Bible was given for man's benefit; therefore the Bible account of creation has to do with man and the place of man's habitation, the earth. The first words of the Bible (RSV) tell us that "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*". The "heavens" here mentioned is that great expanse in which God placed the sun, moon and stars. The earth is the place of man's habitation. Before creating man, God created the birds, fish, cattle and beasts of the field. Then He created man in His own image. He created them male and female and gave them power to bring forth children.

He also gave man dominion over the works of His hands. This is set forth in the first chapter of Genesis.


The account of how man was created is given in the second chapter of Genesis. There we read, "*The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*". (Gen. 2. 7). Notice that God did not give man a soul. He made man's body out of the elements of the earth, and animated that body with the breath of life; in order that man might be a living being, to enjoy the blessings of life in that beautiful Eden home where God had placed him. Man was not given a soul, separate and distinct from himself, but when he was created he "*became a living soul*". In other words, no man *has* a soul, but every man *is* a soul. God designates the various animals as "souls". (See Gen. 1. 20 margin & Numbers 31. 28). Every living creature is a "soul".

Man's original home was a very beautiful place. We read "*The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it*". (Gen. 2. 8, 9, 15).

God then gave man a law to govern his life. The keeping of God's law meant the continuance of life and the blessings of Eden. Disobedience meant death and the loss of all the blessings man enjoyed (Gen. 2. 16, 17). God had previously created the angelic hosts. These are His heavenly

sons, who shouted for joy when He began His work in connection with man by laying the foundations of the earth (Job 38. 4, 7). They would watch the work in progress and when the highest earthly creatures, perfect man and woman, were created in the image of God, there would be great joy in heaven. All God's creation being perfect (Deut. 32. 4), there would be nothing then to mar the happiness of every creature in heaven and earth.

FM



O LORD and Maker of all things, from whose creative power the first light came forth, who didst look upon the world's first morning and see that it was good, I praise Thee for this light that now streams through my windows to rouse me to the life of another day.

I praise Thee for the life that stirs within me:

I praise Thee for the bright and beautiful world into which I go:

I praise Thee for earth and sea and sky, for scudding cloud and singing
bird:

I praise Thee for the work Thou hast given me to do:

I praise Thee for all that Thou hast given me to fill my leisure hours:

I praise Thee for my friends:

I praise Thee for music and books and good company and all pure
pleasures.

O Thou who Thyself art everlasting Mercy, give me a tender heart to-day
towards all those to whom the morning light brings less joy than it
brings to me:

Those in whom the pulse of life grows weak:

Those who must lie abed through all the sunny hours:

The blind, who are shut off from the light of day:

The overworked, who have no joy of leisure:

The unemployed, who have no joy of labour:

The bereaved, whose hearts and homes are desolate:

And grant Thy mercy on them all.

A Diary of Private Prayer

John Baillie

PRAISE to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation;

O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation;
 All ye who hear,
 Brothers and sisters draw near,
 Praise Him in glad adoration.



Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
 Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:
 Ponder anew
 What the Almighty can do,
 If with His love He befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, who when tempests their warfare are waging,
 Who, when the elements madly around thee are raging,
 Biddeth them cease,
 Turneth their fury to peace,
 Whirlwinds and waters assuaging.



Praise to the Lord, who when darkness and sin is abounding,
 Who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
 Sheddeth His light,
 Chaseth the horrors of night,
 Saints with His mercy surrounding.



Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!
 All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him!
 Let the Amen
 Sound from His people again:
 Gladly for aye we adore Him

These are the words written centuries ago by Joachim Neander (1650-1680). Neander is the Greek form of the name which would be the equivalent name as 'Newman' in English. He was a theologian who born in Bremen and lived for several years in Dusseldorf, Germany. It is said that he was the first great hymn writer in Germany after the Reformation. The original version was in German, which was translated into English a long time ago. It appears in various hymn books in differing numbers of stanzas.

Here are some scriptures which are believed to have inspired the man that penned them;

1 Chronicles 16:23-24 Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations.

Job 22:26 For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God.

Nehemiah 9:6 Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

Psalms 10:17 LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.

Genesis 39:3 And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.

Psalms 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Matthew 8:23-27 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to *him*, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

1 Peter 2:9-10 But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Daniel 4:37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works *are* truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Psalms 150:6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

Psalms 106:48 Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.

METHUSELAH

The antediluvian patriarch Methuselah, son of Enoch, is chiefly noted for living longer than any other man, a total of nine hundred and sixty-nine years. This is all that is recorded of him in the Bible, although Jewish legend can add a little more.

Eighty or more years ago a suggestion was mooted, by one Arthur Gook in a booklet entitled “Can a young man trust his Bible?” to the effect that the long life of Methuselah was a witness to the world of that day of the inevitable coming of the judgment of the Flood. The meaning of his name, it was claimed, was “*when he is dead, it shall be sent.*” This, so went the argument, the longer he lived the more cogent the warning, and the fact that he lived longer than any other demonstrated the forbearance of God until the last possible moment. According to the Masoretic chronology of Genesis, which is embodied in the Authorised Version, he is represented as dying in the very year of the Flood.

Arthur Gook evidently based his suggestion upon the Hebrew words *muth*, meaning to die, cause to die, be dead, and *shalach*, a verb “to send”, as sending an arrow from a bow, thus making “*Muth-u-shalach*” which correctly reproduces the consonants of the name (the last letter of his name in the Hebrew Received Text is *caph* (ch) and not *hay* (h) as in the A.V.). This would then mean “be dead—send” which unless elaborated as it was in the booklet, is not very informative. Unfortunately for the theory, however, one important point was overlooked. Methuselah was not a Hebrew, and he lived nearly three thousand years before the Hebrew language came into existence. If his name was intended to have any meaning at all, it would have been derived from the language of the day in which he did live, before the Flood.

There is no doubt that the ancients gave significance to names. Thus the Hebrew Je-ho-shua (Joshua in the AV) means “Jehovah saves”. Transliterated into Greek the name becomes Iesus and transliterated again into English it is Jesus. So Hebrew Miriam becomes Greek Mariam and thence English Mary. The spelling of the name changes as it passes from language to language but its meaning, if any, must be that which it bore in the language from which it originated.

Because that language in this case is unknown, there can be no certainty. It is possible though to embark upon a little exercise in possibilities and probabilities. The admitted earliest written language at present known is that of the Sumerians, descendants of Ham, son of Noah, in about the middle of the second millennium B.C. This was only seven centuries after the Flood and not far from the time when all the earth spoke “*one language and...one speech*” (Gen. 11.1). It could be thought hardly likely that the antediluvian language spoken by Noah and his sons had changed much in that short time and it might well be that archaic Sumerian is not very far removed from that earlier tongue. In that case the Sumerian meaning of the name might form a better basis for assessing its significance, if any. In that language the genetic (generic) word for men or cattle in the plural is *adamutu* (from which comes the Hebrew word “adam” for man) and from *adamutu* is derived *mutu* for “husband” and *matu* as a prefix denoting men or women in the plural. The second part of the name could well be met by *u-sal-la* (peace) and suffix *ka*, a voice, to speak, to proclaim. Thus “Methuselach” transliterated back into Sumerian would appear as *Matu-usalla-ka*, literally “men of peace proclaiming” or as would be rendered in English, “preachers of peace”, or possibly “preacher of peace”. Noah his grandson is said in 2 Pet. 2.5 to have been a “preacher of righteousness” and this expression in Sumerian would be *matu-dug-ka*, *a very similar word*.

If in fact Methuselah’s name did bear this signification—there can be no certainty—it does evoke an interesting reflection. Enoch his father was devoted to God; he “walked with God” according to Gen. 5.24. Methuselah’s son Lamech was a godly man as shown by Gen. 5.29. His grandson Noah was also and had divine approval (Gen. 6.8-9). It could be a reasonable assumption that Methuselah himself, in this God-fearing line, shared and conveyed the same faith from father to son. If this be conceded, then from at least the early days of Enoch to the time of Noah, something like a thousand years of history, there was a consistent witness to God and righteousness in the world before the Flood.

There is some support for this conclusion in Jewish legends. Whilst mere tradition should not be taken too seriously, there is usually some basis of truth hidden at the kernel of such stories, handed down through the ages and being constantly modified and changed in the process. Nevertheless tradition does have some value. The British legend of St. George and the

dragon can be traced back to the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda, in which the hero delivered the maiden from the sea-monster of Joppa, and from that myth back to the story of Jonah and the great fish as narrated in the Bible. In this case the old traditions of Israel (preserved in this case mainly in the apocryphal Book of Enoch) depict Methuselah in this light. He is said to have been charged by his father Enoch to preserve the sacred books for future generations and to have received a vision of the coming Flood, whereupon he called together all his brothers to warn them. Later on his son Lamech at the birth of Noah came to him in great distress because of the striking appearance of his newly-born son, whereupon Methuselah took a journey to the ends of the earth to his father Enoch to seek advice and was given the full story of the coming Flood and the part the child Noah was destined to play, All legendary but at least tending to show that in the traditions of Israel Methuselah was credited with faith.

It may have been, then, that there was a nucleus of faithful believers almost up to the end in a world that had become so hopelessly corrupt that at the last God looked down and “*saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*”. So God sent the Flood.

Methuselah, if righteous, must have been dead by then. According to the Septuagint (Greek Bible) chronology, which is nowadays established to be nearer the truth, he died six years before the Flood, and his son Lamech pre-deceased him. Name or no name, if that was the case and he the last righteous man to die before the cataclysm, he was indeed a sign to that generation. There was at least a final six years for repentance. But no one repented. And they all perished.

AOH

Genesis 9:15-16 (NKJV) I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth.”

SHESHBAZZAR

The leader of the Jews who returned to Judea from Babylon at the instigation of Cyrus, King of Persia in 536 BC is stated many times in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah to have been Zerubbabel, mentioned also in 1 Chronicles 3 (v.19) and by Luke and Matthew as a link in the royal line from David to Christ. In two instances, however, Ezra 1. 8-11 and 5. 14-16, the leader is said to have been one Sheshbazzar, named nowhere else in the Bible. It is sometimes asked: who was this Sheshbazzar?

Most commentators content themselves with saying this was another name for Zerubbabel. Occasionally it is suggested that he was Shenazar, listed as fourth son of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) in 1 Chron. 3 (v 18) appointed to the duty because he was of the royal line (the International Critical Commentary makes this suggestion); that he died soon after reaching Judea and was replaced by Zerubbabel. There is no foundation whatever for this hypothesis and some very good arguments against it.

The narrative in Ezra makes clear that Zerubbabel was appointed by Cyrus to lead the Return and superintend the building of the Temple. Haggai and Zechariah confirm this. What is said of Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1 and 5 is also said of Zerubbabel throughout Ezra. There is no doubt that both names refer to the same person.


The explanation is that Sheshbazzar was the Persian name of Zerubbabel, which was his native name. It appears to be the Persian Shish-ba-utsur, which means "resplendent before the king". He was evidently known to and enjoyed the confidence of Cyrus to have been appointed to this important office. His native name Zerubbabel, Zeru-ba-babel, means "stranger in Babylon" and would have been conferred by his father, Pedaiah of the godly line of Nathan.

There are several reasons militating against Shenazar being Sheshbazzar and the first leader of the Return. In the first place he was never, as was Zerubbabel, "prince of Judah", i.e. recognised as the one in whom the royal title resided. It is known that Jehoiachin had five sons born to him in Babylon of whom Shenazar was one, but the Divine edict was that none of his natural sons should ever succeed to the kingly title. After

Jehoiachin the kingly line in him came to an end. Salathiel, reputed father of Zerubbabel and reputed son of Jehoiachin, was born of the line of Nathan, Solomon's younger brother, by Levirate marriage and so both Salathiel and Zerubbabel, and their descendants, although the legal "princes of Judah" owed their blood descent from Nathan. Shenazar is not mentioned in any of the genealogies as in the royal line and cannot thus be admitted.

He would also have been too old. Jehoiachin's five true sons, including Shenazar, were born before 592 BC, the year in which Babylonian records referring to them are dated. He was probably born about 594 and this would make him 58 years old at the Return under Cyrus, and 74 at the Temple building under Darius, altogether too old for so arduous a responsibility. Zerubbabel could not have been born before about 563, and so would be 23 years old at the Return and 39 in the 2nd year of Darius which accords much more with the relevant narratives. It is possible that in Ezra 1 and 5, Ezra is quoting from official Persian documents in which the Persian name of Zerubbabel was used; in the rest of the narrative he uses the Hebrew name much as in the Book of Daniel that prophet's Babylonian name Belteshazzar—Balit-sarru-utsur—"Beltis defend the king" (Beltis was the goddess also known as Ishtar and, to the Greeks, Venus) is used in some places and his native name Daniel in others.

AOH



He who believes in God is not careful for the morrow, but labours joyfully and with a great heart. "For He giveth His beloved, as in sleep." They must work and watch, yet never be careful and anxious, but commit all to Him, and live in serene tranquillity; with a quiet heart, as one who sleeps safely and quietly.

Martin Luther

THE COMING OF THE KING

3. "He cometh with clouds" (CONT.)

The underlying meaning of all the allusions likening the Second Advent to the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, then, embraces the progressive fashion in which the Advent is perceived by humanity in general. There are two associated principles, judgment and blessing, and God, unseen, is behind the sending of both. His storm-clouds of judgment and his bright light of blessing advances swiftly upon the world and men perceive their onset but do not see the Power behind them which is driving events on to their inevitable climax. What they do see is the figure of a man, one like a son of man, one like themselves, who once dwelt with them on earth and shared their sorrows and healed their diseases and finally was put to death by them because they could not understand him, and who now comes again to them having all power in heaven and in earth to rule them in justice and wisdom until the last trace of evil has been purged away and the human race has attained its destiny. They do not see all this at once; at first the clouds do not more than mark the disappearance from the terrestrial scene of those who have been watching for his appearing and have already seen the *astrape*, the early dawnlight, flaming over the eastern hills to tell that the time has come. It must be so, for those who thus go to meet their Lord "in the clouds" must later on be revealed with him to all the world as his associates and willing followers in the work of world evangelism which will then commence. And so the picture of the one "like a son of man" appearing in the clouds for judgment and blessing merges with those of passages like Rev. 19 and Zech. 14 where that same son of man becomes a Rider on a white horse descending from the heavens, accompanied by armies of his followers, to the execution of judgment and the termination of the Age preparatory to the blessing that will follow.

The clouds of heaven, then, picture the onset of judgment and blessing associated with the end of this Age when the works of man perish in utter confusion. In the early stage of this period the resurrection and "change" of the Church takes place, thus fulfilling 1 Thess. 4. 17. Next comes the disintegration of world institutions and the "kingdoms of this world". Men will only gradually come to see that this disintegration is inevitable and that there is "*no way out*", the expression which is the literal sense of Jesus' words in Luke 21. 26 describing this time. Only then, when the

Rider on the white horse is apparent to men and they realise that the powers of Heaven are concerned in this cataclysmic downfall of human institutions, will it be true that they “see the Son of Man” in “power and great glory”. But once they have thus seen the Son of Man they will not lose the vision, for the time of judgment will pass and the time of blessing will come. The Son of Man will still be in the clouds of heaven, no longer against the dark background of storm clouds, but resplendent in the radiance of light. This is where the Millennial Kingdom is established in power and this is where Caiaphas will experience the fulfilment of Jesus’ words of so long ago. Awaking from death he will see for himself the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven. For men like Caiaphas they will still be clouds of judgment, for even then it must remain true that what a man soweth, that he shall also reap, and retribution for the past cannot be avoided even although repentance may ultimately bring cleansing and a fresh start.

In a sense the Son of Man will remain seen in the clouds of heaven during the entire Millennial Age, in that the glories of that Age and the progressive elimination of evil will be tangible evidences of his presence. Elihu’s magnificent conclusion to his defence of God in the debates of Job (Job 37. 21-24 LXX Septuagint) is the finest Biblical expression of this truth. *“But (For) the light is not visible to all: it shines afar off in the heavens, as that which is from him in the clouds. From the north come the clouds shining like gold: in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty; and we do not find another his equal in strength...wherefore men shall fear (be in awe of) him; and the wise in heart shall fear (reverence) him.”*

After the storm, the calm. After the darkness, the golden light of Messiah’s kingdom. The light is there, mingled with the storm clouds, but it has not yet penetrated all the darkness, and the people who sit in darkness have not seen the great light. But it will come. *“From the north come the clouds shining like gold.”* Nothing can hinder their advance. And in the glory of those shining clouds men will see the power of God and know that, at last, the Lord from heaven has returned to earth and established that new order of things which the prophet so long ago promised would be *“the desire of all nations”*.

AOH

(To be continued).

WATCH AND PRAY

“What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.” Mark 13. 37

Our Lord, when teaching his disciples, placed much stress on watchfulness. He taught it by direct exhortation, illustrated it by several parables and practised it in his life to such an extent that if the question were put to us, when shall we watch? we must reply, Always, every moment of consciousness. The standard set up by a review of our Lord’s example and teaching on this matter is exceedingly high; indeed it seems there is nothing more difficult for a Christian to practice.

Regarding watchfulness from a general aspect, it is usual to associate it with ourselves alone, but the Bible assures us that God, the angels, and Satan, all watch. There is also the special prerogative to be exercised by those whose privilege it is to serve the Church, besides the general watchfulness of the whole Church in respect of the Lord’s return, which in practice is an individual matter for each one of us.

God Watches.

This is the all important thing. Is He watching over and for us? The Psalmist says in Psalm 127. 1. “Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” and the principle holds good whether it be a city or an individual. Is He our Father? Can we go to Him and claim a Father’s protecting care? If so, we need not fear. Psalm 121 is full of God’s loving care for Israel, “He watching over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” If He took such an interest in them, how much more does He watch over us who are recognised as being in Christ, personally represented before Him by his own beloved Son? This psalm alone will furnish material for much thought and comfort. God is represented there as our protector, the preserver of our soul, and as keeping us in the way of life, never for one moment relaxing His vigilance. We may stumble, but He knows and seeks to restore us. We may forget Him, but He remains faithful. We may go astray but He will never leave us or forsake us unless we wilfully reject Him. In 1 Cor. 10. 13 we are assured of God’s watchfulness in the matter of our temptation. He is watchful to see that we are not tried beyond our capacity; there is always a way of escape.

Jesus time and again bade His disciples to watch, and not only so, but He left minute instructions regarding watchfulness. It is His counsel for the

whole of our spiritual life. Why did He lay so much stress upon it? Undoubtedly it was the fruit of His own experience; He had realised it all through His earthly career. He examined everything that was presented to Him, having the Father's will pre-eminently before His mind. On the eve of His death He urged His disciples repeatedly to watch and pray; even in the dreadful ordeal of the garden of Gethsemane it was upon His mind. It seems as though in spite of all His personal suffering one great object was before Him, if by any means He might give them the full benefit of His experience and teach them the necessity of meeting trial and temptation by watchfulness and prayer. When He was face to face with the crisis of His life, when it might reasonably be expected that He would be concerned only with His own need, we find Him rising from his knees, going to His disciples and finding them asleep and waking them, saying, "Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." He forgot Himself desiring only to help them to meet their comparatively light temptations with the same weapon as had brought Him success. No human sympathy could be found for Him, but for them the love and sympathy of the Son of God was expressed in the most practical manner at the very time He was longing for theirs. With what regard then we should seek to watch and carefully consider what it cost Him to help us. In season and out of season to Himself, He ceased not to warn us. Watchfulness was not given as a command, or as a piece of advice such as a parent might give his son when starting out in the world, but as the last word of love to those for whom He was about to give His life; His dying wish. Does not this enthuse us and make us wish to examine His words again and respond to them to the very best of our ability? We cannot watch continually without a living motive to sustain us; it would be too arduous, too wearying, but when love demands it what is there too hard? If we really loved Him as much as we love some of those around us we should delight in Him more than we do, and we should find His yoke easy and His burden light. If we desire to love Him better, our prayers will continually express that desire, and He will reveal Himself to us. Then we shall see things in a new light; place fresh values on everything, and in Christ become overcomers. **Watchfulness is love in action.**

Watchfulness pre-supposes vigilance, wakefulness, to take heed, to observe. It implies keenness, placing duty to the Lord above every other. It is always coupled with prayer. We have already seen that God must watch for us, otherwise it is useless for us to watch. Jesus said, "Watch and pray

that ye enter not into temptation.” Paul in Col. 4. 2. speaks in the same strain, and, like Jesus, his last words to Timothy included an exhortation to be watchful in all things. (2. Tim. 4. 5). How can we be delivered from entering into temptation, seeing that we are surrounded by it, and even more, seeing that it comes from within also? Here lies the reason for prayer; watchfulness alone would not save us, or we should attribute overcoming to our own strength. As we are fallen by nature how can we watch against evil in our own strength? So He bids us pray, taking our joys, temptations, trials, victories and failures to Him that we might remember that all our ways are ordered of the Lord. What room is there for the selfish counsel our hearts would dictate? What opportunity is there for the Adversary’s suggestions to take root if we watch our thoughts, words and conduct by applying the principles of the Word to them and seek His blessing and guidance continually? Why should we not lift up our hearts to God in mental prayer at any time, wherever we are, whatever we are doing? There is a tremendous power latent in that.

The Scriptures show also that Satan watches, and the Apostle in 1. Pet. 5. 8. tells us that we are to be sober, vigilant and watchful that we may resist him, steadfast in the faith. James tells us that if we resist him he will flee from us, and our Lord said, “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” The watchfulness of Satan may be defeated by being vigilant ourselves. If we do not watch there is the possibility of being devoured.

In Rev. 3. 1-5, the Church at Sardis was exhorted to watch and strengthen the things that remain, and some were specially commended because they had kept their garments pure. This is to be the aim and object of watchfulness. If we fail to watch to keep ourselves pure we shall be judged and found wanting in an hour when we think not. Have we set our hearts on being with Him and being accounted worthy? Then let us watch and not let our garments be defiled by anything impure either from within or without. Let us set ourselves this daily task for love of Him who will not be ashamed to confess our names before God and His holy angels.

*Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for thine appointed hour;
And fit us by thy grace to share
The triumphs of thy conquering power.*

STRENGTH FROM ON HIGH

“For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest ye shall be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” Isa. 30. 15.

It can safely be said that none save the consecrated child of God realises the utter truth of this statement, “In confidence is strength, in returning and rest is salvation.” It is upon this and like promises that the Lord’s people rely more and more in these days of stress and turmoil. How contrary to God’s ways are the ways of fallen man; strength today is measured in a very different manner. Calm, quiet confidence and rest in God is not considered strength and finds no place in unregenerate hearts. It was ever thus, for we read in the very next verse the reply made by Israel of old to this wise counsel from God, “But ye said, No (we will not return) for we will flee upon horses.” They preferred their own way rather than the way of God, and God’s answer to them was, “therefore shall ye flee.”

The horse in Old Testament usage is a counterpart of the modern tanks and guns. It was their idea of confidence and strength. Egypt was distinguished for producing fine horses and the Egyptians used them much in war. God knew this and had forbidden the kings of Israel to multiply horses (Deut. 17. 16) and in prohibiting them He designed to distinguish His people in all respects from the Egyptians. It was not His purpose for them to rely upon horses for strength and deliverance but solely upon their God, who had promised them victory over all their enemies on conditions of faithfulness to Him. Psalm 20. 7, says, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the LORD (Jehovah) our God.”

In spite of God’s warning through Moses in Deut. 17. 16, to those who would afterward become the kings of Israel, we find Solomon grossly violated this law, for 1 Kings 10. 26 says, “Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen.” He had “1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen” and verse 28 says that Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt. This course finally led to Solomon’s downfall and the downfall of his kingdom as shown in the next chapter (1 Kings 11. 9-12.)

Among the heathen nations the horse was dedicated to the sun and driven in processions at the festivals of sunworship. The ancient Persians, who

were sun worshippers, dedicated white horses and chariots to the sun and it is supposed that other nations derived the practise from them. The sun was supposed to be drawn daily in a chariot by four wondrous coursers. That even Israel had become contaminated by this particular type of idolatry is shown by 2 Kings 23. 11, for Josiah, in instituting his wonderful reformation, took away the horses that the Kings of Judah had given to the sun and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. In view of this we can well understand the fitting rebuke of Isa. 2. 7-8. "Their land is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots; their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made."

Isa. 30. 16 continues, "We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift." Alas that man still, as Israel in Isaiah's day, should rely upon the "swift," and his pursuers have access to the same "swift," whatever it be, whether the horses of the ancients or their modern counterparts, and it is still necessary for the Lord (as in verse 18) to "wait, that He may be gracious." Yet how our hearts rejoice as we continue this passage, in verses 19 and 20. "For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more: He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers", and, even as we apply to ourselves now the words of verse 21, "This is the way, walk ye in it," so, soon we believe, God will say with authority, "Stand still, and know that I am God," and mankind will then no longer have any trust in horses, but will in "quietness and confidence" wait for the word of our God.

Isaiah 51:3 (NKJV)

*For the LORD will comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD;
Joy and gladness will be found in it,
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.*

Ephesians 5:19 (NKJV)

*Speaking to one another in
psalms and hymns and
spiritual songs, singing and
making melody in your heart
to the Lord,*

LAW AND GRACE

What a difficult chapter the seventh of Romans is to many. Then again there are some Christians, the minority perhaps, who are not bothered with it at all and would seem to be quite happy if it were not there. But it is necessary, it is fundamental and rightly understood is certainly most precious.

However, I ought to say at the beginning that there are different views on this chapter. I can only give my own view which amounts to a firm conviction, and which can be summed up in this way.

The personal pronouns of verses 7 to 25 are convincing enough to show that Paul is referring to himself. But at what time. Well it couldn't have been before his conversion on the Damascus Road. For then he was a godly Jew, keeping the law blamelessly, at least so he thought. (Phil. 3.6) With his conversion his eyes were opened to see that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lamb that taketh away the sin of the world. And so, zealot that he was, he straightway says "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? In other words, having been made free in one sense by beholding the Great Sin-offering, he now wanted to serve his new Master by doing good works.

But Paul had yet to learn the very painful lesson of deliverance from law in addition to deliverance from sin. Not only that he had a body prone to sin, but that in that body dwelt no good thing. Such knowledge, I suggest, could not have been a momentary attainment, as was his conversion, but only achieved by experience over a length of time, possibly during one of those periods mentioned in Galatians. What I do know is that insofar as I could say every one of these particular verses and apply them to myself, then I do know where the experience occurred and no doubt you can say the same.

It reminds me too of the words of that inimitable Christian of bygone days, John Bunyan who, recounting his experience of the "Slough of Despond" in his book "Grace abounding" could say that he "did greatly long to see some ancient godly man's experience who had writ some hundreds of years before I was born" until Martin Luther's Commentary

on the Galatians was put into his hand of which he says “When I had but a little way perused, I found my condition, in his experience so largely and profoundly handled, as if his Book had been written out of my own heart”. Doubtless one could say the same about the 7th of Romans.

It follows, therefore, as a somewhat sobering fact that were it not for the presence, in our own make-up, of that which is so clearly portrayed in this chapter itself, there would probably have been no need for it at all, one could go straight on to Chapter 8 and enjoy all that God had purposed that we should enjoy anyway. But such is man.

To illustrate the doctrine Paul uses the picture of the marriage relationship, the woman being bound to her husband by the law as long as the husband lives. So with the believer, he cannot get away from the law, with its “do this” or “don’t do this” by his own efforts, and one who is striving to do so is only in complete bondage. Neither will the law itself die for it will operate we are told in Matt. 5.18 “till all (things) be accomplished” (Diaglott).

The Apostle likens the believers at Rome, and of course elsewhere, to the woman and if they ask “How do we die to law” in verse 4 he answers “You were put to death to the law through the body of Christ, in order that you may belong (become) to another”*. And the word for “another” is “heteros” which means another of a different kind not another of the same kind, and refers of course to Christ.

In the previous chapter verse 7 he has already said that one who dies is justified (or “freed from sin”) now he is saying the same thing about the law, you are made free from it. It is all a question of reckoning. For both sin and the law have resulted in death—the death of Christ and by reckoning ourselves to have died when he died we are made free from both to serve “in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of the letter” as it says in verse 6 (Rom. 7).

So Paul covers the doctrine in these first 6 verses. From verse 7 he considers its implications using his own experience to illustrate. He first meets and answers a question which is sure to follow from his pronouncements, namely “Is the law sin?”. Of course not. But it gave the knowledge of sin in the individual, and as it says in Galatians “It was added because

* combination Diaglott / KJV

of transgressions”. Let us make no mistake, if all is out of God, and it is, then God gave the law knowing full well that man could not keep it, but it has proved and will continue to prove that the whole world is guilty before God.

Paul tells us that he would have had no knowledge of sin if the law had not said “Thou shalt not covet”, and the word means desire, lust, covet or yearning. Now some have found this very difficult, but it should not be forgotten that it needed the Holy Spirit of God to shine into Paul’s heart to give the knowledge of this. But I am sure that only let a believer say that from now on I will not desire anything whatsoever, he would break that law within a very short space of time, if not by act then by the very desire itself. It is like man’s boasted so-called free will. Man hasn’t got free will.

He goes on to say in the 14th verse that the law is spiritual but because he is carnal or fleshly then he is sold under sin, sin takes charge and brings forth death.

The explanation is given in verses 15 to 23. They are explicit in themselves, as it says *“For what I do, I do not recognize as my own action. What I desire to do is not what I do, but what I am averse to is what I do. But if I do that which I do not desire to do, I admit the excellence of the Law, and now it is no longer I that do these things, but the sin which has its home within me does them. For I know that in me, that is, in my lower self, nothing good has its home; for while the will to do right is present with me, the power to carry it out is not. For what I do is not the good thing that I desire to do; but the evil thing that I desire not to do, is what I constantly do. But if I do that which I desire not to do, it can no longer be said that it is I who do it, but the sin which has its home within me does it. I find therefore the law of my nature to be that when I desire to do what is right, evil is lying in ambush for me. For in my inmost self all my sympathy is with the Law of God; but I discover within me a different Law at war with the Law of my understanding, and leading me captive to the Law which is everywhere at work in my body—the Law of sin.”* (Weymouth).

Now all this shows a condition of absolute helplessness and desolation as he exclaims “O wretched man that I am, who (or what,) will rescue me

out of this body of death”*. And then, having reached that point, deliverance comes. Not law, but GRACE. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.”(v.25)

This is the point all believers have to come to, when we trust Christ to do all which we could not do by trying to keep the law. The mature Christian is at rest, trusting in the work of Christ who has been made unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. He can say “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

The man of the world is full of confidence—confidence in his achievements, what he has done or can do. Paul had none as he says in Phil. 3. 3 and neither should we, our confidence is in Him for all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him, Amen.

Oh! what a blessed transition it is from the 7th to the 8th Chapter of Romans. For here we tread the ground of resurrection, beyond the reach of anything to which the judgement of God applied. As Paul shows in the 2nd verse the end result of sin is death, what he had previously said in the last verse of chapter 6 but by the Spirit of God dwelling in us this gives the realization of the fact that we have been made free from that law and can now rejoice in the more abundant life that we have in Christ Jesus.

We were too weak to keep the law, but the Strong One came, subjected himself to that law and died under it and so we, taking our place with Him in His death can also follow through and partake of his resurrection too.

The words “Not according to flesh are they walking but according to spirit” at the end of the first verse should be omitted, their proper place is at the end of verse 4. (Diaglott)

Paul goes on to show that the real conflict is now between the flesh and the Spirit and the more the believer seeks to walk in the Spirit (that is exercising the truth which is ours as being in Christ Jesus) the more constant the enjoyment of victory.

* combination Diaglott / KJV

Romans 8. 9 says, “*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*” Now some believers have wondered whether or not they have the Spirit because of the use of the word ‘if’. They only have to read Gal. 3. 2 “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith” or Eph. 1. 13 “After...ye believed ye were sealed...” to realize that they have and that the words are applied to any “man”. In God’s sight the believer is not in the flesh but in the spirit, the life inherited from Adam reckoned as dead and finished with and the Spirit life because of righteousness.

The practical result of having the Spirit is that it takes away all fear. We are no longer in such bondage, for fear, John tells us causes pain and torment, but perfect loves drives away fear and if a man gives way to fear there is something imperfect in his love. Of course it doesn’t mean to say that we should never experience fear, because it can give us warning of danger, but it should be treated as a watch-dog and kept outside the door of our hearts.

This Spirit of God within us is a spirit of adoption as sons so that the cry of “Abba Father” comes naturally to us as it did to our Saviour, for we are joint heirs with him and if we suffer with him we shall be sharers in His glory.

But until that glory comes we are in the midst of a groaning creation, and furthermore because of the weakness and frailty of our earthly bodies we too are part of it. The press, radio, television and many other things all join together to proclaim the sad and undeniable fact that the effects of the curse are still with us, and I need hardly add that not only man is in this sad condition but the animal world and, in fact, all creation as it says.

Let us not overlook the very important fact stated in verse 20 too, that the “creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope”. If words mean anything this surely speaks of the fact that our great God Himself was the originator and Architect of the whole great and wonderful plan of redemption.

How often we have read the words of verses 26 to 28 and found them sweet to our taste. Dwelling in us the Holy Spirit pleads for us in the

midst of the misery around and within by groans which cannot find audible expression. Is it not a manifest token that it is the same spirit that was in our Lord Himself when he groaned in spirit at the grave of Lazarus?

All this shows us that He is not unmindful of our sufferings and perplexities for they are part of the all things which He is allowing to work together for our good, because we love God and are the called according to His purpose.

Only let us believe all this and the blessing and comfort will follow, for God has foreknown all His children, and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son. He has spoken it and He will do it.

Verse 31. What, then shall we say to these things. Yes, what? It is so marvellous, for if God is for us who can be against us? Who can condemn us, Who can separate us from the love of Christ? And the answer is no one, or nothing. For even though there be tribulation or persecution etc... even in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Yes, neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In conclusion I would just like to say that if there is one thing which I have learned from the Companion Bible is the value it places on the marvellous structure of Scripture as a means to a correct understanding. It may not always be easily seen, but in the case of this 8th Chapter of Romans it is most clear. At the beginning we have no condemnation, next to the beginning and the end the question of sonship, next again the Spirit bearing witness or interceding and finally in the middle suffering and glory and the manifestation of the Sons of God. Surely this one more link in the chain of proofs giving weighted testimony to the fact that this Book is indeed the Word of God far beyond the mind of man to conceive.

Grace Reigns *Grace! tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear;
Heaven with the echo shall resound,
And all the earth shall hear.*

TRUST IN THE LORD—NEVER DOUBT

The Scriptures clearly explain the Lord should never be doubted and one should never follow their own understanding. Proverbs 3:5-8 (ESV) ‘Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.’ This scripture clearly explains how to trust Him and what can be gained if we do. Never believe in the flesh, it leads to pride which God dislikes.

Trust in the Lord is very basic; an essential thing to our spiritual life. This leads to two questions

- 1) How do we achieve ‘trust in the Lord’?
- 2) What are challenges that need to be understood in order to trust in the Lord?

Here are some biblical heroes or examples to help understand the challenges of those who had doubts in their spiritual path;

Zechariah & Elizabeth

In the New Testament Luke 1: 6 says they were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. The noble couple, Elizabeth and Zechariah, the parents of John Baptist, were worried because they had no children. They were praying to God about their sorrow one day in the temple of Lord and there appeared an angel of the Lord Luke 1:11-13 ‘Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.’” (NIV)

The Scriptures clearly say that he was a righteous man and they were praying to God to have a child. When he heard the good news from the angel called Gabriel in the Temple he should have been happy. But actually he doubted and asked for clarification. Luke 1:18 (NIV) ‘Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”’

Since he did not trust with his whole heart the word of God he was given the punishment of being dumb and deaf for some time because he didn’t

believe the word of God. Luke 1:19-20 (NIV) ‘The angel said to him, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.’”

John The Baptist

John the Baptist, the son of Zechariah, was richly blessed with the spirit even from his mother’s womb. His birth and work was great in God’s sight. He completely led his life according to God’s plan;

Firstly he identified Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1: 29)

Secondly he said that Jesus was “Preferred before me” (John 1: 30-31).

Thirdly he saw the Holy Spirit (John 1: 32-33).

Fourthly he called Jesus the Son of God (John 1: 34).

John 1: 29-34 (NIV) “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

But after he had been cast into prison for criticizing King Herod for marrying his brother’s wife, an incestuous relationship, and had been confined there for some time he had doubts about Jesus and what he saw. So he sent his disciples. Luke 7: 20 ‘When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’” Even our Lord Jesus mentioned in Luke 7: 28 he was the greatest prophet in God’s plan, even though he had doubted. All this doubt happened because they did not trust the Lord completely for various reasons and following their own understanding.

Peter

What Jesus said about this kind of belief can be seen from the event that happened to the apostle Peter as recorded in Matthew 14: 28-31 (NIV)

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water”. “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” This is the reason for doubt; Peter wanted to come to Jesus and he asked for permission and Jesus said come, then he jumped onto the water, but in the middle he was afraid, because his eyes saw the wind instead of Jesus. This is the same for us when we start walking towards Christ in this life, we might get the same challenges, if we start to see the problems, then our eyes may be away from Jesus and he may say the same words to us, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt’.

A worse situation in this case would be to try to get back to the ship to protect ourselves from the wind, ignoring Christ completely and believing in the flesh, This is very pathetic and like the Israelites who in the wilderness on their way to Canaan thought about going back to Egypt in order to save themselves. They doubted the Lord and were rejected by the Lord, forbidden from entering the Promised Land.

Thomas

The apostle Thomas is well known for doubting (John 20: 25) “So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he (Thomas) said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” When Jesus came again after 8 days and they were all assembled he clearly explained the importance and blessings of trust based on faith when he said “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20: 29 NIV)

The Early Church

Then finally an example of our early church period is King Herod Agrippa. He killed the apostle James, the brother of the apostle John. (Acts 12: 1-2 NIV) “It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.”

Next he proceeds to try to kill the apostle Peter to please some Jews, as he was trying to get the support of Jewish leaders, fame and to stabilise his rule. So he arrested Peter and was planning to put him to death after The Passover. Therefore the other apostles and followers joined together and

started to pray earnestly for Peter (Acts 12: 5). What happened in the night is well known. Peter was set free by the angel of the Lord and went to the house of Mary, where others were praying for him. Acts 12: 13-15 (NIV) “Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!”

“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.” They were praying for the apostle Peter, but when he was set free by God, they thought they had seen his angel, meaning he was not any more. Why was this? Because they already had prayed for the apostle James, and he had been killed? They had the same thought and expectation for Peter rather than thinking of God’s plan.

Summary

In these few examples of doubt in the New Testament by God’s loving people, firstly we see Zechariah due to his age doubted. Secondly John the Baptist after he had been arrested when his situation in life changed being in prison influenced his mind and he had doubt about Jesus being Christ. Then Thomas even though he had listened to all Jesus’ promises about his resurrection and even though his fellow brethren conveyed to him the news about Jesus’ resurrection, didn’t believe. Finally all the apostles, those who were anointed by the Holy Spirit after they saw the death of the apostle James, doubted and were not able to see with their spiritual eyes God’s plan.

All this doubt happened because God’s people for various reasons did not trust in the Lord completely. They followed their “own understanding”.

The message is to focus on Christ in our life, completely obey his words and in this way show complete trust in our spiritual life. The best examples are the apostles Peter and Paul. They were wrong and had doubt in the beginning of their spiritual lives; Peter even denied Jesus; Paul had the wrong knowledge about God and His plan until he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus. But they overcame and finished their ‘race’, with a very high spiritual life. The Scriptures clearly show they achieved this by being focussed only on Christ demonstrating complete obedience. They completely surrendered their freewill to God’s plan in their life and God’s grace helped them to develop in Christ and to show the fullness of Christ in their ‘race’.

AS

To the tune of Danny Boy, aka
Londonderry Air

Oh gracious Lord,
thy voice of love is calling
From ages past
it comes so sweet and clear,
Thy truth unfolding
in this night of darkness,
Shows us, dear Lord,
thy kingdom now is near.

Oh Kingdom come,
that blessed reign of Jesus,
That blessed peace on earth
we'll soon behold
When saints with thee
will raise and bless the nations
And bring them back from death,
O Lord, into thy fold.

Dear Lord, dear Lord,
thy voice, thy voice is calling,
Come unto me
and peace shall fill your heart,
O sorrow not
as darkness gathers round thee,
If faithful, thou from me
shall never part.

And when the darkness deepens,
ever deepens,
My love for thee
shall ever clearly shine;
And in that glorious mansion
in the heavens,
Dear child of earth, dear child of woe,
you shall be mine.

Songs of the nightingale

One of the gifts of God by which man can render praise and thanksgiving to his Creator as well as give expression to his emotions, his sorrows and his joys is of singing, of poetry and of music.

On each of the two occasions that were involved in transporting the Ark to Jerusalem, vocalists and instrumentalists were present (1 Chron. 13.8 & 15.16). In the later years of David's life, God through his prophets, directed the establishment of the music organisation for the sanctuary. 1 Chron. 23:1-5 (ESV) David Organizes the Levites. *“David assembled all the leaders of Israel and the priests and the Levites. The Levites, thirty years old and upwards, were numbered, and the total was 38,000 men...and 4,000 shall offer praises to the LORD with the instruments that I have made for praise.”*

King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple

2 Chron. 5:12-13 (ESV) *“and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever,” the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud.”*

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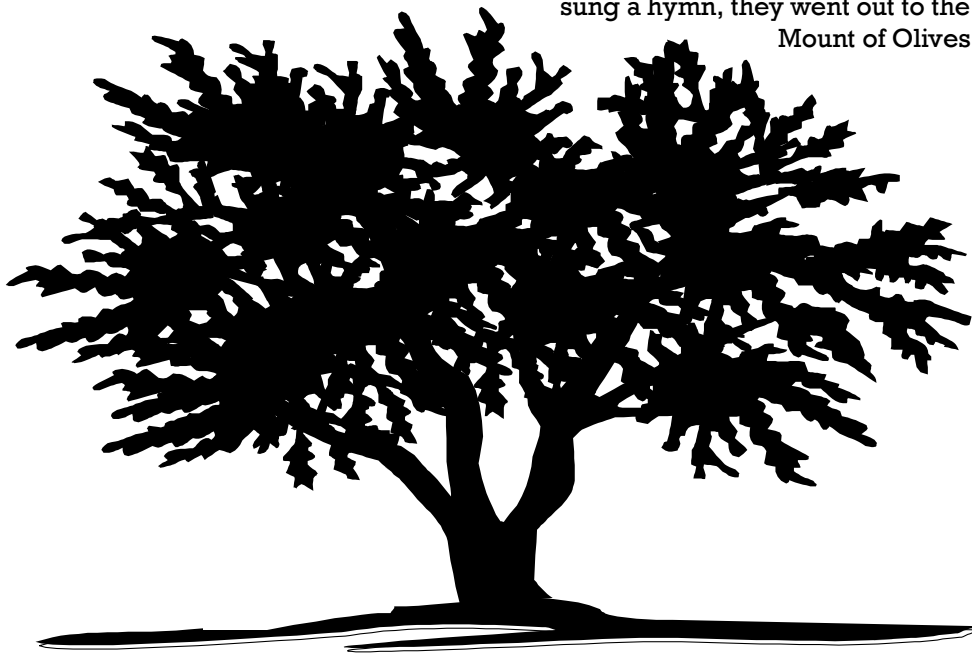
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Mark 14.26 (NKJV) And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives



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"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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A SEASONAL THOUGHT

The Gospel writer Mark records that after partaking of the unleavened bread and wine they sang a hymn. What hymn is not recorded. There are 150 Psalms and it would be no surprise if it were one of them. Would it be a hymn of praise, or perhaps some melancholy one or even one relating to that first Passover and passage out of Egypt.

The next event Mark records is that they went out to the Mount of Olives. It has been claimed for many centuries that the olive trees that now grow on the slopes of the Mount of Olives were there on that very night when our Lord Jesus and his eleven disciples went out to Gethsemane. Modern carbon dating during the 20th Century showed that about 10 such trees were at least 2,000 year old. They were there when in his distress and agitation he threw himself to the ground and prayed to His Father. They were there when he was betrayed in the middle of the night.

After the Mount of Olives firstly he was taken to the High Priest and the assembly of chief priests, elders and scribes. Then after that he was taken to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate who is still nearly two millennia later one of the most well-known Romans. His part in the crucifixion of

our Lord Jesus has not been forgotten. He knew Jesus was not guilty of the crime he had been accused of but yet he gave the order for Roman method of execution, crucifixion.

Crucifixion is a slow and painful death. This is the death our Lord was permitted to suffer for all the men and women that lived before and after him. It is shocking to read that such a method of death penalty is permitted and considered fitting in the last year in some middle eastern countries.

However his death was followed by his resurrection on the third day which in this country is known as 'Easter Sunday'. This is the happiest of days in the Christian calendar because it points forward to the resurrection of the dead at the last day.

The resurrection of the dead is a very important teaching of the Bible. A recent BBC journalist reporting on the death of David Bowie in light of a track 'Lazarus' that the British artist had released just days before his death looked into the camera and finished by saying said "Lazarus came back from the dead, David Bowie won't." On the contrary the scripture says "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive".



The fatty liquid most familiar to the Hebrews was that obtained from olives. Fully ripened black olives gave the most oil, but those yet green, though beginning to change in colour, produced the oil of finest quality. After the fruit was carefully removed from the trees, and the twigs and leaves were cleaned from the olives, they were carried to the oil press.

The pulp of the ripe olive berry is about half oil, which varies in grade according to the method of processing the pulp. The very best, called "pure, beaten olive oil," was produced by a simple process before the olives were put into the press. (Lev. 24. 2) First the olives were placed in a mortar and beaten until they were well bruised, or they were sometimes trodden by foot. (Mic. 6. 15) Next the bruised fruit was transferred to strainer baskets wherein it "bled" oil until the "virgin" or "first expressed" oil was released.

Selected

(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.)

JOSIAH'S PASSOVER

The story of a great cleansing

It was in the eighteenth year of the reign of good King Josiah that the great Passover was kept—the most memorable Passover that Israel had known since the day of its entering into the land. “*Surely there was not holden such a Passover*” wrote the historian “*from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah*” (2 Kings 23. 22). It was a famous Passover, one to be remembered and preserved in tradition and exhortation throughout their generations. There would have been some seven hundred Passovers celebrated since the invading hosts had crossed Jordan and built the stones of Gilgal, but this one was the greatest. What was there about it that made it so noteworthy?

Perhaps it was the freshness and enthusiasm of the whole thing. The story in 2 Chron. 35 reads like that of a revival in nineteenth century England. Faith in Israel had fallen to a very low ebb. The days of Hezekiah had long since passed—he had been dead for about seventy-five years. Judah had suffered under the sway of two idolatrous kings, Manasseh the son of Hezekiah and Amon the son of Manasseh. Under those two men the knowledge and worship of God had languished and died. The idolatrous religion of the surrounding nations had been set up in its place and the people had, in the main, readily accepted the change. Manasseh had erected the symbols of Baal worship all over the land and images even in the Temple itself; he it was who first gave to the Valley of Hinnom its evil reputation, and caused his son to pass through the fire to Moloch. When Josiah came to the throne, as a young lad, the land and the people were steeped in wickedness and the word of the Lord was silent; there was no open vision.

Now it was when King Josiah was twenty-six years of age that he became seized with the desire to rebuild and repair the Temple of the Lord, which had evidently suffered seriously from neglect and consequent decay. Exactly ninety years previously that Temple had been the scene of a mighty deliverance in Israel. Sennacherib the Assyrian had lain encamped with his army, outside the walls of Jerusalem, demanding unconditional surrender. Isaiah the statesman-prophet had gone into the Temple and laid the insulting letter before the Lord, pledging the faith of King and people

that God would deliver....and the angel of the Lord had gone forth that night, and slain in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and eighty-five thousand men: and Sennacherib returned with shame of face to his own land, there to meet death by the assassin's dagger. Thus was Jerusalem delivered. But all that was ninety years ago, and the people who had rejoiced in that great thing were now asleep in the grave, and their sons and their grandsons no longer believed that such things could be, and they bowed down before Baal and Ashtoreth and Moloch and delighted themselves in the abominations of the heathen—until Hilkiah found the Book of the Law among the Temple treasures.

It was finding that book of the Law that brought about the great reformation and the great Passover. Josiah had ordered the restoration of the Temple. It was whilst bringing out of the treasury the silver that was stored up therein, wherewith to meet the cost of the work, that Hilkiah the High Priest discovered a greater treasure still, the Book of the Law of Moses. He gave it to Shaphan the scribe to take it to the king.

Hilkiah was the High Priest but he had not known that this treasure was in his keeping. To what depths must the priesthood and the Temple service have sunk! Quite evidently the old injunction that the Law was to be recited in the ears of the people and taught to the children had not been honoured for a long while past. The consternation that was evoked when the contents of the Book were made known to Josiah a little later reveals that the Law of Moses was in general unknown to Judah at this time. It had been forgotten, and with it the ceremonies and ritual of the Day of Atonement, the Passover, and the feast days must have fallen into disuse. Probably Hilkiah knew that such a book had once existed; maybe he had heard his grandfather and predecessor in the priestly office speak of some such thing; and there may have been a vague tradition that a copy had once reposed somewhere in the Temple archives. But he had never seen it and was probably much more concerned with the “modern” religious thought of his own day. There seems to be something of awe in his tones as he says to Shaphan, surely in hushed words “I have found the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord”. And Shaphan took it to the king.

Shaphan was much more indifferent. He merely remarked to Josiah “Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book”. It meant nothing to him; just an old book found in the recesses of the Temple, and probably hopelessly out

-of-date. It was perhaps with a feeling of boredom that he began to read it before the king. But the effect upon Josiah was immediate and decisive. He realised at once that his ambitious plans for the rebuilding and rededication of the Temple counted for nothing in God's sight without a deeper and more important thing, the existence of which had not until now even occurred to him. The Temple was but the outer shell; without the worship and service of a consecrated people, conscious of its own weakness and shortcoming, but confident in the saving power of God, the beauty of the restored Temple would be as ashes and its sacrifices an abomination in the sight of God. In the midst of his schemes for the restoration of the Divine Sanctuary in the sight of all Israel, Josiah heard the terms of the Divine Law, and he rent his clothes.

Just so, it may be, do we, in the midst of all our planning and scheming, activity and service for our Master and our brethren, all our preaching and witness to the world, come up suddenly against the essence of the Divine Will for us, and realise that all these outward things are of no account in his pure sight unless we have first made our hearts right with him. The will of God for us is, first of all, our own sanctification, and it is after we have started on that consecrated walk that He leads us to opportunities of outward service for him. It is the consecration that hallows the service, and not the service that vitalises the consecration. "*Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and, sacrifices*" asked Samuel of Saul "*as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*" The question comes down the ages and rings in our ears, with its answer "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice". Happy are we if, like good king Josiah, we can realise the situation directly the word of the Lord falls on our ears, and act, swiftly and decisively.

Josiah did not content himself with rending his clothes. Repentance is a necessary preliminary to justification and no progress can be made until that first step has been taken, but it is not a condition in which to linger. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to *salvation*" says Paul in 2 Cor. 7. 10, and unless there is that tangible fruit of repentance, and a speedy fruit at that, the repentance is not very genuine. So Josiah called his ministers of state and his court attendants, and sent them speedily to enquire of the Lord's will for him at the hand of one who could rightfully claim to speak on his behalf. They seemed to know where to go: they made their way to Huldah the prophetess, who, for all that the information we have is very

scanty, seems to have been of some repute and held in some respect. Her words leave us in no doubt as to the forthrightness of her own allegiance to the God of Israel. Her reply was framed in terms of the strongest condemnation. Albeit there was a word of approval for the king's own personal condition of heart before God, the old lady made it plain that Israel as a nation must suffer the inevitable consequence of its sinful way. Judgment must needs come upon them before times could be better. "*Because* they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; *therefore* my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched." (2 Chron. 34. 25).

Here is a principle that applies in our own day also. Again have men—the whole world of so-called “civilised men” this time—forsaken God their Creator and Sustainer, and rendered homage to gods of their own creating, to works of their own hands. In the midst of the distress and trouble which that course of action has brought upon them we proclaim the coming of a new and better order, the Millennial Kingdom, in which evil and lawlessness will be put down with firm hand and all men walk in the light of the glory of God and in the peace of his laws. But before this roseate picture can become a reality there must first be judgment upon the world for its wrongdoing. The Lord Jesus is to be “revealed from heaven..., in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1. 7-8) before He comes with clouds, glorious in the retinue of his saints, and all the people of the earth join in that great mourning which is at once the evidence of their realisation of his Advent and the sign of their repentance. God waits to bind up the broken-hearted and give liberty to the captives, but nothing now can avert that Divine judgment under which the last vestiges of the rulership of “this present evil world” will pass away, never to return. And in our witnessing and preaching we should remember that. Not only must we, as Paul on Mars Hill, declare that God commandeth all men everywhere to repent, and like Peter at Jerusalem, speak of the coming pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, but we must also, like that faithful old prophetess in the dim long ago, pronounce the inevitability of Divine judgment on this world, to burn out its evil as by fire, to consume the defiling images and symbols and sweep clean the corruption off the land,. It is only when God has thus devoured all the earth with the fire of his jealousy that He will be able to turn to the people

a pure language that they may all call upon his name to serve him with one consent (Zeph. 3. 8-9).

The king's decisiveness did not fail him. Unwelcome as the news of the coming desolations of Israel must have been to his ears, he nevertheless took the only course that could be right with God. He summoned the elders and the people, gathered them together, with the priests, in the Temple, and there, in the presence of the God of Israel, he caused to be "*read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord*". There was to be no further excuse for ignorance. All Israel was to hear the Law read, and the authority of no less a person than the king himself lay behind the injunction to heed the words. And then the king drove home to all the seriousness with which he regarded the position. He "*stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book*" (2 Chron. 34. 31). That was a mighty thing to do! Josiah stood before his subjects, openly confessing himself to be a breaker of the Mosaic Covenant and worthy only of its curses because of his shortcoming, and then solemnly and formally made a covenant between his God and himself that he would in future keep the words of the Law as a true son of Israel. He publicly repudiated his own past sin, his nation's sin, and espoused afresh the holy calling of the chosen nation. It was a great thing to do, and it was the only thing. Thus was he able to call all Israel to pledge themselves to follow his example; so he "caused all Israel to stand to it" and the people entered once more into the covenant made with their fathers.

It was in that strength that Josiah proceeded to the logical end of his reform. He went straight from the making of the covenant to a great sweeping away of the idols and the images from the land. The thoroughness and speed with which he conducted that campaign of destruction is shown more clearly in the parallel account in 2 Kings 23. Up and down the land he went, breaking down images, grinding them to pieces and scattering their dust to the winds, defiling the sacred places of the idolatrous religions, turning out their priests, demolishing their buildings, desecrating their sacred symbols and smashing their works of art, until

nothing was left of paganism in all the land from Bethel to Beer-Sheba, and the land was cleansed.

And it was only after all that, after the king had shown the sincerity of his repentance by his determination to be clean in God's sight, that he came to the Passover!

The greatest of all Israel's Passovers was that held by King Josiah after his reformation work was done, and it was the greatest, not because it was organised and directed by a king, but because it was inspired by a man who had become clean in the sight of God. Just as the ancient Hebrew women used to take their lamps and sweep out every corner and cranny of their houses, the night before the Passover, that not the slightest trace of leaven might remain in their homes, so did King Josiah with resolution and ruthlessness seek to sweep out every trace of personal and national uncleanness in the sight of God, that his Passover might be truly acceptable to the Most High.

There is a challenge for us! We approach another Memorial season, another day of coming together in a ceremony which goes to the very roots of all that we hold most dear. "Till He come!"—we repeat the words and cling to our faith that the time will not be much longer delayed and the angel of deliverance come to us and to all the world. It is thus that we gain much of the strength to sustain us for another year of pilgrimage. "*So let a now examine himself!*" comes the solemn words of Paul to us, "*and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of that cup*". As did Josiah, so let us, approaching this season, stand to our covenant with our God, and renew it in the sight of our brethren, go forth to cleanse out of our hearts all that stands between us and God, all that divides us from our brethren, with ruthlessness and determination rooting out everything that savours of the world, the flesh and the devil. And being thus cleansed, thus zealous for the righteousness of God, thus filled with the Spirit, we can come with our brethren to partake of the feast and feel its life-giving influence entering into and permeating every fibre of our being. This wine is life, said our Lord to his disciples—*My* life, given to *you*. This bread is *My* flesh, given *for* you. Can these things do aught but revivify us to greater works than ever before and a closer following than ever before, *if we are clean*? One there was at the Last Supper who was not clean, and he had no part or lot

at the fellowship of that table. But to those who did share in the broken bread and poured out wine, *because they were clean*, there came a union in fellowship which lasted as long as life itself, and inspired them to go forth as one family to turn the world upside down for Christ and his Kingdom. And they did turn the world upside down!

May we, then, at this season, remember King Josiah and his Passover, and how he prepared himself for that Passover by first becoming clean in the sight of God and removing out of his kingdom those things that did offend and cause iniquity. Let us prepare in like manner, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

AOH

OIL A SYMBOL OF PROSPERITY AND IMPORTANT COMMODITY

Great prosperity was signified when reference was made to the vats overflowing with oil. (Joel 2. 24)

Suffering Job longed for his previous days of plenty when “the rock poured...out rivers of oil” for him. (Job 29. 1,2,6)

The LORD caused “Jacob,” or the Israelites, figuratively to suck “oil out of a flinty rock”. (Deut. 32. 9,13)

Moses declared that Asher would “dip his foot in oil,” indicating that this tribe would enjoy material blessings. (Deut. 33. 24)

Olive oil became an important trade commodity because of its abundance there. Yearly Solomon gave King Hiram of Tyre twenty cors (1,162 gallons; 4,400 litres) of beaten oil as part payment for temple construction materials. (1 Kings 5. 10,11)

Olive oil was a common lamp fuel. (Matt. 25. 1-9)

“Pure beaten olive oil” was burned in the lamps of the golden lampstand in the tent of meeting. (Ex. 27. 20,21 RSV)

As a cosmetic it was applied to the body after bathing. (Ruth 3.3)

Selected

PONTIUS PILATE

It has been bitterly remarked that the most well known Roman in history is Pontius Pilate. That caustic comment is probably true. Nero is renowned for depravity and cruelty, Julius Caesar the man who invaded Britain and was defeated, but much more familiar is the name of this rather minor diplomatic official who had the misfortune to be Procurator (Governor) of Judea at the time of the Crucifixion. Since that day he has been universally despised and vilified, and made to carry the major share of responsibility for the condemnation of Christ. What kind of man was he?

The four Gospels record his behaviour at the trial of Jesus but do not tell us anything about him. The two Jewish historians of the period, Josephus and Philo, have a little to say and what they do say shows him in a bad light. Roman historians only refer to him in passing, so that not much is known about his life before coming to Judea, nor his subsequent career after the tragedy in which he played so prominent a part. What little is known enables a picture of the man to be drawn; the history of his ten years' administration in Judea throws some light upon his character.

Pontius Pilate was appointed Procurator of Judea by the Emperor Tiberius Caesar in A.D. 26, three years before John the Baptist appeared. He was, so far as can be determined, about thirty years of age, of Spanish-Italian blood, born at Seville in Spain, and making considerable progress in Roman government service. He was well known and esteemed at Caesar's court, enjoying the confidence both of Tiberius and Aelius Sejanus, an influential politician who at that time was the "power behind the throne".

Pilate married Claudia Procula, a granddaughter of the late Emperor Augustus Caesar, distantly related therefore to the reigning emperor Tiberius. It was Claudia Procula who sent her husband the warning message at the time of the trial. There is not much doubt that Pilate's connection by marriage with the Caesars was a factor in his rapid promotion, although when he received the intimation that he was to succeed Valerius Gratus in the administration of Judea he might well have considered it a backhanded compliment, for none of Rome's subject peoples were more difficult to govern than the Jews. It was probably with

very mixed feelings that Pilate and his wife set sail from Rome to take up his new appointment.

From this point some appraisal of the man's character can be made. One of the paradoxes of history is that Pontius Pilate appears in a much more favourable light in the Gospels than he does in the writings of Jewish historians. All four Evangelists unite in testifying that Pilate went to extreme lengths to acquit his prisoner and only when threatened with an accusation of treason to Rome did he give way. The literature of the Early Church is generally more favourable towards Pilate than it is toward the Jewish leaders of the day and there is no doubt upon whom the early Christians placed the main responsibility for the Crucifixion. Jewish writers of the time, Philo and Josephus, on the contrary, vilified him in the extreme. Since he represented the hated Roman power their attitude is understandable; the Jews were forever trying to get the governors into trouble with their superiors and often, it is true, with ample justification. Apart from Porcius Festus, who was Governor, A.D. 60-62 (and is mentioned in the Book of Acts) they were an unprincipled lot and usually out for illicit personal gain. Philo defined the administration of Pilate as one of "*corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill-treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without even the form of a trial, endless and intolerable cruelties*". Josephus describes him as "*mercenary, avaricious, cruel and bloodthirsty, conscienceless, and yet at the decisive moment wanting in decision*". There is not much doubt that Pilate was a ruthless and somewhat obstinate man possessed of a profound contempt for the Jews. The known incidents of his administration highlight that fact. At the same time he was probably, from the viewpoint of Rome, a good governor. Tiberius is known to have been very scrupulous about the men he appointed, and the fact that Pilate lasted ten years would seem to show that there was no official dissatisfaction with his regime although he sailed perilously close to the wind at times. He involved himself in trouble at the beginning of his term of office. It was the custom for Roman troops to carry images of the Emperor on their standards, but on account of Jewish religious scruples former governors had not allowed them to be taken into Jerusalem itself. Pilate, either through ignorance or obstinacy, ordered his legionaries to carry the images into the city and this immediately provoked reaction. A number of leading Jews waited upon him at Caesarea, the official residence of the Roman governor, to plead for their removal. Pilate refused and there was a riot. He ordered his

soldiers to draw their swords upon the multitude if they would not disperse and at once the Jews prostrated themselves upon the ground vowing they would suffer death rather than assent to heathen images in their Holy City. Pilate could not afford to start his new appointment with a massacre and he yielded, with bad grace. A few years later he determined to give Jerusalem a good water supply by building an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon, thirty miles south of the city. Probably thinking that a work of such public utility would be approved by all, he raided the Temple treasury to pay for it, and this provoked another riot which he put down ruthlessly with heavy loss of life. Following this, and probably not long before the events of the Crucifixion, he erected some golden shields with dedications to Caesar in Herod's palace in Jerusalem, and this time the outraged Jews sent a letter of complaint to the Emperor. Tiberius ordered Pilate to remove the shields. Altogether, by the time Jesus appeared before him, Pilate and the leading Jews were on extremely bad terms. Jesus himself referred to an otherwise unknown incident when He spoke (Luke 13. 1 Diaglott) of those "*Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices*". A dispassionate view of the evidence seems to indicate that he was not particularly concerned about justice, had no hesitation in using his soldiers against opposition, was indifferent to the religious observances of the community even although Rome's official policy was one of toleration, was obstinate and callous in his dealings. There is no real ground though for thinking he was personally corrupt, amenable to bribes, or that he sought to enrich himself by unjust use of his power as did most of his predecessors and successors. Several indications point to the conclusion that he was a loyal and devoted servant of the Emperor and probably in all that he did was concerned only for the interests of Rome. For the subject peoples he cared not a jot.

The behaviour of Pilate at the trial of Jesus is therefore something of an enigma. There are four Gospel accounts; between them they provide a detailed narrative, and from that narrative it is clear that this usually ruthless and impatient man used every argument and artifice he could think of to avoid a verdict of guilty. Only when he was blackmailed by the suggestion of disloyalty to Caesar did he reluctantly give way. The concern he showed for this solitary prisoner is altogether out of keeping with his known character. The man who ordered his soldiers to massacre unarmed citizens whose only crime was a protest against violation of their religious customs would hardly be likely to concern himself over the guilt

or innocence of one unknown man who had already been tried and condemned by his own people. What was it that made Pilate do all that he could to release Jesus, and when he found it of no avail, issue a public disclaimer of responsibility? Surely there is another side to Pilate's character which is not readily obvious.

Consider the situation. Pilate was brought out "*early in the morning*" to meet the priests and their prisoner. This could point to Pilate having been approached by the High Priest, Caiaphas, late the previous night with a view to an early trial and quick verdict of guilty, so that all could be over before the Passover ceremonial, due that day, began. This might very well have been the case; the Roman governor would hardly have been amenable to an early morning summons from men he normally disliked and despised unless the appointment had been pre-arranged. His formal question "*What accusation bring ye against this man?*" (John 18. 29) was the normal prelude to a Roman trial and showed the priests that despite any agreement of the night before he intended reopening the entire matter. Hence their surly rejoinder "*If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee*" (vs. 30), to which Pilate replied by telling them to take the prisoner and judge him according to their own law. This did not suit his opponents, who pointed out that having no power to pass the death sentence their purpose could not be achieved. Balking of this first attempt to rid himself of the problem, Pilate went inside the Praetorium—this battle of wits having taken place on the concourse outside, since the priests did not wish to defile themselves on the Passover day by setting foot inside a Gentile building—where he had left Jesus, and talked to him in private. This was the interview at which Jesus explained the nature of his kingship; that his kingdom was not of this world, that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. But Pilate had no head, and was not in the mood, for philosophising. "*What is truth?*" (John 18. 38) he exclaimed contemptuously and went out to the waiting Jews. "*I find in him no fault at all*" he told them, and this without giving them any chance to proffer their accusations or produce their witnesses! But this second attempt met with no better success than the first. According to Luke's account (23. 5) the Jews vociferously accused Jesus of incitement to tumult, from Jerusalem to Galilee. Pilate's quick mind picked on the latter word; he asked if Jesus was a Galilean. Being told that He was, Pilate saw another possible avenue of escape. His own jurisdiction extended only over Judea; Galilee was under the nominal

suzerainty (limited domestic autonomy) of Herod. Herod was in Jerusalem at the moment for the Passover. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod and told his accusers to go there and proffer their complaint.

This, the third effort, failed also. Herod refused to be involved and sent Jesus back. Pilate remembered then that it was the custom on the occasion of the Feast to release a prisoner as a symbolic act of clemency. The custom was really a Roman one in honour of the gods, but had been observed also in Judea. Once again Pilate repeated his view that no fault was to be found in the prisoner, that he would therefore scourge him and release him in observance of the custom, the scourging being obviously a sop to the insistent demand of the Jews that Jesus be condemned. That alone highlights Pilate's disregard of the ordinary principles of justice.

The proposal was met with a roar of dissent. "*Not this man, but Barabbas*". Barabbas was a man admittedly and undoubtedly guilty of sedition and treason. Weakly, Pilate yielded and consented to the release of Barabbas. Thus ended his fourth attempt to avoid a decision.

The order of incidents in the trial is a little difficult to follow but it seems that Pilate next brought Jesus out before the crowd, arrayed in the purple robe and the crown of thorns, repeating his former statement, "*I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him*". And as Jesus approached, Pilate uttered the phrase for which he has become famous "*Behold the man!*" It is impossible to determine whether those words were spoken in admiration or contempt; certain it is that Pilate was at that moment profoundly contemptuous of the accusers, for as they vociferously shouted out "*Crucify him, crucify him*" he replied coldly "*Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him*" (John 19. 6). He knew full well that they could not take and crucify anyone; that prerogative belonged only to Pilate. They knew that too, that they must rely upon the consent of the Roman to get their purpose accomplished. In a milder and more conciliatory tone, therefore, they re-joined "*We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God*" (vs. 7).

It is significant that although no crime against Roman law was involved in such a claim, Pilate, as soon as he heard the words, was "*the more afraid*", going back into the Praetorium to ask Jesus from whence He really had come. He received no answer. To his reminder that he, the governor, had

power both to crucify and to release, Jesus calmly told him that he had no power at all except it were permitted him from above, and at that Pilate was more afraid than ever. He declared once again and for the fifth time that Jesus would be released.

The priests were not defeated. They had a trump card, and now they prepared to use it. They knew where to find Pilate's vulnerable point. The former accusations were put aside; a new one brought to the front. The kingship of Christ had already been mentioned; a new cry fell upon the ears of the harassed Governor. *"If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar."*

Pilate must have heard that cry with a tremor of apprehension. Tiberius was notoriously sensitive on any question of possible treason; these same Jews had already complained once to the Emperor about him and he had received an official reprimand. Any suggestion of connivance at possible rebellion would certainly mean something much more serious than a reprimand. He could not afford the risk. The considerations which had led him all this while to avoid the condemnation of Jesus met a powerful counter-force. He knew, now, that the priests had won. So Pilate gave in.

There are two elements in the Gospel narratives which shed some light upon the reasons which led Pilate thus to act so much out of character. One is the fact of his very real concern on hearing that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and his consequent attempt to learn from Jesus' own lips his origin. The other is the intervention of Pilate's wife. According to Matthew, Pilate had taken his place in the "judgment seat", therefore was in the opening stage of the trial, when a hasty message came to him from Claudia *"Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things in a dream this day because of him"*. The Praetorium, in which the trial was held, was in the Tower of Antonia. Pilate's official residence when in Jerusalem was in the palace which Herod had originally built for himself, half a mile away. If in fact the High Priest did visit Pilate late the previous night to discuss the trial, Claudia would have known something about it. Pilate left early in the morning for the Praetorium; his wife, awaking later and finding him gone, sent the frantic message, just as Pilate was about to open the trial.

Like most Romans, Pilate probably had at least a nominal belief in the gods. He would certainly have been well acquainted with the literary works current in his time, and he must have been familiar with the stories of gods coming down to earth in the form of men. He could hardly have viewed the God of Israel as other than one of the many gods of heaven, one perhaps solely concerned with the Jews but essentially of the same nature as those of Rome. The histories of his own people and of the Greeks told of occasions when one or another of the gods, coming to earth in the guise of some peasant or poor man, was ill-treated by those to whom he appeared, and of the vengeance the god wrought upon them in consequence. The enigma of Pilate's conduct during this eventful trial can well be explained if the calm and unruffled demeanour of Christ, his assertion that Pilate had no power against him unless it were permitted from above, the Jews' intimation that He had claimed to be the Son of God, and Claudia's anxious warning, had given rise to a real fear in the Procurator's mind that the man before him might well be one of the gods come to earth, just as they had been reported to do in former times. Had he been sure that Jesus was no more than man, Pilate would probably have had no hesitation in condemning him, innocent or guilty, and forgetting the whole matter. But he was not sure, and he feared the vengeance of the gods. So he wavered, torn between his dread of Jupiter and his fear of Caesar, while the Jews waited, exultant.

One last gesture, one despairing effort to appease the powers of heaven, since those on earth would not be mollified. He called for water, and a bowl was brought. There, in full view of the now quiet multitude, he ceremonially washed his hands. "*I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.*" And there arose a great shout, a cry that has echoed down the centuries and earned a terrible fulfilment; "*His blood be on us, and on our children*". "*And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.*"

Little more is known of the life of Pilate after that dreadful day. Two years later he was involved in a fracas with the Samaritans. A fanatical prophet had promised to reveal the secret hiding place of some sacred objects on Mount Gerizim and a multitude had assembled. Pilate, nerves on edge and fearing an insurrection, sent his soldiers against this unarmed concourse and there was a massacre. The Samaritans appealed to Vitellius, the Governor of Syria, Pilate's superior. Vitellius ordered Pilate

to return to Rome to face the Emperor. So, in disgrace, the unhappy man and his wife boarded ship for home. But Tiberius died whilst Pilate was on the voyage, and when he did reach the capital Caligula was Emperor, and what happened to Pilate no one really knows. He was no longer important enough to figure in Roman historians' works and there are only the traditions of the Early Church to go upon.

It is only to be expected that the early Christians of the first few generations would preserve among themselves some recollections relating to the fate of the man who condemned their Lord. There were Jews in Rome at the time; within a matter of ten years there were Christians. The traditions as they have come down to us are fragmentary and somewhat contradictory; the most probable reconstruction is that Caligula was not greatly interested either in Pilate or his alleged crimes, but deprived him of office and banished him to Gaul (France) where in A.D. 41, eight years after the Crucifixion, he ended his life by his own hand. If that is indeed a true recollection, does that last desperate act indicate remorse for the part he had played or a haunting dread that he had indeed offended the gods beyond repair by his treatment of their Sent One? He must have known of the excitement in Jerusalem associated with the preaching of the Resurrection of Christ and noted how the same priestly fraternity to whose demands he had so weakly submitted proved to be powerless against the unlearned disciples now preaching that this same Jesus lived again. As a Roman, he knew only the Roman gods, but what he saw and heard in Jerusalem in the months after the Crucifixion might well have convinced him that Jesus was one sent from the gods.

Several Apocryphal books contain alleged reports of the trial, said to have been sent to Tiberius by Pilate, but none of them are likely to have any foundation in fact. There is in existence a lengthy treatise claimed to be translated from a manuscript in the Vatican library purporting to be Pilate's official report to the Emperor. Such manuscript, if it exists is most likely to be one of the "religious fictions" of the Middle Ages—many such are known. It is certainly not genuine, for it contains too many inaccuracies, betokening its author's ignorance of the conditions in Judea at the time. If in fact Pilate did make any report justifying his actions it is most unlikely that it has survived; as a document of no particular importance it would have been destroyed at the next clear-out of unwanted Government records.

AOH

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

A Devotional Study

“*That I may know him...and the fellowship of his sufferings*”. (Phil. 3. 10). A friendship grows with the passing years. As two people learn more about each other and share each other’s experiences their love for each other deepens. Paul discovered this in his fellowship with Jesus, as he followed in his Master’s steps. James calls attention to the example of suffering which the prophets gave us, and in Hebrews 11 we have a list of Old Testament heroes who suffered for their faith. The prophets declared that Messiah would suffer shame and death and he is thus spoken of in Isaiah 53. 3, “*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*”. All who associate with Jesus in his mission to the world must share the same conditions of humiliation and sacrifice. This is not just a willingness to deny oneself a few luxuries and be patient with the normal troubles and ailments of life. Suffering for Christ may include those things, but it must ultimately mean much more.

Jesus was born into the hard Roman world and often the peasant folk had a lean time making ends meet. From his earliest years our Lord must have been familiar with the grief of his fellowmen. His ministry of healing would bring him into greater touch with the weakness and frailties of humanity, and the Gospel records reflect his mingling with and sympathy for the sorrowful and outcast members of society. He was contradicted, ostracised and hunted. The agony of the garden, the hypocrisy and humiliation of the trial, the fatigue and rough handling on the way to Calvary, were all part of a bitter cup which He drank to the dregs. Not only did He suffer physical pain and mental anguish for himself, but his pure and sympathetic heart grieved for the suffering and sin of the whole world.

The witness which the disciples gave after Pentecost rapidly brought persecution from the religious leaders who had been responsible for the death of Jesus. The power of the Gospel message caused many Jews to repent and believe in the Lord. The priests and lawyers soon realised that instead of crushing the new sect by putting its leader to death, it had suddenly obtained new life and influence. Not only were the members of the early Church willing to suffer for their Master but they did it with joy as reflected in Luke’s words, “*They departed from the presence of the*

council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5. 41) This. Spirit of joy, derived from sharing their Lord’s sufferings, continued with the Christian church as it spread to Gentile lands, as shown by the experience of Paul and Silas in the gaol at Philippi, where they sang praises to God during the night. Paul knew the cost of the witness of the early Church before he became a Christian, but the visions he had received from his crucified Saviour were too strong a call and he followed the path of martyrdom. Eventually he turned his back on the comfort and serenity of his home town of Tarsus and set out along the great highways which led to Rome, stopping only to tell the tidings of great joy which must be told to all people.

The joy of the early disciples was a feature of the Christian life which neither the Jews nor the Gentiles could understand. They cheerfully faced torture and death for Christ’s sake, and nothing would make them forsake their trust in him. They knew that their Master was with them during the actual experiences, they knew that He sympathised with their afflictions because He had trodden the same thorny path, and they were able to say with Paul, *“our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding...weight of glory”* (2 Cor. 4. 17).

What is the purpose of it all? The prophet in Isaiah 53. 5 gives us the foremost reason, because, as the Saviour of the world, he was, *“wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed”*. He was announced by John the Baptist as *“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1. 29). Jesus spoke of himself as the good shepherd who was to give his life for the sheep (John 10. 11). Soon after Pentecost Peter addressed a large crowd in the Temple area and told them that there was no other name given among men whereby they could be saved (Acts 4. 12). Later Peter wrote, *“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”* (1 Pet. 3. 18, R.S.V.). In his long discussion of the resurrection Paul wrote to the brethren at Corinth that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Cor. 15. 3). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of him suffering without the gate in order to sanctify the people with his blood (Heb. 13. 12). The New Testament writers bear united testimony to the purpose of Christ’s suffering and death, that it was for the redemption of mankind from death.

The experiences through which our Lord passed as Saviour prepared him for his work as mediator, reconciling men to God. The writer to the Hebrews describes him, learning "*obedience through what he suffered*" and being made, "*perfect through suffering*". (Heb. 5.8; 2.10, R.S.V.) Jesus was perfect in that He was sinless and obedient before He came to earth, but until He came to live among men He had no personal contact with the conditions in which men lived. He had not felt the consequences of sin. "*For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning*" (Heb. 4. 15, R.S.V.). Those who follow Jesus, share his suffering, and by so doing become like him in his compassion and patience for a sinful world. It will mean betrayal, scourging and contradiction, but it will prepare them for a place beside him in his work as earth's future King. Any denial or retreat from this aspect of our fellowship with Christ must necessarily find us unready for his priestly work in healing and rehabilitating a broken and sinful human race (2 Tim. 2. 11,12).

In the economy of God's purpose, He has used the wrath of man to perfect his workmanship and He restrains that which would cause harm (Psa. 76. 10). So it is that our experiences in the world, although they may seem bitter, are part of our chastisement and are a mark of our sonship to God (Heb. 12. 5,6 & Prov. 3. 11,12). The same thought is conveyed in another way by Jesus in the parable of the vine, when He said , "*every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit*". The fiery trials cause our faith to strengthen, and we emerge stronger and purified, thereby making us more fitted for his service.

Just before his death, Jesus asked the sons of Zebedee whether they were able to drink of the cup which He was about to drink. That question to James and John is reiterated to every Christian through the words of the Gospel. Our answer to that question gives evidence of our allegiance and love for him. It is in the trial of our faith that we learn to trust him and depend upon his guidance and strength. It is after we have been through the valley of tears and humiliation, when we have felt the biting sting of this world's scorn and rejection, that we draw closer in fellowship to the "lover of our soul". "*If we are his children we share his treasures, and all that Christ claims as his will belong to all of us as well! Yes, if we share in his suffering we shall certainly share in his glory*". (Romans 8.17 Phillips).

CTW

MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS AROSE

A note on Matt. 27.-51-53

“The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” Thus runs Matthew’s account, and since no other Evangelist records the incident, it stands as a somewhat strange statement, difficult of comprehension. For long it was suspected that the passage was an interpolation on the part of some ancient copyist, but it has been traced back to the earliest manuscripts known and there seems to be no valid reason for doubting its authenticity. The phrase “and the graves were opened” is not found in the Sinaitic, and both Sinaitic and Vatican MSS omit “and went”. It seems that Matthew has indeed recorded an actual happening and it is worthwhile to seek the true significance of the account.

The apparent sense of the passage is that at the time of the crucifixion many of the “holy ones”—saintly men—of Israel rose from their graves and were seen walking about Jerusalem. The unusual nature of such an occurrence has led some to offer alternative explanations. One suggestion is that the earthquake opened up many of the tombs—which were for the main part cut in the rocky sides of the Mount of Olives—and that the bodies were exposed and some thrown into the city precincts. The suggestion hardly meets the sense of the account and appears to be little more than an attempt to offer an alternative. Another explanation is that the followers of Christ at the time of his arrest, fled for hiding to the tombs, and only ventured forth after his resurrection. The known antipathy of every God-fearing Jew to the ceremonial uncleanness resulting from contact with tombs—especially at the time of the Passover—would make this supposition extremely improbable, and this hypothesis also does not fulfil the plain meaning of the words. Amazing as the statement may be, it seems as if there were in very fact certain ones raised from the dead at that time as one of the “signs” attendant upon the culmination of our Lord’s life at Calvary.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ himself was to be the first one to be raised from the dead in the true “resurrection” sense (*“Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept”*) it is clear that

these who were thus brought back to the world of men were raised only for a short time and must ultimately have gone back into the grave, in like manner to Lazarus and others whom Jesus restored to earthly life during his ministry. This is borne out by the word used for “arose”—*egeiro*—meaning to wake up or rise up, and is the word used in Matt. 24. 24, “There shall *arise* false Christs”, John 7. 52, “Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” and for the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the widow of Nain’s son. The word for “resurrection”—*anastasis*—is not used in such cases.

Another difficulty is the statement that these awakened ones did not come into the holy city until “after his resurrection” as though they lingered among the tombs for three days before showing themselves. Again it is noted that “*anastasis*” is not the word used in verse 53. A word employed nowhere else in the New Testament is employed—*egersis*—and the meaning of this word is that of a rising up or being set up. The Septuagint uses the same word in Psalm 139. 2 “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine *uprising*” while a further instance of its use in our Lord’s day is found in the Apocrypha, 1 Esdras 5. 62, “Singing songs of thanksgiving unto the Lord for the *rearing up* of the house of the Lord,” speaking of the building of the Temple after the return from the Captivity. It is possible therefore that the reference in verse 53 is not our Lord’s resurrection at all but to his being “raised up” or “set up” on the cross, on Calvary. Certain it is that there is no indication in any of the New Testament stories of the Resurrection that dead men recently restored to life were appearing in Jerusalem. The whole tenor of the Resurrection story centres around the disciples’ ignorance that anything unusual was transpiring until our Lord himself appeared to them in various guises.

There is nothing said as to what these awakened ones did after appearing in the streets, and no indication that they were seen again, or even that the rulers and Pharisees knew anything about them at all. We have but a single statement of an isolated incident the more mysterious because of its brevity. The darkness lasting three hours, from noon until three o’clock; then the earthquake, of itself not an uncommon thing in Jerusalem; then this mysterious appearance of saintly ones of old, risen as if in protest against the tragic deed then being consummated on Golgotha. The expression “seen of many” would at least indicate that there were sufficient witnesses to attest the reliability of the record, according to Jewish ideas, and these three words ought to be taken as sufficient

authority for believing that the incident took place exactly as related.

Then it was all over. The earth ceased to tremble, the sun came out again, and those visitants from the past were seen no more. Perhaps their brief span of waking life lasted only between the time of the earthquake and that hour when Joseph of Arimathea came to Pilate and besought the body of Jesus. It may have been that they were after all not the ancient dead, but very recently deceased righteous men who came back into the city with their grave clothes and all the signs of death upon them, rendering the city itself ceremonially unclean by their presence at the very time of its most solemn feast, and so symbolising in the most expressive fashion possible the position of that city in the sight of God. If this be the true purpose of the occurrence, with what fearful foreboding must the witnesses have gazed upon—and perhaps recognised—these death-like messengers and maybe sensed something of the doom which even then was gathering around the city which had rejected and crucified the Prince of Life.

AOH

RANSOM FOR ALL

When Jesus grew to manhood and was heralded by John the Baptist as the Messiah the Jews were disappointed in him. They were looking for a leader greater than Moses, a general greater than Joshua, a king far greater than David or Solomon, who would deliver them from the subjection of the Romans, and make of them a great and mighty nation. The meek and lowly Nazarene was rejected by them, and thus Jesus became “despised and rejected of men” as the prophet had said the Messiah would be. (Isa. 53. 3). They had set their minds upon the prophecies which spoke of the might and power and glory of their Messiah, but overlooked those which spoke of his humiliation and sufferings. They forgot that God’s prophet had said that he should be “led as a lamb to the slaughter”, that he should “pour out his soul unto death”, and “make his soul an offering for sin”. (Isa. 53. 7-12). These prophecies and many others were fulfilled in Jesus when He came to earth, but those which speak of His glory and power are yet to be fulfilled. Then the hopes of the Jew respecting the Messiah and the expectations of Christians respecting Christ’s second coming will be more than fulfilled.

Why should Jesus pour out His soul unto death? Why should He make Himself an offering for sin?

Briefly the answer is this: Man, because of sin, dies. "*The wages of sin is death*", (Rom. 6. 23). Sin entered the world by one man's disobedience—the disobedience of Adam (Rom. 5. 12) and has passed upon all men because the offspring of Adam are all born imperfect, he having fallen from his perfect condition before any children were born to him. Thus "all in Adam die". (1 Cor. 15. 21-22). Before man can have hope of everlasting life a ransom must be found for him, a "corresponding price" for the first man whose sin brought death. If such could be provided, then all who die because of Adam's transgression could be given hope of life. God had promised to ransom man from the power of death. (Hosea. 13. 14). Where was the ransom to be found? Not amongst fallen man. None of these can redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him. (Psalm 49. 7). They are all imperfect, therefore cannot provide the ransom for man. Jesus was a perfect man, because he was "the only begotten Son of God". God was His Father. (Luke 1. 30-35). Jesus said that He came to give Himself a ransom (Matt. 20. 28), and the Apostle says that the man Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. (1 Tim. 2. 5, 6). Jesus further said "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly". (John 10. 10). Jesus by reason of His great sacrifice provided the ransom price, which "in due time" (1 Tim. 2. 6) will bring to every man (He died for all; Heb.2. 9) a release from the death in Adam, and give to all, one full fair opportunity of salvation and life everlasting. Thus "all the families of the earth" are to be blessed in Him, according to God's promise to Abraham. (Gen. 12. 1-3). Jesus' teaching and example are the finest ever given to man, and have done much to make the world better, but His death was the all important matter. From the Cross there radiates the only real hope for humanity.

Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, highly exalted (Phil. 2. 7-11) and given "all power". (Matt. 28. 18). As the risen, exalted Lord, He has power to bring to mankind the benefits of His sacrifice, but that work will not be completed until other features of God's plan and purpose are fulfilled.

FM

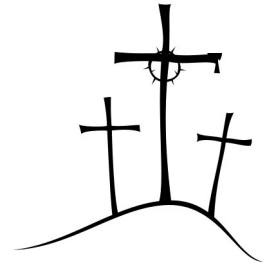
HE DIES! HE DIES! THE LOWLY MAN OF SORROWS

He dies! He dies! the lowly Man of Sorrows,
On whom were laid our many griefs and woes;
Our sins He bore, beneath God's awful billows,
And He hath triumphed over all our foes.

*“I am He that liveth, that liveth, and was dead;
I am He that liveth, that liveth, and was dead;
And behold I am alive for evermore,
Behold, I am alive for evermore.
I am He that liveth, that liveth, and was dead,
And behold, I am alive for evermore.”*

He lives! He lives! what glorious consolation!
Exalted at His Father's own right hand;
He pleads for us, and by His intercession,
Enables all His saints by grace to stand.

He comes! He comes! Oh, blest anticipation!
In keeping with His true and faithful word;
To call us to our heav'nly consummation—
Caught up, to be “forever with the Lord.”



These words were penned by C. Russell Hurditch (1839-1908). He was born in Exeter in England and was later Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association in London. It was first published in 1865 in 'The London Hymn Book for Prayer Meetings and Special Services'. It was observed that his hymns were 'characterised by great simplicity and eagerness'.

Here are some scriptures which are believed to have inspired the writer;

Isaiah 53:3-12 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions,....and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise

him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, ...and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Jonah 2:3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me.

Colossians 2:15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.

Philippians 2:7-9 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.

Acts 2:33 (NKJV) Therefore exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Romans 5:1-2 Our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Acts 1:11 This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

The tune of the same name is in five flats. Like other tunes for hymns in five flats it has an emotional and oft-times melancholy quality.

OBADIAH MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

5. Everlasting Righteousness

“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” (vs. 17*). The Authorised Version renders this verse “Upon mount Zion shall be deliverance” but the thought behind both renderings is the same. After all the tribulation and trouble that has been brought upon the people of the Lord by the evil machinations of the Edomites, the Lord has opened a way of escape and delivered his people into the calm and security of the Holy City. Despite all the assaults of the enemy and the vicissitudes which befall Jerusalem, the time comes at length when God ushers into “an afterward of peace” all those who have demonstrated their sterling faith and stood firm. They have escaped the designs of the Evil One and have won the heavenly crown. Mount Zion is exalted in the top of the mountains and all nations are ready to flow into it. Edom has been finally overthrown and destroyed, and Jerusalem “is inhabited again in her own place, in Jerusalem”.

Just for a moment, at this point, it might be desirable to take a backward glance to the literal fulfilment of the prophecy. We have been talking of spiritual Israel and her treatment at the hands of those we have called spiritual Edomites, and set all this against the background of the Gospel Age. Now all this, although a legitimate and true application, and moreover the interpretation that is of the deepest significance to us today, is not the only interpretation. The prophecy is equally applicable in a more literal sense to Obadiah’s own time and people, and their own ultimate triumph when at last literal Edom is laid in ruins. But the important thing to notice is that although the two interpretations have their commencement at different points of time—the literal fleshly Israel one, in Obadiah’s own time, six hundred years before Christ, and the spiritual Israel one at Pentecost and onward into this Gospel Age, yet they both reach their culmination at the same time, the Time of Trouble which ends “this present evil world”. So in considering this seventeenth verse we may well see two classes of people pictured, each entering upon its reward after tribulation, but in different spheres or aspects of God’s plan, and both at the same time, the end of this Age.

“Those who have escaped,” therefore, in this verse may well refer, first to the Church, who at the end of this Age enter upon the eternity of

fellowship and service with our Lord which is the goal of all their hopes, and second, to the earthly representatives of the New Kingdom, raised from the dead to take up the administration of the new Millennial order of things. These, too, have been “perfected through suffering” even although it has perforce been that, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us at the end of his eleventh chapter, *“they without us should not be made perfect”*. And following these, regathered and purified Israel takes up its position in the Divine scheme of things. *“The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions”*.

At this point, therefore, we are carried into the opening scenes of the Millennial Age. The Time of Trouble is over, the powers of evil have been restrained, the people will no longer be deceived by the pretensions and false doctrines of oppressive State and apostate Church. *“Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”*. That is the ideal combination of secular and sacred control which is to be so characteristic of that glorious Age; a time when the Ruler will be a Royal Priest—a priest upon his throne. Just as Melchisedek of old ruled his people in both the things of man and the things of God, so will it be in that great day when the saviours have ascended Mount Zion and the House of Jacob has taken control of its rightful possession.

*“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!”* (vs. 18).

There are two Scriptural themes which have a direct bearing on that verse and serve to illuminate and explain it. Logically enough, one has to do with those spiritual rulers, the Church, and the other with the earthly rulers. The one is found in Matt. 13 and is enshrined in the well-known parable of the wheat and tares. When the end of this Age comes, those who are represented by the wheat, the true and faithful Church, are taken away to *“shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father”* but the tares are consumed in a great furnace of fire. Those tares are precisely the same as the ones we have in this series of studies been likening to spiritual Edom, which, in this verse 18, are to be as stubble, which is ignited and consumed until nothing is left. So here we have a vivid picture of the final warfare when the Lord Jesus *“shall be revealed from heaven in flaming*

fire taking vengeance on them that know not God". The Revelation picture of a Rider upon a white horse, followed by the armies of heaven, descending to earth to wage victorious battle with the kings of the earth and their armies, allied with the Beast and the False Prophet, is but another presentation of the same thing. This intervention of spiritual forces at the culmination of the Age to overthrow man's final resistance to the incoming Kingdom is a very real thing and the prophetic pictures are not one bit too extravagant in their portrayal.

The other theme, having to do, not with the spiritual rulers of the new earth, but the earthly rulers, is expressed best in Zech. 12. 6 "*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, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem*". It is impossible not to perceive the resemblance between these words and those of Obadiah's eighteenth verse. Here again the enemies of Israel are to be consumed as by fire, a fire which emanates from those "governors of Judah" who are the "saviours" or "those that escaped" of Obadiah's prophecy. In some way analogous to the descent of the Rider on the White Horse—perhaps in some way as part of the same process—they will play their part in consuming, as by an all-devouring fire, every trace of resistance to the new Kingdom, every shred of antagonism to the people who have put their trust in God, and eventually, every relic of evil itself. "*As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory.*"

It may well be that in verse 18 the dual reference to the "House of Jacob" and the "House of Joseph" may be an oblique hint that there are two victorious peoples here involved, the natural rulers (Jacob) and the spiritual rulers (Joseph) working together in harmonious unity. The Church is sprung from natural Israel just as Joseph was sprung from Jacob, but the Church becomes the life-preserver of Israel just as in history Joseph was to Jacob.

"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 shalt 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" (19-20)

All this reads much like a geographical medley and really it is necessary to put geography and history together to make much out of it. The whole passage is intended to convey the absolute nature of God's victory over his enemies and restoration of peace and righteousness. The various place-names and allusions are intended to suggest ideas. Thus those who lived barren, desert lives because of the oppressions of their Edomite enemies will now come into their own—they will inherit their enemies' land. Those who had been oppressed by the people of the world, the Philistines, who had felt the persecution of men fall heavily upon them, will move into the place of prosperity formerly appropriated by the world. *"Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, sit down in the Kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out."* Ephraim, for long unable to move into her rightful possession in Samaria because of the resistance of "the people of the land" will at length achieve her desire, and so will Benjamin in Gilead. The Israelites taken captive by the Assyrian hosts and removed far away to Halah will come back to a greatly enlarged and extended home-land in northern Israel, even embracing Phoenicia, and likewise the Jerusalem exiles taken away by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon will return to the wide open spaces of Judah where they can settle in peace and flourish. The passage can well bear a natural and a spiritual application and in either case teaches the "gathering home" and abiding prosperity of those faithful souls who, *"hungry and thirsty, their soul fainting in them, cried unto the Lord, and he heard them, and delivered them out of their distresses, and led them by a right way, and brought them into a city of habitation"*. That is the great lesson of the Book of Obadiah, one that should bring us confidence as well as cheer in this day when it seems as though the power of evil is being prolonged so much beyond its appointed time.

"And those who have escaped shall come from Mount Zion to rule the Mount of Esau, and the Kingdom shall be the Lord's." (vs: 21).

The victory is complete! What more is there to say? The way of the righteous has been triumphantly vindicated, the judgment of God has done its work, and henceforth there is only glory—a glory that is eventually to enshroud all the world of men in its radiance.

(The end)
AOH

BOOK OF JUDGES

The Old Testament abounds in narrative which provides wonderful lessons for the Christian. Take the Patriarchs—they all had experiences as they went on their pilgrimage and we would have fared much the same in similar circumstances, but when the “vail which is upon the heart” or in other words the bondage of the letter which the law engenders, is taken away, and we look at their experiences in the spirit precious indeed are the lessons to ourselves.

The same can be said of Israel as a whole and so it was that Moses who is a type of the Law had to die without going into the Promised Land and thus make way for Joshua who as a type of our Saviour took His people over Jordan.

The passage of Jordan and entry into Canaan we do not interpret as a type of the believer’s death and entry into heaven, for when that event comes we do not anticipate having to fight spiritual enemies of which the enemies that came against Israel in the land of Canaan are a type.

Rather can the passage of Jordan be as a type of our death and resurrection with Christ, in spirit, and this being so there is much food for thought in considering the experiences which came to Israel in the Land, the land which the Lord had given to them. For the Lord had said to Joshua “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan... unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.” (Josh. 1. 2-3)

They could not have gone over into the land with Moses their leader, for he was a minister of the Law which ministers death for every transgression and cannot give life. Nevertheless they must have a leader and so God raised up Joshua who is a type of our Saviour in resurrection, and therefore the inheritance in Canaan into which Joshua led the people of Israel gives us a beautiful type of our inheritance in Christ in the heavenly places. All that Israel had to do was to take possession and enjoy the blessings. Did Israel do this, or did they allow their enemies to gain the victory over them? The Book of Judges gives the sad answer. As all

Scripture is profitable and given by inspiration of God carrying valuable lessons and admonitions for believers when read in the Spirit.

After Joshua had led the people of Israel into Canaan and subdued much of the land, at a time when he was old and stricken in years the Lord appeared unto him and told him that there remained very much land yet to be possessed. (Josh. 13.1) The aged leader gathered the people together and warned them of what was before them, exhorting them to beware of apostasy (Josh. 23). He encouraged them too by reminding them that they knew in all their hearts and in all their souls that not one thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord their God spoke concerning them. All had come to pass and not one thing had failed. (Josh. 23. 14)

Surely this reminds us of a great New Testament counterpart, when another great servant of the Lord, the Apostle Paul gathered the elders of the Ephesian Church together and warned them too of the danger of apostasy—"For I know this", he said, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them". (Acts 20. 29-30.)

So it is that after Joshua died the book of Judges tells of the declension and recovery of Israel. Because they did not drive out their enemies from the Land which God gave to them these enemies were allowed to harass them and captivate them, until God raised up Judges to deliver them. Twice in the book we read that "In those days there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes" and in fact the book closes with this pitiful statement. Nevertheless it says in Judges 2. 18 that "when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge." Incidentally, this is one of those key scriptures which may be fraught with hidden meaning in the light of our Lord's future work for mankind. The point to make though is, do we see merely as a historical book recounting various periods of servitude and deliverances or do we look for revealed light.

When our Lord met the two disciples on the Emmaus road and he opened the Scriptures to them it was the things concerning Himself that made their hearts burn. And it is the same with us. All our blessings are in

Christ and we can only know of these through the Word of God, where it tells us that they are not on this earth, not in this world, but in the heavenlies, in Christ. So Paul said to the Philippians that he was going on to apprehend that for which he was apprehended in Christ. But this calls for diligence and patient study and meditation on the Word of God together with a measure of suffering. So Paul goes on to say, that he may know Him, and the power of His resurrection—and adding also and the fellowship of His sufferings.

Now as we press on to apprehend more of Christ we find that there are spiritual enemies which would seek to hinder our progress. When Israel turned from God then He allowed their enemies to bring them into bondage and thus prevent them from taking the land and enjoying the fruits thereof, and we suggest that although we are under grace these enemies represent or typify something which is not of God or some form of evil which can be used to bar our progress and thus keep us from the enjoyment of those spiritual blessings which are in the heavenlies.

The Book of Judges records seven apostasies, seven subjections to various nations and seven deliverances although there were thirteen judges raised up to deliver Israel.

Let us now take a look at the first bondage to which Israel was subjected. It was to Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia and they were in bondage eight years. (Jud. 3. 5-11)

The meaning of Chushan-rishathaim is “the blackness of double-iniquity”. He was king of Mesopotamia, or as it is in the Hebrew “Aram”, which means “exaltation” and pride and it was out of Mesopotamia that God called Abram, thus showing it to be a type of the world, and here we have Israel coming under the yoke of this king of the very land from which they had been called. Can we not see in him a type of the god and prince of this world Satan who ensnares and deceives by the things of the world, so that we are exhorted to “love not the world neither the things that are in the world.”

Compare him with Christ; what a difference. For our Lord was not exalted whilst here on earth, pride had no part with Him, for He was meek and lowly in heart. He emptied Himself, made Himself of no reputation. And

from the cradle to the grave with Him it was a case of “Not my will but Thine be done O God.”

What a lesson there is here for us. As long as we abide in Christ we experience the secret of all blessing, but should we pay heed to the tempter’s subtle snares whereby he seeks to engender pride or exaltation in the flesh then we lose that sense of blessing. Let us not fear if we have little confidence in ourselves for that is a blessed state. Paul tells us so in Phil. 3. 3 and goes on to show us how his pride of birth or attainments or anything else with the name Paul attached to it he tied up in a bundle and threw on the scrap heap, counting them all refuse in order that he may win Christ, and be found in Him, having His righteousness.

Othniel

In due course Israel began to feel the burden of bondage to the King of Aram, but when they cried unto the Lord He raised up a deliverer, whose name was Othniel. Who was this man and what was he like?

In the first place his name means “powerful man of God”, or “Lion of God” and that in itself is surely not without significance, suggesting a man to be reckoned with. In the first chapter of Judges after the death of Joshua Judah went forth against the Canaanites and they took Kirjath-arba and renamed it “Hebron” which means communion and that we might say in itself is a good thing to take something belonging to the enemy and change it to communion with God. Then notice that Caleb, who was one of the spies, who believed God and went forth into the promised land with Joshua, promised his daughter Achsah—and again her name means “Adorned”—to the one who should go forth and take Kirjath-sepher. Othniel it was who accepted the challenge, took Kirjath-sepher and straightaway changed its name to Debir which means “Word of God”. Can we say that there is no significance in the proper names in the Bible?

For here is a precious nugget of truth. A powerful man of God takes the City of the book and it becomes The Word of God. That Book in the hands of the enemy is just like any other book, although He can even use it, distort it, take passages out of context and certainly water it down, but when taken out of his hands by a man of God it becomes what it was always meant to be, The Word of God, the Living Word of God, the

Book whose words can become as a fire shut up in our bones, as Jeremiah says, the Word that is sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, but at the same time comfort to the weary and the suffering strength to the weak and hope to the hopeless.

And can we spare a thought too for Achsah, with such a name meaning “adorned”? As the bride of the great Deliverer does she not suggest a type of the Bride of Christ? All the blessings she received were given by her father and she would not have had them if the one to whom she was given, the great deliverer had not won her hand by going into battle with the enemy. She was given the South Land and she still desired to be fruitful, so she asked her father to give her springs of water, whereupon he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs, some of the blessings God promised to Israel as a reward for obedience in Deut. 8. So also the believer is promised in John 7. 38 that “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”. The gift of the Spirit which the believer should receive for it is the Spirit alone that quickens and changes the written Word into the living Word, the Word that vivifies, strengthens, comforts us. (John 7.39)

“He that drinketh of this water”, our Lord said to the woman of Samaria “shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”.

So we see what sort of a man Israel’s deliverer, this Othniel was. His whole life was centred in God, and his wife, one would think no less so. In spirit he was free from worldly fetters with which the evil king had bound Israel, and as such one whom the Lord could use to effect their deliverance and topple the evil king Chushan from his lordly throne. The lesson is that so long as we lay hold of these things in spirit and enjoy the wonderful inheritance in Christ, the charms and snares of the world will lose their appeal. For it is in Him and in Him alone that we have this particular victory over the enemy and not in many endeavours on our part to deny ourselves for that would merely serve to bring us into greater bondage and a life of legality. A true man of God is one whose heart is filled with His glory, seeking in everything to have the mind of Christ who turns his back on all the empty splendour this world has to offer.

This was the attitude of Paul, who said “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”. (Gal. 6.14)

It is one thing, to know that we have been delivered from the world, etc... but it is often another to live in the conscious enjoyment of this

Ehud (Judges 3. 12 to 21)

Moab, descended from Lot (Gen. 19. 37), were some of Israel’s bitterest enemies (Deut. 23 .3). The Amalekites of whom it was said, “The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation. . .” joined Eglon the King of Moab as well as the Ammonites.

Moab set up his headquarters in the city of Palm trees, which Deut. 34.3 tells us is Jericho, at the very entrance to the land, the city which was so difficult to take at the beginning.

In verse 15 it says Ehud a Benjamite, a left-handed man whose name means “Him that praises”, the son of Gera whose name means “combat or disputings” was brought into the conflict. In Ehud’s armour was a dagger which had two edges like the Word of God is (Heb. 4. 12). Then at Gilgal, where twelve stones were taken from river and an altar made after crossing Jordan (Josh. 4), where circumcision took place, where the Passover had been celebrated, where the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away (Josh. 5. 9) and if they had remembered its lessons Israel would never have been subjected to the bondage of Moab. Verse 21 records death of Eglon by the cunning hand and dagger of Ehud who had contrived to be alone with his adversary leaving him dead from a wound in his fat stomach. Eglon’s death pictures the death of the flesh. And the land had rest for fourscore years.

The Book of Ruth is a grand contrast, and the events took place during the period of the Judges as Ruth was delivered from all the bondage in the land of Moab by the hand of Naomi and Boaz.

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6. .8). “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Rom. 8. 6).

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 21 April 2016 after 6 p.m. is the appropriate date and time.

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THE CHRISTIAN'S COMMISSION

*Art thou down-hearted child of God?
If thou would'st courage seek,
Forget thyself—go forth and tell
Glad tidings to the meek.*

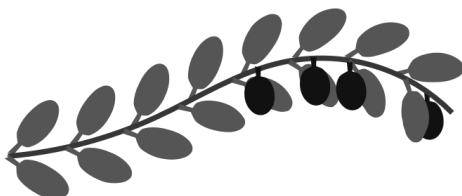
*Is thy heart sad because of loss?
Go forth and take this token,
Tell all that mourn, that soon our God
Will death's great prison open.*

*For ashes, beauty—oil of joy,
And praise as garments strong,
Instead of hearts of heaviness,
Their souls shall fill with song.*

*While God today his vengeance shows,
On nations great and small,
Teach them to pray "Thy Kingdom come"—
God's blessings on them all.*

*This then is thy commission now,
Go forth and do thy part,
And thou wilt find the greatest joy
Lies deep within thy heart.*

Poems of The Way



OLIVE

Olea europaeae (Oleaceae)



“And the dove came in to him in the evening: and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth” (Genesis 8. 11)



This is the first of innumerable mentions of the olive and its products in the Bible. It was a sign that...the waters had abated and that He (God) now felt more conciliatory towards what remained of the human race. Thus the olive branch became a symbol of peace. Few trees in the world give greater visual pleasure than the olive; whether on hillside terraces in the Holy Land or in Tuscany, their knobbly trunks and the shimmering grey-green beauty of their leaves gives an impression of beauty and timelessness. *“His beauty shall be as the olive tree” (Hosea 14. 6)*

The olive tree was an essential tree in the Holy Land, closely associated with the people’s daily life. One tree would supply a whole family with fats.

The olive tree provided a setting for those later sacred and glorious events. The Mount of Olives, outside Jerusalem, was where our Lord retired alone or with His disciples and it was there that the disciples witnessed His ascension into Heaven (Acts 1).

There are several varieties of olive in the Holy Land. The trees are twenty to thirty feet high with gnarled trunks and smooth ash-coloured barks. All have leathery green leaves and small, whitish flowers. Almost every village has its olive grove or olive ‘garden’.



The Flowers and Fruits of the Bible
John Chancellor

Acts 1:10-12 (NKJV) *And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey.*

Zechariah 14:4 (NKJV) *And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south..*

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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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May / June 2016



Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.
Matt. 10.29

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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

The sparrow has had the reputation of being one of the humblest birds. Perhaps because it's small and brown or maybe because they are found all over the world and there are millions of them even in this country. According to the RSPB there are 5.3 million breeding pairs in the UK, although they stated the populations declined by 71% from 1977 to 2008. No wonder it has been noticed that even the humble sparrow is a rarer visitor to the back gardens of Britain.

The reputation of the common humble sparrow explains why the Lord Jesus said that the heavenly Father notices what happens to even the small, rather plain and common sparrow. Nothing is beneath His notice or hidden from Him. Therefore how much more must he watch over the human population.

The bird is used again in Matthew 6. 26 to show how the heavenly Father feeds the birds that fly in the air. Therefore how much more does he provide for us. He does more than provide for us, he cares for us (1 Pet. 5. 7) and more than that he loves us (John 16. 27).

People have always been at the heart of the divine plan. In the early days of the Christian era (Gospel Age) it included men such as Paul who persecuted the church, yet received forgiveness of his hand in the death of many. It also included men and women such as the tentmakers Aquila and Priscilla.



Erasmus
Image—Dreamstime

People such as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were used as well as James, Jude and Paul to provide us with the New Testament today.

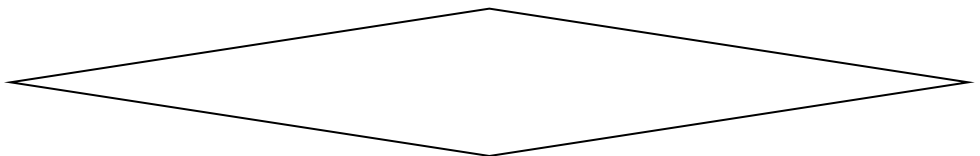
However it is worth sparing a thought for a man who spent many prominent years in England, the Dutch scholar and reformer Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536). 500 years ago in 1516 he published the Greek New Testament with a Latin translation alongside. He wanted to go back to the original source of the Christian faith and used all the Greek manuscripts available. William Tyndale is believed to have used Erasmus’ version to produce his New Testament in English.

On the contrary 1516 was to leave a less happy record in the birth of Queen Mary Tudor. She used her position as head of the government and first queen regnant to burn to death some 300 persons, according to S.T. Bindoff, for their Christian beliefs from 1555 starting with one John Rogers, another Bible translator who met this horrible end at Smithfield on 4 February 1555.



Queen Mary I
Hans Holbein
Image—Dreamstime

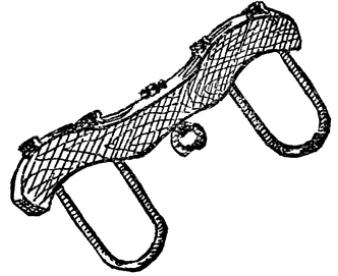
1 Peter 5. 7 He cares for you.



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

THE EASY YOKE

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” (Matt. 11. 28-30).



To take Christ's yoke upon us is to become a yoke-fellow with Him, and to patiently walk with Him. The yoke is a symbol of servitude, and he who submits to the yoke thereby submits to the will and directing of another and quietly plods on for the accomplishment of an appointed task. This our Lord Jesus did in willingly submitting His will to the will of the Heavenly Father. God did not impose the yoke upon Him, nor does He upon any; but He cheerfully took it and patiently bore it, not esteeming it a menial service, though it cost Him the deepest humiliation; but delighting to do God's will.


The invitation to us is to be yoked in together with Christ in the same service and under the same Master. The yoke, He says, is an easy one, and the burden light. But we cannot be yoked in with Christ unless we have His spirit. Two that are yoked together must of necessity be of one mind; and that which makes the yoke set lightly upon us is the fixedness of purpose which does not chafe under it or try to get away from it, but which delights to bear it in view of the end to be gained, as well as in the communion and fellowship of a kindred mind, a true yoke-fellow.

What a blessed invitation, to come under the same yoke with Christ! and what an excellent opportunity to learn the way in which our Heavenly Father would have us walk! How, indeed, could we miss the way when yoked in with such a leader? From Him we learn the way; in company with Him we catch His blessed spirit; we learn of that meekness which despises no humiliation, however great; which is not only content and happy in any situation, but which is always rejoicing in the privileges of treading the way, as well as in the hope of the glorious end to which it tends. Thus we find rest unto our souls—rest from the vain and fruitless works and plans which other taskmasters would force upon us. O! that all

who labour under other yokes and are heavily burdened would cast them off and learn with what ease and delight they can wear the yoke of Christ.

All of the greatest toilers in God's service gave the same testimony. Jesus said, "It is easy and light;" Paul said, "These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," James said, "Brethren, count it all joy, for the trying of your faith (under this yoke) worketh patience," Peter said, "We rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." All the true yoke-fellows of the Lord in the present day also bear the same testimony. They can rejoice in all circumstances, and in everything give thanks.

TH



Lord, you do it for me.
 You stand back,
 you treat me like an adult
 even when I behave like a child.
 You let me learn by my own mistakes.
 Yet, Lord, in my eagerness for space and independence,
 remind me, now and then, that my freedom lies in you.
 Guard me from danger of thinking all I need is space.
 I need light too, your light,
 and if I bar you from my space
 I lose the light.

But when I'm ready
 —your graciousness again—
 you lead me out
 into the wide open spaces of your freedom.
 And I find that I can stretch, and walk, and run
 in your great plains of liberty,
 kicking my heels in joy,
 all restraints gone,
 except the welcome yoke of your love.
 And I can grow.

*Eddie Askew
 Disguises of Love*

AQUILA & PRISCILLA

One of the brightest experiences to befall the Apostle Paul during his first evangelistic tour in Europe was the unexpected meeting at Corinth with two fellow-Christians. In company with Silas, Timothy and Luke he had crossed the sea from Troas in Asia to Neapolis in Greece and visited one Greek city after another, preaching Christ. In most places he encountered Jews and took part in their synagogue worship but it was becoming increasingly evident that his real mission was going to lie with the Gentiles. For the most part his fellow countrymen would have none of him. Eventually he found himself at Athens, where he expounded the faith to an audience of the most cultured intellectuals of his time, but they were all Greeks and at the end there seemed to be little to show for his efforts (Acts 17). It must have been with a somewhat heavy heart that he went on to Corinth, some sixty miles farther, perhaps wondering what good he would be able to do in that notoriously dissolute city, and there he met Aquila and Priscilla.

It was probably in the synagogue that he met them, for Aquila at least was a Jew—born in Pontus, the Asiatic province towards the eastern end of the Black Sea, and therefore a Jew of the Dispersion. It might have been many generations back that his forebears left the land of Israel; that his family had long since become thoroughly acclimatised is shown by the fact that his name Aquila is Roman and not Jewish. His wife's name is thought by some to indicate her connection with the Prises, a noble Roman family who were prominent in early Roman history and many of whose members filled various public offices. If this was indeed the case then Priscilla was a native Roman, not a Jewess, and being thus highly born was probably cultured and intellectual, which could account for her apparent position of equality with Aquila in the various matters which are recorded of them. But Aquila, and Priscilla his wife, were Christians. That unexpected and welcome fact must have gladdened the Apostle's heart, and his interest must have been the more aroused when he learned that his new-found friends had themselves been in Corinth only a short time, having come there from Rome itself. This was the first contact Paul made with the city in which above all cities he longed eventually to visit and preach the Gospel.

The story commences in Acts 18. Aquila and Priscilla, living and gaining their livelihood in Rome, were caught up in a decree issued by the Emperor Claudius Caesar banishing all Jews from Rome. Where they were to go he cared not, but go they must. Acts 18. 2 says they had but recently arrived from Rome and this enables us to confirm the date of this part of Paul's journeyings. This edict of Claudius was issued in A.D. 52—it is mentioned by one or two Roman historians—and it was almost certainly in the latter part of that year when Paul arrived in Corinth and met them.

There was an additional bond. Aquila and Paul were of the same craft; they were tentmakers. Aquila was such by necessity; by this craft he earned his daily bread. Paul, as a Pharisee, was bound to learn some craft by which he could gain a livelihood if necessary, even though a Pharisee was normally in the happy position of not having to labour with his hands. Paul, however, although he had given his life to the ministry, was accustomed to earning enough to meet his modest needs, and so it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to join forces with Aquila for the duration of his stay in Corinth. The arrangement also provided him with a home; *“because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers”* (Acts. 18. 3). The craft thus described denoted the weaving and fabrication of a heavy goats hair, produced mainly in Cilicia and in Pontus, into tents and ships' sails and the like. Paul's birthplace Tarsus was in Cilicia—the fabric was called *cilicium* after that name—and so this would have been an obvious trade for him to learn in his youthful days. Aquila was born in Pontus and here again it was a natural occupation for him to take up in that district.

So passed two years, during which the Church at Corinth was established and grew from a handful of converted Jews and Greek proselytes to an influential community which, for all its heterogeneous (diverse) nature and many failings, was ever after very dear to the Apostle's heart. Much of the “spade work” must have been done by Aquila and Priscilla, and much of the credit must go to them.

There were probably a number of other Roman Jews in Corinth at this same time. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans some six years later, he sent greetings to Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16. 3.) who therefore must have been back in Rome by then. He also mentions by name a

considerable number of other believers in Rome, some twenty-five altogether, some of whom had apparently shared experiences with him. “*Urbane, our helper in Christ*”, “*Mary, who bestowed much labour on us*”, and so on. Paul had never been in Rome and could not have met these Roman brethren there. The implication is that many of those whose names appear in Rom. 16 had emigrated to Corinth on account of the edict and that they formed part of the Corinthian Church during its first few years. It is known that the edict was only of limited effect and many Jews remained in Rome; Claudius died two years later and his successor Nero did not continue the ban so that gradually many of the expelled Jews returned. That could explain how Paul, writing to Rome six years later, could send greetings to so many by name; he had laboured with them for a while in Corinth.

After two years Paul was on the move again. He intended to go to Jerusalem and finally Antioch, thus completing his second missionary journey. To do so he must cross the sea to Ephesus in Asia. In A.D. 54 he was in that city, and Aquila and Priscilla went with him. (Acts 18. 18). There they stayed for a few years although there was not as yet any Christian community in Ephesus. Paul had fellowshipped in the synagogue during his short stay and the other two continued to do so after his departure (ch. 18. 19-26). But their missionary spirit was not to be stifled; there were probably more than a few who began to share their faith and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Just a glimpse of their zeal is granted in the end of chapter 18. An eloquent and cultured Alexandrian Jew, Apollos, came to Ephesus. He was a disciple of John the Baptist; he had probably never seen the Baptist but heard of his message and believed it. Aquila and Priscilla expounded the Scriptures to him and in consequence he too accepted Christ. Later on he went to Corinth and became a power for good in that church; but in the meantime he would almost certainly have been an invaluable help to the other two in their promulgation of the faith. His learning and eloquence might have supplied something which they themselves lacked “*he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ*” (Acts 18. 28).

Three years passed, and then Paul appeared again in Ephesus, as he had promised (Acts 18. 21), during the course of his third missionary Journey. This time he found a Christian church in being; this we know because it was on this occasion, whilst resident at Ephesus, that he wrote and

despatched his first Epistle to the Corinthians. In the course of that Epistle he conveyed, to the brethren at Corinth, greetings from the Ephesian church. "*Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house*" (1 Cor. 16. 19). The implication is that when Paul reached Ephesus on his third missionary journey there was a Christian community in the city holding its meetings in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. This would imply that these two were the founders of what afterwards became the most famous and celebrated church in Asia, one that had the honour of coming first in the gallery of the "seven churches" in the Book of Revelation. Since Ephesus became the centre of Christian evangelism in Western Asia it could be that this devoted couple were used by the Lord to initiate and direct a mighty work which developed and flourished long after they themselves had gone.

For they did not stay in Ephesus. They were certainly there in the Spring of A.D. 57 when Paul sent his first Epistle to Corinth, conveying their greetings and those of the church in their house. But not much more than a year later, when Paul, now himself at Corinth, despatched his Epistle to the Romans to Rome, he sent greetings to his two former co-workers, now at Rome, and again "*the church that is in their house*" (Rom. 16. 3-5.). Apparently by this time Aquila and Priscilla had returned to Rome and within a few months of their arrival gathered a community of Roman Christians to meet in their house as they had done at Ephesus.

It would seem then that when Paul arrived in Ephesus there was this small band of Christians meeting in the house of Aquila. There is no mention of this in Acts 19. The narrative there reads as though Paul was the founder of the church. That is because Luke was narrating primarily the story of Paul. What apparently happened is that Paul first encountered the small group of disciples of John the Baptist, twelve in all, converted and baptised them, (Acts 19. 1-7) then spent three months in the synagogue to which he had promised to return when previously in Ephesus, but finding an opposition which had not previously been apparent, withdrew and commenced a series of meetings in a secular debating establishment (the "school of one Tyrannus") which continued for some two years. There is nothing unlikely in the supposition that for a few months—six at the most—the "public" evangelical meetings in the school of Tyrannus and the more "student" meetings in the house of Aquila for growth in the deeper truths of the faith went on side by side and during this period the

First Epistle to the Corinthians was written and despatched. Then Aquila and his wife returned to Rome leaving Paul and his companions to carry on both works; probably the two “meetings” then fused together and when, ten or twelve months later, Paul wrote to the Romans he had knowledge that Aquila had established another church in his house at Rome and Paul sent greetings to that church. Then when Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia not many months later (Acts 20. 1) he left duly ordained elders from among the Ephesus converts to guide the future destinies of the church—the elders referred to in Acts 20.17. Something like that is probably the picture.

It is not possible to say with precision why Aquila and his wife returned to Rome. Claudius had been dead now for four years and his edict was dead. Perhaps Rome offered a better livelihood and once the obstacle was removed they felt the urge to rejoin the brethren there from whom they had been separated these six years past. It is known that many Jews did return to Rome at this time once the way was open. Perhaps Aquila felt the work at Ephesus was now well established and being well cared for by responsible Asiatic Greek and Jewish brethren and he and his wife could be of more use in Rome. At any rate they returned. They were probably among those who met and greeted the Apostle Paul when, a further three years later, he himself arrived in Rome, a prisoner, to be tried before Caesar.

Paul was only at Rome for two years. After his trial and acquittal he left the city and the Scriptures afford no clue to his whereabouts or his journeyings until about six years later, when he reappears in Greece. Sometime during this period, probably before Paul’s acquittal, Aquila and Priscilla left Rome again and returned to Ephesus. We know this because Paul, writing to Timothy at Ephesus from his condemned cell in Rome in the early part of A.D. 68, sends greetings to his two old friends. (2 Tim. 4. 19). Here again the reason for their abrupt departure is difficult to surmise. It might well be connected with the changed attitude of the State to Christianity occurring at this time. When Paul left Rome a free man the faith was still tolerated by the State; it was no crime to be a Christian. But a year or so later, in A.D. 64, there occurred the great fire of Rome, which was blamed on the Christians, and the intense though short-lived persecution by Nero was the result. A great many Christians were martyred and when it was over the church of Rome was sadly reduced in

numbers. It might be that Aquila and Priscilla were able to escape from the country during that persecution and in such event the most natural place for them to go to would be Ephesus.

There we have to leave them. There are no further inferences from which we can deduce how much longer they served the Lord Christ, or with whom. Probably they spent the rest of their days as co-labourers with Timothy and Onesiphorus, and Tychicus, and later on, the Apostle John, with others whose names are unknown, in building up the church at Ephesus until it became the most influential in all Asia, renowned for its missionary zeal and its deep spirituality. “*I know thy works*” said the resurrected Lord to them “*and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted*” (Rev. 2. 2-3). That all had its start in the devoted labours of two Roman exiles, Aquila and Priscilla.

AOH

CILICIA. A relatively small and narrow region of SE Asia Minor. On the S lay the Mediterranean Sea, to the W was Pamphylia, on the N the Taurus mountain range separated it from Lycaonia and Cappadocia, and to the E the Amanus mountain range divided it off from Syria. These, at least, were its boundaries during much of its ancient history. Its name is believed to come from the Assyrian *Hilakku*, found in inscriptions of the ninth century B.C.E.

In Roman times the Plain Cilicia was dotted with some sixteen semiautonomous cities, the most prominent of which was Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul.

In addition to such products as wheat, flax, and fruits, a principal product of Cilicia was its famous goats’ hair, known as *cilicium* in Roman times. Its use in the manufacture of tents may partly account for Paul’s early experience as a tent-maker.

GOAT. In Bible times, some of the goat herds may have been quite large. Nabal, for example, had 1,000 goats. (1 Sam. 25. 2-3) Jacob’s gift to Esau included two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats. (Gen. 32. 13-14) And the Arabs brought 7,700 he-goats to King Jehoshaphat of Judah. (2 Chron. 17. 11)



To the Hebrews the goat was very valuable. (Prov. 27. 26-27) It provided them with milk, from which butter and cheese could be made. Its flesh, particularly that of the kid, was eaten. Goat’s hair made into fabric, was employed in various ways. (Num. 31. 20) The “tents of Kedar” may have been made from black goat’s hair (Song of Sol. 1. 5), and goat’s hair was used in the construction of the tabernacle. (Ex. 26. 7) Goatskins were made into bottles (Gen. 21. 15) and were also used for clothing.

Selected

THOUGH troubles assail and dangers affright,

Though friends should all fail and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide;
The promise assures us, "The Lord will provide."

The birds, without barn or storehouse, are fed;
From them, let us learn to trust for our bread;
His saints what is fitting shall ne'er be denied,
So long as 'tis written, "The Lord will provide."



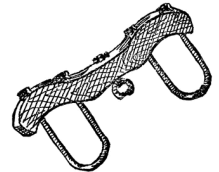
*His Call we obey, like Abram of old,
Not knowing our way, but faith makes us bold;
For though we are strangers we have a good guide,
And trust in all dangers, "The Lord will provide."

When Satan appears to stop up our path,
And fills us with fears, we triumph by faith;
He cannot take from us, though oft he has tried,
The heart-cheering promise, "The Lord will provide."



He tells us we're weak, our hope is in vain;
The good that we seek we ne'er shall obtain;
But when such suggestions our graces have tried,
This answers all questions, "The Lord will provide."

No strength of our own, nor goodness we claim;
Our trust is all thrown on Jesus' dear name:
In this, our strong tower, for safety we hide;
The Lord is our power, "The Lord will provide."



When life sinks apace, and death is in view,
The word of His grace shall comfort us through;
Not fearing nor doubting with Christ on our side,
We're sure to die knowing, "The Lord will provide."

- Verse in original poem by John Newton but omitted from most hymnals

Here are some scriptures which are reckoned to have inspired Newton;
Genesis 22:8 Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for
a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

Job 5:19 (NKJV) He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you.

Psalm 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 27:5 For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

Psalm 94:1-5 O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.

Matthew 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread.

Matthew 6:26 (NKJV) Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Luke 12:24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

Philippians 4:19 God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 11:8-9 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.

Hebrews 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Various tunes are used such as Hannover and St. Denio but an appropriate one is Houghton written by H.J. Gauntlett who like Newton spent many years in Olney in Buckinghamshire where this hymn was first heard in 1775.

THE MIRACLE BOOK

“The Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” 1 Pet. 1. 23



The Holy Scriptures have truly been described as a miracle of diversity in unity. The Bible is its own great evidence to its Divine origin and authority and we cannot consider these two great facts without being tremendously impressed with its diversity and its unity.

First there is the diversity of language; the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, a portion of it in Chaldean, while the New Testament was written in Greek. There is a diversity of authorship. These Scriptures were neither written by one man nor by a company of men collaborating with one another, but men with greatly diversified mental calibre, training and occupation were employed in writing them. Moses was a shepherd, Joshua a soldier, Samuel a seer, David a King, Solomon a philosopher, Amos a herdsman, Daniel a statesman, Ezra a scribe, Matthew a taxgatherer, Luke a doctor, John a fisherman, Paul a scholar. There is a further diversity of place in which these Scriptures were produced; they have come to us from the desert of Sinai, the wilderness of Judea, the banks of *Chebar, the city of Zion, the public prison of Rome, and the Isle of Patmos. There is no literary phenomenon in the world to be compared with this book, the Bible. Not only so, but there is diversity of form; in Genesis there are stories, in Leviticus ritual, in Deuteronomy oratory, in Ruth romance, in Samuel and Kings national history, in Job drama; the Psalms are sacred hymns, in Proverbs we have ethics, in Ecclesiastes philosophy, in the Canticles a love song, in Joel and Habakkuk rhapsody, in Isaiah and Jeremiah prophecy, in the Gospels biography, in Acts church history, in the Epistles doctrines, in Revelation the Apocalypse. All these forms of literature make up this great spiritual classic. From the standpoint of diversity of subject matter also, is there any other book in the world to be compared with it? In the Bible we read of God, of men, of angels and demons, of Jews and Gentiles, of Christians and pagans, of saints and sinners, of the church and the world, of peace and war, of friends and foes, of blessings and curses, of holiness and sin, of honour and shame, of faith and unbelief, of time and eternity, of life and death, of love and rage, of Heaven and Hades. These and countless other subjects are brought to our notice within the covers of this extraordinary volume.

We are not impressed, however, with any sense of incongruity; there is an

eminent fitness in the relation of these tremendous themes to one another. Nor were these writings produced at any one time. They do not belong to any one age; they come to us as the growth of many centuries. Is there any other book in the world that can be compared with this as to its diversity? Were the number of subjects treated or their equivalent brought together in any other book no publisher would take the risk of publishing it and no purchaser would ever buy it, and yet the Bible is the most widely circulated book in all the world. Other books have a season, they have a run and then we hear of them no more, but this book lives on through the ages. It outlives all other literature and is the queen of all literature.

Notwithstanding all this diversity the Bible is nevertheless a sublime unity; every part is essential to the whole, and it all originates in the will and revelation of God. The two Testaments are essential to each other; they brood over the mercy seat as did the cherubim of gold of old, each answering to the other. “The New is in the Old contained, the Old is in the New explained.” Genesis and Revelation are essential to each other; Genesis is the book of commencement, Revelation the book of consummation; Genesis anticipates Revelation and Revelation consummates Genesis. Each part is related to and corresponds with every other part. Genesis with Matthew, the two great beginnings. The books that introduce the two covenants, Leviticus and Hebrews—Leviticus giving all that is essential to Judaism and Hebrews all that is essential to Christianity. Exodus with Acts—Exodus telling of the nationalisation of the people of God and Acts of the beginning of the Christian Church and the first generation of her history. Joshua with Ephesians, telling of the inheritance of God’s people. Daniel, the Old Testament Apocalypse with Revelation the New Testament Apocalypse, pointing beyond the rise and fall of the world’s empires to the coming of Him who is King of kings and Lords of lords.

As an illustration of this correspondence, take the first three chapters of Genesis and the last three of Revelation and it will be found that each of these chapters treats the same subjects but in the reverse order. In Genesis 1 we have the first Heaven and Earth, in Revelation 22 the last Heaven and Earth. In Genesis 2 we have husband and wife. In Revelation 21 the Lamb and the Bride. In Genesis 3 the sentence is pronounced upon Satan, and in Revelation 20 the sentence is executed. It is little wonder that the Devil attempts to have us believe that the one book is all myth and the

other is all mystery.

The Word of God is not a dead letter; Hebrews speaks of the Word of God as being alive, and Peter speaks of the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. We can no more leave the Bible alone or leave it out of our reckoning than we can leave Christ alone. Christ does not derive His value from the Bible; the Bible derives its value from Christ. Only through the Bible can we get to Christ; our eternal knowledge of Christ comes through the Bible.

The Bible is built up in an extraordinary way, not to be accounted for by accident or chance and both Testaments we find in sequence. For instance, in the Old Testament from Genesis to Esther we have history and further back we cannot go; but begin that first verse of the first of Genesis, and interest is aroused and we are led on through all the books right to the sublime end in the Apocalypse of John. We are impressed as we read with this amazing diversity, yet it unfolds and presents itself as a sublime story. All these stories are one story, all these revelations are one revelation, and all these records are one record. Across the whole of the Old Testament you may write the word, "expectation," and across the whole of the New "realisation." In Genesis there are origins, in Revelation there are issues, and all the way between, from Exodus to Jude, there are processes leading from those origins to those issues. The revelation of God to man has been made in history and everywhere in Holy Scripture there is historical continuity and sequence. There is historical unity everywhere in Scripture; there is, further, prophetic unity. Here there is opportunity for the wildest confusion and multiplied contradiction, as witness modern prophecies, but, although there was not, and could not have been, any collusion among the writers of Holy Scripture, there is no contradiction. There are four great themes of prophecy—the Messiah, the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church. Some treat of one, some of another and not a few touch upon them all, but there is an amazing harmony everywhere. There is no contradiction among the voices. In the Old Testament there are predictions, and in the New there are fulfilments. In the Old we get types, in the New antitypes. The whole of the Old is leading up to the First Advent and the whole of the New is leading up to the Second Advent. There is prophetic unity as well as structural unity, and historical unity everywhere in Scripture. We also have here doctrinal unity. Were men left to themselves, how utterly impossible it would be to

have harmony of doctrine, but these many writers across the ages were not left to themselves.

Everywhere in Scripture Jehovah is God. We are told in some quarters that Jehovah was the tribal Deity of the Hebrews, but this is not so; He is declared the God of all the earth, the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is the God of all men, and the New Testament shows that He so loved—not the Hebrews, nor the Church—but the WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Everywhere in Scripture man is a sinner. The Old Testament does not present man as half a beast on his way up to morality and the New as a man made like God; both Testaments agree in saying that man has sinned and come short of the glory of God. Both Testaments teach that Christ is the one and only Redeemer and His Cross our only hope. Redemption, in the Old Testament anticipated, is in the New accomplished, and it is from the Acts to the Apocalypse applied. It is the one great theme which runs through all the Scriptures. It is the note that dominates in this orchestra from start to finish.

We also have spiritual unity. Think of the level of thought in the Bible. Think of its range, of its vision, of the sublimity of its themes. Think of the loftiness of its ideals, of the power of its appeals. The horizons of the Bible are infinitudes and immensities. The current coin of this realm is Faith, Love, and Hope. Think what the Bible has done for individuals. Think of the countless numbers who, were they with us still, would say, “this one thing I know—that whereas I was blind, now I see.” No man ever came to say that by studying philosophy or science, but many have done so through an acquaintance with the Word of God. Think of what the Bible has done for the Church of God and for national life; for where the Word of God is accepted and believed there is emancipation and deliverance from degradation and from cruelty.

It has turned the demons out of cruel hearts and made men sober and kind. If the Bible is to be judged by what it has accomplished, then verily it is the Book of Books and the Word of God. It could have no other origin than God Himself. It does not need our apology or our special pleading; give it a chance and it will demonstrate its own character and its

own power.

The poet Dryden wrote: -

*Whence but from Heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In several ages born, in several parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? Or how, or why,
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unmasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.
Then for the style; majestic and divine,
It speaks no less than GOD in every line.*

AOH



THE SHADOW OF GOD'S WINGS

Is there a grief in your heart which groweth into a sore pain? Is there a shadow of a coming sorrow that you see drooping down over you? Remember it is the shadow of God's wing, and therefore it is a safe shadow. Creep closer under it, closer yet. Earth has nothing human so gentle as true mother-love; but God's wing that folds down over you then is gentler than even mother-love; and you can never get out from beneath it. It holds you close to the gentle heart of the divine Father. You need never be afraid while resting there. In all the universe there is no harm that can come nigh you. From your eternal shelter you can look out with confidence, as from a window of heaven, on the fury of earth's storms, and be at peace. The wildest of them cannot touch you in your pavilion.

*In Green Pastures
J.R. Miller*

THE SOURCE OF THE SHADOW

As when a father stoops down to kiss a child, the shadow of his body falls upon it, so many of the dark misfortunes of our life are not God going away from us, but our Heavenly Father stooping down to give us the kiss of his infinite and everlasting love.

*Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook
A.C. Frey*

THE HUMAN MIND AND THE CONSECRATED LIFE

In the consecrated life what is the biological reason for our failures? How can one overcome like the apostles did and attain victory in the race?

Paul in Romans 12.1-2 says “I beseech you therefore, brethren,...that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”. To summarise the 21 verses in Romans 12, verse one talks of a living sacrifice and being holy before God, verse two of the renewing of the mind to the perfect will of God. From verse 3 practical steps to follow the consecrated life: how to be humble, and to overcome all our failures, attain victory and to effectively love in action and finally verse 21 talks about ‘Overcoming evil with good’.

Renewing of the mind

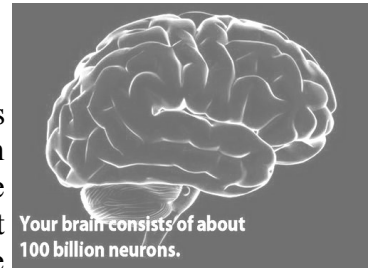
The renewing of the mind is essential. Phil. 2.5 “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” Therefore we need to have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor. 2.16 (NIV) “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ”. The question is ‘what is mind of Christ?’ It is full of God’s will. But what is God’s will? The Lord’s will is for all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2.4) Jesus completely surrendered to his Father’s will and gave his life as a living sacrifice unto death. Christians are all chosen to follow in his footsteps and aim to glorify our Lord.

The question is Why then do we fail? Why do we have conflict? If we were to rewind our life back for 5 years would we say that we are progressing well in our spiritual consecrated life? (Following the first advent of Christ we are still waiting for the 144,000 to be complete.) (Rev. 14.1) Paul had the same struggle. He said in Rom. 7. 15-23 (NIV) ”I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to

do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.”

How does the human mind work?

Here are some scientific facts to help us understand in our consecrated life. The human brain is a vital part of human body. It is the most amazing thing in the whole universe. It has 30 billion(b) nerve cells. However the maximum usage of the brain is not more than 5% even for people like Einstein. Most people use less 3% nevertheless if 4% is used it is still better than any computer invented so far.



The mind has 2 parts: the conscious (10%) and the sub-conscious (90%) **The sub-conscious mind** stores information (data) like an automatic recording machine storing from the 5 senses—sight, smell, taste, sound and touch. The subconscious does not think it only stores. Therefore, it cannot distinguish between information that is good and bad, colour or shape. It can store 2.5m beta bytes or 1m gigabytes or to put it another way it can store TV coverage which runs non-stop for 300 years. How amazing God has made us! It works 24/7 from day one till our race in the flesh is finished.

Emotions are bonded with this stored information and it is this combination that is responsible for the creation of activities and the character of a person. Even the new born child stores emotions.

This sub-conscious mind has 3 layers—sensory memory (SM), short term (ST) memory and long term (LT) memory. Sensory memory storage can only remember 7 things at one time like when reading one page of a newspaper. Dreams at night come in the sensory memory which is why it is not possible to remember all of a dream properly.

ST memory. This is used for work passwords, phone numbers etc...

LT memory. This is essential as it creates where our habits and character

are formed from.

The conscious mind is 10% of the human mind but has no space for memory storage but it can collect data information from sub-conscious mind as they are interrelated. It uses knowledge, can think well and can distinguish with all logical reasoning power, making decisions as well as having the ability to start and stop, unlike the sub-conscious which is unable to stop.

Male brains are conscious-oriented and task-focused. Female brains are more sub-conscious orientated focusing on values, are more creative with good memory and the ability to multi-task. Only females can give birth. Nevertheless we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3.28) before God there is no males or females all one equal; all one in Christ Jesus.

In Scripture the conscious mind is compared to a male mind, which is why it says "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (1 Cor. 16.13) Satan knows how male and female brains work and that the sub-conscious works for 24 hours per day therefore making it easy for him to influence a human being. 2 Cor. 11.3 (NIV) "*Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ*". Eve was deceived with a mind where it is possible for the subconscious and conscious to contradict each other.

The conscious mind is vital to what is stored (God's will and truth) and how to arrest negative thoughts which are against God's will and truth and which are not good for the spiritual life. We need to store all spiritual parts that make us the fullness of Christ. This is difficult because on average each person has between 50k-70k thoughts per day. It's challenging. 2 Cor. 10.5 (NIV) advises us to "*demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and...take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*" How important can the power and strength of conscious thought be?

To understand more about the value of the conscious there is a need to understand the flip side of our conscious brain and consider why the conscious is unable to perform.

In the Conscious mind there are 4 different types of waves.

beta, theta, alpha and delta

- a. Alpha waves. Most negative thoughts occur when we are in the alpha state. This is where the conscious mind is idle or relaxed and where our sub-conscious is performing. This is during the times where we are in front of our TV, laptops, other such entertaining things, apps and sports and when we are in lust mode. (Alpha waves responsible addiction in our minds.) They stimulate our brain cells to produce a kind of chemical which our brain gets addicted to. For example in drug addicts the brain produces an electrical discharge of dopamine to shut the conscious down. The brain is happy when the conscious is inactive. If we want to come out of an addictive state the human mind is able to open new pathways and blood flows so we can overcome and heal the damage. That is a gift of our God. According to research we all have brain damage in some way, we all have addictiveness so when we are awake and alert we can make sure we are not in an alpha state with an idle mind. An idle mind is the Devil's workshop. Therefore when we are conscious we need to be focused.
- b. Beta waves. Here the conscious is focused and the sub-conscious is quiet. For example when students are studying their sub-conscious is quiet and they can concentrate on a particular thing. Like Jesus when was tempted by Satan "turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (Matt. 16.23)

The Christian needs be alert to arrest the influence of Satan. We need to use this beta state to say 'go away Satan'. God understands the importance of the conscious mind being alert and awake. Jesus after 40 days in wilderness in Mark 3.27 (NIV) says, "in fact, no one can enter a strong (conscious) man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house." So Satan uses the technique of arresting our conscious first before spoiling us. 2 Cor. 2.11 says that we are not unaware of Satan's schemes to outwit us. The Christian should be sober and vigilant; because the adversary the devil, acts as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Pet. 5.8)

Therefore we have to follow the advice of Phil 4.8 (NIV) "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is

lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” This can arrest any negative thoughts and keep the mind in beta mode.

We need relaxation and God has provided day and night. The night for rest and 8 hours are good enough for the conscious brain to be relaxed.

How can we store good things?

The Long Term (LT) memory is responsible for habits and character (the positive fruits of spirit).

Science gives 7 qualities which make LT memory. They are vision, desire, knowledge, effort, faith, intention and habit.

1. Vision. We need vision to develop Christ in us, to produce the fruits of the spirit and show the fullness of Christ before we finish our race and become part God’s kingdom. For *“where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he”*. (Prov. 29.18)
2. Desire. Matt. 6.21 tells us about desire as *“where your treasure is, there will be your heart also”*.
3. Knowledge. Prov. 12.1 (NIV) says *“whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid.”* The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is therefore important to understand God’s plan to be part of the Kingdom.
4. Effort. In Acts 24.16 (NIV) Paul said *“I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”* The Christian is representing Christ.
5. Faith. Heb. 11.6 (NIV) reminds us that *“without faith it is impossible please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists.”*
6. Intention. The Christian’s intention has to be to do God’s will like Jesus Christ did during his first advent in all his ways and actions.
7. Habit. Heb. 5.14 (NIV) *“Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”* *“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man”* This can be taken to mean ‘do it often then it becomes a habit’.

These 7 things make LT memory storage. For example our Vision is stored in our LT memory which produces our character.

Fellowship

Meditating on God's word keeps the storage healthy and keeps good things in the subconscious mind. Praying regularly can store God's will in our brain.

Balanced mind or a dual mind

Our spiritual journey is like driving a car. When it is new we have to be very alert and try hard but after lots of practice it's added to the subconscious mind from the knowledge of what to do and then we can be confident to drive. After being stored in the sub-conscious there is no need think about breaking or using the clutch as it happens automatically. But we can't just rely on the sub-conscious when driving as we need to be alert. So it is also in the spiritual journey there is a need to always be conscious like when driving a car. This produces a balanced mind.

A Christian mind will be balanced when it follows the following scripture in Proverbs 4. 20-27 (NIV) "My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."

James 1.8 states "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways". Our Lord puts on record that "no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". (Matt. 6.24). The apostle Stephen supplied us the example of the failure of the children of Israel in the wilderness who "refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts (subconscious) turned back to Egypt". (Acts 7. 39 NIV) In their consecrated walk they failed because they had not stored properly the promises of God regarding the 'promised land'.

James 4.1 (NIV) "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" So both the conscious and the sub-conscious have to be the same for God. He has one

mind. Job 23.13 “he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth”.

Now the importance of keeping the mind healthy can be seen. By being mature and giving a living sacrifice the body can be holy and produce the fruits of the spirit. As it says in Romans 12.21 (NIV) “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Gal. 4.19 (NIV) “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” Babies are immature physically and mentally but we expect them to develop and here; Paul is describing them as sub-conscious because he is comparing his pain and patience with a mother who can give birth to young ones.

So we should renew our minds to the mind of Christ and be one in 144,000 subconscious and join with our head, Christ and this complete whole brain is going to lead the whole world as one body towards the Lord’s mind. This is the literal term but if we say in biblical terms we will be joined with the second Adam as his and go on to give the blessing of the Garden of Eden to the whole of mankind. This is the will of God that all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2.4)

AS



PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS

COLOSSIANS 1.28

The Church of Christ then will be so pure, that not even the eye of Omniscience will see a spot or blemish in her; so holy and so glorious, that Hart did not go beyond the truth when he said:

‘With my Saviour’s garments on, Holy as the Holy one.’

Then shall we know, and taste, and feel the happiness of this vast but short sentence, ‘Complete in Christ’. Not till then shall we fully comprehend the heights and depths of the salvation of Jesus.

Spurgeon

THE TRUE CHURCH

The blessing and deliverance of mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ is the purpose of His Second Coming. All the prophecies relating to His power and glory will then be fulfilled, as those relating to His suffering and death were fulfilled at His First Advent. Meanwhile, another work has been in progress—the development of the Church of Christ. The true church is not composed of one nor all of the church organisations or denominations. It is made up of the faithful followers of Jesus, whether they have been inside or outside of church denominations. True Christians are members of the Church of Christ. There are many professing Christians who are not of the true church. (Matt. 7. 21). Jesus is head of the church (Eph. 1. 22,

“He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”.

(Eph. 1.22-23 NKJV)

23) and members of the true church must follow the example set by Him. (1 Peter 2. 21). They must take up the Cross, deny themselves, follow Jesus (Matt. 16. 24) and be wholly devoted to the will of God, doing the will of God from the heart, not as men pleasers, but as the followers and servants of Christ. (Eph. 6. 6, 7).

Those who are truly followers of Jesus are given many precious promises. (2 Pet. 1. 4). They will be with Christ in His kingdom (Luke 12. 32; 2 Pet. 1. 5-11). They will share His throne and His glory (Rev. 3. 21; Rev. 20. 4; Col. 3. 4). Theirs is a heavenly inheritance (1 Pet. 1. 3, 4). As the gospel has been preached amongst the nations those with an ear to hear have responded to its invitation, and conformed to the conditions of discipleship. These have not been a great number, but few, “a little flock”. These have lived and died, and slept in death, awaiting the return of the Lord for their reward. At the Lord’s return they rise from the dead first and are made partakers of the First Resurrection to share the honour and glory of Christ. Those of the true Church living at the Lord’s return do not sleep in death; but death to them is a change from a human to a heavenly condition (See 1 Cor. 15. 20, 38. 50-52; 1 Thess. 4. 14-18; Rev 20. 4-6; Phil. 3. 7-11).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who...has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1.3-4 NKJV)

This class is spoken of under different figures of speech. In 1 Cor. 12, 12, 27 they are spoken of as the body of Christ, Jesus being the head. As a class they are spoken of as the “bride” of Christ. The union of the members of the church with Jesus their Head is the marriage of the Lamb. (Rev. 19. 7). When this has taken place, then the true church of Christ, with Him in power and glory sharing His great kingdom, will share His work, and with Him invite “whosoever will” to come and drink of “the water of life freely”, (Rev. 22. 17). Then all who die in Adam will be given a full fair opportunity to regain all that was lost by sin. This means they will be given the opportunity to live for ever in a condition like unto the conditions of Eden, free from sin, aches, pains, sickness and death. This will be the time of deliverance for mankind.

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”
(Rev. 19.7 NKJV)

FM



JESUS IS OUR STRENGTHENER

He enables us to become strong, ardent, and zealous for God. We have increased physical, moral, and intellectual power in Him. He enables us to become effective and efficient in resisting Satan. JESUS says....When your life is utterly Mine, the power is there because you will know what to ask in My name. Seek Me, desire Me with all your heart so that God’s purposes can be fulfilled through you...

2 Timothy 4:17-18 (NASB) But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

At the Name of Jesus
S. Hornsby

THE COMING OF THE KING

Part 4. "Higher than all heavens"

A number of years ago there was published a book which set forth the views of twelve Christian ministers on the characteristics of Heaven. In nearly every case they pictured it situated a long way from the earth, somewhere in space, beyond the reach of telescopes or cameras, but having a definite geographical location so that presumably if one had some means of travelling through space and could live long enough it might be possible to take a journey to Heaven and come back to Earth. Of course none of the writers suggested as much but that is what would logically be implied. Even although some of them stressed the fact that heaven is a "spiritual" realm, inhabited only by "spiritual" beings, the idea of locality in relation to the earth and the sun and the stars remained. It is difficult for anyone to think of Heaven in any other terms. The well-known hymn, "*There's a home for little children, above the bright blue sky*", is a tolerable correct reflection of the idea that exists in most minds respecting Heaven. Somewhere up there, beyond the sun and the moon and the stars, there is, suspended in space, the golden floor which constitutes the land of Heaven; there stand the hosts of the redeemed round the Throne of God. Somewhere in the upper skies shines resplendent that Holy City of which God and the Lamb are the eternal light.

When considering Scriptural teaching regarding our Lord's return to earth at his Second Advent it is important that we clarify our ideas, as far as possible, about the nature of Heaven. Naturally enough, the way in which we visualise it in our minds will affect and colour our understanding of what the Scriptures say about his return. If, for example, we believed that Heaven was on the moon, we would picture his Coming as a simple journey through space for two hundred and thirty-eight thousand miles from moon to earth, and easily imagine him cleaving our atmosphere at the end of the journey and landing upon earth in full view of those who happened to be on the spot at the time, in just such a manner as 1 Thess. 4. 17, and Matt. 26. 64, would indicate if interpreted strictly literally. We are saved all that since we do not believe that Heaven is on the moon—which is just as well, since man, in his inexhaustible hunger for exploration, has now succeeded in effecting a landing on that satellite. And yet, if the place to which our Lord ascended when He "appeared in the presence of God for us" is not in fact a physical locality in our Universe to which men

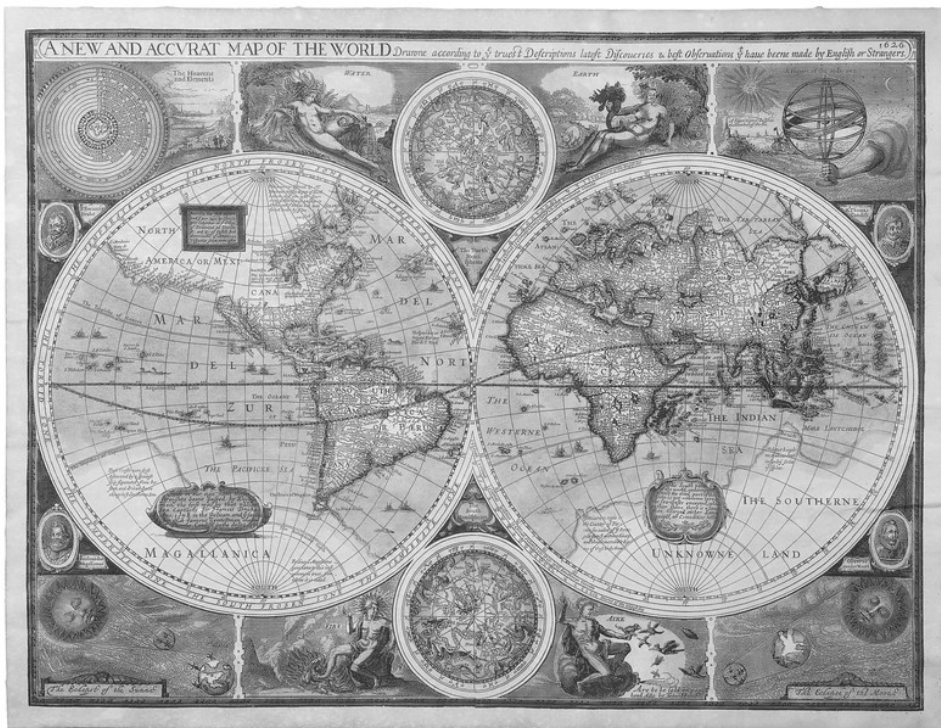
might conceivably travel if they had the machine and knew the way, and from which our Lord does travel when the time comes for him to return to the earth, how and in what terms are we to picture his coming? Putting it crudely, where does He come from and how does He get here? The answer to that question might help us to understand the manner of his coming more clearly. We might well question now whether the time has come when, in the development of our understanding both of Divine revelation and natural science, it is necessary to consider from a new angle Scriptural statements such as that Christ “ascended into Heaven” and “sat down at the right hand of God”? A clearer appreciation of what really happened to our Lord when the cloud veiled his ascending form from the eyes of the disciples on Olivet, cannot fail to be enlightening when the manner of his return to earth is considered.

It is difficult to think of the Second Advent except in terms of some kind of journey from a distant part of space. The very fact that our Lord’s spiritual presence is with us all through the centuries (“*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age*”) implies that his Second Advent is a personal coming to the earth, something more than merely being present in thought and care for his Church. One truth upon which all agree is that for thirty-three and a half years the Son of God was literally present in the earth, communing and associating with men, and that after the Olivet scene following his resurrection He was thus literally present no longer. Even although during those last few weeks He was for the most part invisibly present, there came a change at Pentecost. Thereafter He was in the earth no longer; He had “ascended into Heaven”.

It may be useful at this point to trace the progressive development of human beliefs about Heaven. From earliest times the place of the after-life has been visualised as lying just outside the boundaries of the known physical creation, transcending this earth in all the things which make for happiness and contentment, but essentially of the same physical nature as this earth. As men’s knowledge of the universe widened so their ideas of the place of Heaven perforce receded farther away. The Sumerians of 2700 BC and earlier looked on their sacred mountain, the “Mount of the East”, on the border between Iraq and Iran (Persia) as peculiarly the place of the gods. Somewhere in the skies above its summit they had their home from whence they ruled the world. In the Babylonian story of the Flood it was on that mountain that the Ark came to rest and from which the earth

was re-peopled. Later on the Greeks fixed on the heights of their Mount Olympus as the home of the gods and the eternal abode of the blessed, and that did duty until some hardy adventurers, greatly daring, climbed to the summits of the mountains and found no marble halls, no playing fountains, no rich feasts of food and drink of life, no gods and no goddesses—nothing but a line of snow-clad peaks across which the wind howled and chilled them to the bone. Then in the days of the philosophers Heaven was pictured as a world in the upper atmosphere enveloping and enclosing this earth, where the gods and their favourites dwelt in eternal felicity. Plato describes this celestial world, saying that just as men dwell on earthly continents and islands which themselves float on the seas, so the islands of the heavenly world float on the top of earth's atmosphere, the air, so that righteous souls at death have only to ascend upward to find themselves in the heavenly realm. (This, the general belief in St. Paul's day, is the meaning of the reference in 1 Thess. 4.17 to the resurrected Church at the end of this Age meeting the Lord "in the air", i.e., meeting him in Heaven above.) The later Christian conception of Heaven is founded almost entirely upon this belief.

But men were beginning now to study the heavens in a spirit of scientific enquiry. The first great Greek astronomer, Hipparchus, a century and a half before Christ, accounted for the motions of the sun and planets by developing suggestions made by another, Eudoxus, two centuries earlier. According to his theory the earth was the centre of creation. The moon, sun, planets and stars revolved around the earth in a succession of concentric orbits not very far away. Outside these orbits there were three great crystalline spheres or "heavens", something like vast glass envelopes completely encircling and enclosing the earth, sun and stars. The surface of the third and outermost of these three spheres was the "sphere of happy souls", the eternal abode of the righteous. This was the accepted scientific view of astronomy at the time of the First Advent. A century later a then leading astronomer, Claudius Ptolemy, elaborated the system in his writings from which it is now generally known as the "Ptolemaic cosmology", and this remained accepted scientific belief until the seventeenth century when it was superseded by the discoveries of Kepler and Galileo. As late as 1626 John Speed's map of the world—now in the British Museum—showed these concentric spheres with the place of heaven marked!



1626 Map of the World—John Speed
www.dreamstime.com

The Christian Church in the early centuries of the Age grew up against the background of this system, and thus the idea of Heaven being somewhere out in space, on the uttermost of these spheres, became firmly fixed. The principal reason why the Catholic ecclesiastical authorities persecuted Galileo in the seventeenth century for denying the Ptolemaic theory by declaring that the earth and the planets were really moving round the sun, and the earth was not the fixed centre of the universe, was because it upset their theology in so far as the place of Heaven was concerned. In demolishing Ptolemy's crystalline spheres Galileo and his predecessor, Copernicus, had unwittingly demolished Heaven as well!

It was in consequence of this rapidly expanding knowledge of the heavenly bodies that in 1750 Thomas Wright, a British astronomer of Durham, hazarded the theory that the constellation known as Pleiades is the centre of the universe, and that all other stars, including our sun and

its planets, circle around that central point. His thesis was not accepted but in 1846 it was elaborated and revived by a German astronomer, Prof. Maedlar (Madler). Dr. Joseph Seiss, a noted Lutheran minister of Philadelphia, came across the idea and concluded that here, surely, was the ideal place of Divine rule. He wrote “*Science has discovered that the sun is not a dead centre, with planets wheeling about it, and itself stationary. It is now ascertained that the sun also is in motion...around some other and vastly mightier centre. Astronomers are not yet fully agreed as to where that centre is. Some, however, believe they have found the direction of it to be the Pleiades, and particularly Alcyone, the centre one of the Pleiadic stars...Alcyone, then...would seem to be the 'midnight throne' in which the whole system of gravitation has its central seat, and from which the Almighty governs his universe...*”

But as with Ptolemy, so with Maedlar. So far from Pleiades being the centre of visible creation, current discovery has established that it is but a member of our own “galaxy” or cluster of stars, and not even at the centre of that. Pleiades is in fact a relatively near neighbour of our own sun, and with the sun is itself revolving round some other and greater centre. And even that does not locate Heaven, for outside our own galaxy there are other galaxies, great “star-cities,” at a distance so great as to defy the imagination. The extent of creation is unplumbed and unknown, and Heaven as a geographical location farther away than ever.

Against this should be set the sublime words of Solomon in 2 Chron. 6. 18 “*But will God in very deed (truth) dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!*” Speaking thus at the dedication of the Temple, the Israelite king glimpsed a truth which all the seekers after a geographical heaven have passed over—that God “*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*” (Acts 7. 48). He exists from eternity, before any part of the material universe came into being. He cannot be contained within the structure of that which He created. It is with this in mind that enquiry into the “going” and “coming” of our Lord Jesus Christ must be made.

In the search for Scriptural allusions that may help us to understand these things a little more clearly we are led quite naturally to the experience of the Apostle Paul when he was “*caught up*” to the “*third heaven*” and heard “*indescribable things spoken, which it is not possible for a Man to*

relate” (2 Cor. 12. 2-4 Diaglott). The Apostle cannot be expected to have been wiser in things scientific than his own generation and the “third heaven” of which he speaks is, of course, the third sphere, the heaven of happy souls, of Hipparchus and Ptolemy. That is where St. Paul must of necessity have visualised the location of Heaven. Whether he was literally translated to the celestial world “*out of the body*” or merely experienced a vision “*in the body*” he himself knew not and it has no bearing on the matter now at issue. The fact remains that he perceived and retained a definite mental impression and memory of sights and sounds unlike anything occurring in human experience, and in consequence no words or analogies existed in human experience whereby he might describe them to his fellows.

To illustrate: Two hundred feet below the surface of the sea all sunlight is so filtered out that only blue is left. All things there appear in various shades of blue. A diver, cutting his hand, sees the blood emerge as blue. Men have descended to that depth with floodlights and colour film cameras and found that when their powerful lights are switched on, the seabed and all its myriad forms of life show up in a magnificent and resplendent blaze of all colours. Suppose there had been on that seabed a race of intelligent beings, accustomed to spending their lives in that environment of blue, knowing nothing else, and one of them coming in contact with the scene thus illumined by floodlights. How could he describe to his less fortunate fellows, afterwards, what he had seen and the glory of the reds and greens and yellows? He could carry the brief vision in his own memory for ever, but it would be to him, so far as his companions were concerned, an “*indefinable thing which it was not possible to relate*”. So must Paul have felt when he penned those words.

The celestial world from which our Lord comes at his Advent, then, is something so different from the world we know that we could not understand or visualise it even if the Scriptures tried to describe it. It is not just that the trees are greener and the streams are clearer and the gold is brighter and the music sweeter. It is described in the Scriptures by many such devices but only because that is the nearest we can get to comprehending it. As Paul said to the Corinthians “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him*” (1 Cor. 2.9). Yet he goes on in the very next breath to declare “*But God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit—*

for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"(v.10). And if that last remark means anything at all it must mean that those who are the Lord's disciples should expect to comprehend at least the fundamental principles of the celestial realm even though they may not visualise its citizens and its landscapes.

Landscapes? Yes, landscapes! for the celestial world must be a real world, as real to its citizens as is ours to us. The fact that it may not be found on Ptolemy's crystalline globe, or in the Pleiades, or anywhere else in this physical creation of which we are a part, does not detract from its reality, nor, be it said, from a certain similarity which must subsist between that world and this. For this world is a copy of that. When God made man, He said "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*". In some very definite sense man's world is modelled after the likeness of that which God had before created for the celestials. At the very least, man is in the image of God and of the angels in his love of beautiful things and inspiring things; in his urge to create, to build, to accomplish; in his impulse to happiness, to joy, to laughter. Then there must be in that world, too, beautiful sights and inspiring sounds, things to create and build, purposes to accomplish, events that evoke happiness and joy and laughter. How inconceivable it is, when one comes to think it out, that God should make it possible for men to have laughter and merriment on earth if in all the long ages that preceded man's creation there had never been laughter and merriment in Heaven! The sights and sounds and surroundings of that world must assuredly be as real and substantial to its inhabitants as those of our world are to us, even although we may, with the aid of all that human science can give us, range throughout the whole wide domain of the starry heavens and never catch a glimpse of its splendour nor sense one note of its celestial harmonies. "*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.*" It is not just distance in space, measured in so many millions or quadrillions of miles, that bars us from reaching the golden gates. It is something much more fundamental, a barrier that can never be crossed except by those who experience the reality of the Apostle's words "*We shall be changed*".

What if that "change" is a change to life on a different "wave-length" so to speak, as if one had switched from BBC1 to BBC2 on the TV?. That may be a difficult thing—it may even seem a ludicrous thing—to

contemplate. But it may serve to indicate a possibility. It is a common experience in everyday life to switch on a television receiver and “tune in” to a particular wavelength. The room is filled with music—a definite world of sight and sound is created and is perceptible to the eyes and ears of the observer. Almost everyone realises that simultaneously with that programme other worlds of sight and sound, inaudible and unperceived, are pulsating through that room, not seen or heard only because the force that creates them is on a different wave-length. They are just as real, and in other rooms, on correctly tuned receivers, are yielding sight and sound just as evident. Each receiver can discern only that to which it is adapted and tuned.

If the spiritual world can, by analogy, be pictured as something like that, and existing, not in some other part of the material universe, but as it were upon a different wavelength, then, imperfect as this analogy must be, it can at least serve to free us from the geographical limitation which has of necessity shaped men’s thoughts in the past, and help us to visualise that world as divorced from this, and yet in a sense superimposed upon it. If such a conception in any way approaches the truth, then our Lord Jesus Christ, who left the earth and ascended to the right hand of God, effected that transfer of his personal presence from earth to Heaven, not by continuing his upward progress through the cloud that received him out of the disciples’ sight to some far distant point in outer space, but by passing into a world which is just as near to us here, and at the same time just as far away, as the unheard radio programme is near and yet far from the one that fills the room in which we may be sitting.

Likewise, at his coming again, He can, for a period at least, be present on the scene of earthly affairs without having necessarily come “into tune” as it were, with the material creation of human sense, and therefore unperceived by human senses, even as during most of the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. Only upon occasion then did He become apparent in a terrestrial body, the rest of the time He was out of this world and yet still near his disciples; only at the end of the forty days did He leave them to return to the Father. All the evidence goes to show that our Lord “descends from heaven”, not by a physical journey from some recess of outer space into the solar system and so to the earth, but rather by something analogous to a change of “wave-length”.

Perhaps the analogy is too hard to grasp. Perhaps is not a very good one after all. But that our returning Lord comes, not from somewhere else *inside* our universe, but from a celestial realm which is *altogether outside it*, ought to be realised as a fact even if we cannot fully comprehend it; and that in turn should help us to understand why the early stages of his Advent are described as being thief-like, unobtrusive, not detected by human eyes and ears but by the mental and spiritual faculties, rightly appraising the signs of the times. The outward manifestations, appealing to the natural senses, come later.

AOH

(To be continued)



LOOK AT THE BIRDS IN THE SKY

Matthew 6.26 (NET)

Lost and stray geese are always welcomed into the formation. It's not an exclusive club for the elite. Birds separated from other formations, isolated by weather, accident or infirmity, are given full family status. The formation will alter its plans, reschedule its arrival time and inconvenience itself to accommodate any strangers seeking its acceptance. Many newcomers arrive dirty, bedraggled and ill-fed. They're never turned away. In the same way, God's church isn't a museum for masterpieces—it's a hospital for those who have been hurt by life, even self-inflicted hurt. Jesus said, '...All...who are weary and carry heavy burdens...' are accepted (Matt. 11. 28 NLT). 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also...there shall be one flock and one shepherd.' (John 10. 16 NIV). Christ has no higher agenda than to recruit, save and adopt the stranger into his flock. You say, 'But they're not my kind of people; they don't look, talk or smell like me! So what? We don't get to choose our biological or spiritual siblings; God does. If they rub us like sandpaper they're helping rub off rough edges and polish us up. Want to see the material God builds the church with? Prepare yourself for a shock. '...The unrighteous...fornicators...idolaters...adulterers...homosexuals...thieves...covetous...drunk ards...revilers...extortioners. And such were some if you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Cor. 6. 9-11 NKJV). We were taken into the formation we were washed, sanctified, justified and given full family status!

Selected

3 STORIES OF SALVATION—A BOOKLET

The first of these stories is ‘The Good Shepherd’ which draws its starting point from the first of the three ‘lost’ parables in Luke 15. Jesus gave this parable to a multitude of people during the three and a half years of his ministry on earth. It portrays himself as the compassionate and patient shepherd who had come to save the human race from the position they had lived in since they rebelled in the garden of Eden.

This booklet expands on the picture of a shepherd in those times. This shepherd would give his life for the sheep at the end of his three and a half year ministry and now there are many already in the fold because of his message during this Christian era. But there are many more not in the sheep pen and those he must also bring into that fold in the dispensation of the fullness of times. (Isa. 40.10-11).

Nicodemus is the focus for the second tale of salvation. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, an educated man of status. He came to Jesus alone at night and at first anxious not to be seen in the same place as the ‘saviour of the world’, he had no doubt been astonished by Jesus’ teaching and miracles therefore, wanting to know ‘how to be saved’. He needed to be saved as much as any other at that time. As Jesus’ ministry on earth began to close, to him was given the special task of putting the early remains of the saviour’s body into a tomb.

Belief in the saviour, the son of God would be expanded upon after Pentecost for a way to be saved was new in those days and Nicodemus was one of the first to hear the message and many more individuals will as they rise from their tombs.

The last in this trilogy of stories features someone quite different. It centres on a woman on her own outside of the commonwealth of God at that time, an out-cast even within her own people. She and Jesus were alone at Jacob’s well in Shechem in what was then called Samaria. Both were thirsty and in need of water, she was refreshed not by H₂O but by Jesus’ message of the living waters. This booklet expands on him, her and the picture of water. In her way, she pictures all gentiles and all who are selfish, who have found an oasis in a desert land having come to Jesus, their personal saviour. The third story leaves us with the kingdom hope that all will take of the water of life freely. (Isa. 55. 1, Rev. 22. 17).

Booklet available free on request from the address on the back or by emailing—mailing@biblefellowshipunion.co.uk

FREE! AT LAST*John 8.32*

*I shall have to say, if she wants to know,
But not if she comes to force me to go;
To go to the place that makes me sad,
I want to remain in the place I am glad.*

*For now I come under my Father's wings,
Yes, he has revealed many wondrous new things;
Such beautiful gems—such spiritual treasure,
Bounteous, glorious, I am filled beyond measure.*

*From the bondage of sect, I have become free,
My once blinded eyes, now so clearly do see;
And the spiritual flow, has returned to my heart,
And no more, dear Father, from you will I part.*

*So even if Bab'lon does beckon to me,
I shall never return—I must remain free;
To serve with all, my Redeemer and King,
All day—my heart—with his praises does ring.*

*And now in the light, I can say how I feel,
So happy before that great throne I kneel;
Such gladness and joy since he tapped on the door,
More happy than ever I have been before.*

*So, if you should ask for my reason to hope—
No longer in darkness with others I grope;
Only then, must I witness to my mighty God
And follow the way the good shepherd has trod.*

*Where Eagles Gather
Rosemary Page*

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Saturday 14 May 2016

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11 a.m.—5 p.m.

For a programme, please email—nick.charcharos@btinternet.com

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Tuesday 16–Sunday 21 August 2016

Hoddesdon, England, EN11 8SG

Theme; “*Let us be glad and rejoice*” (Rev. 19. 7)

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Gone from us

Alan Buxton (Rugby)

Peter Ferlejewski (U.S.A.)

Edna Holliday (West Wickham)

THE FATHER HIMSELF LOVES YOU

(John 16. 27)

What a deep interest our Father takes in each of His children: truly it is a personal and peculiar attachment to each member of His family. Do we not lose much by forgetting this? Even in human things we are apt overlook it. We call the feeling which the Father entertains to each of His children, love, and well we call it so, but this is not all. There is a difference in the love He bears to His eldest and His youngest born, a difference in the case of each, called forth by the peculiar character of each. It is this minute and special love which is so precious. Were it not for this we should feel as if we had only a part of our Father's heart, as if we had not the whole; but realising this we feel as if we had His whole heart, and yet our having the whole did not rob our brothers and sisters of any. It is with the family as with the sun in the firmament; it is this property of all and yet each has the whole of it. Even so with Jehovah, our Heavenly Father; His is a special, peculiar, personal love, just if He loved no other but had the whole of His heart to spare for us. His is a minute and watchful care, bending over each day and night, as if He had no other to care for. How sweet to think that each of us is the special object of such personal attachment, the peculiar object of such unwearied vigilance.

TH

In time of trouble say:

FIRST: He brought me here—It is by His will I am in this strait (difficult) place; in that will I rest.

NEXT: He will keep me in His Love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as his child.

THEN: He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He means me to learn, and working in me grace He intends for me.

LAST: In His good time He can bring me out again, how and when, He knows.

Say:—I am here—by God's appointment—In God's keeping—Under His training—For His time.

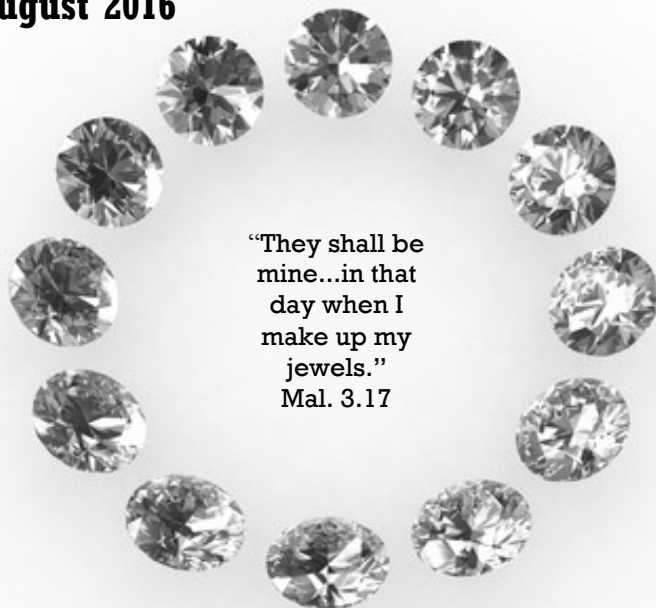
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BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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“They shall be
mine...in that
day when I
make up my
jewels.”
Mal. 3.17

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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

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is God's purpose that prevails."

This quote from Proverbs 19. 21 appeared on T-shirts to accompany Justin Beiber's Purpose tour following the release of that artist's 4th studio album in November 2015.

But what does this scripture mean? Individuals have their hopes and dreams and therefore make plans to make them a reality. It's implied that those aims may be good but they could also be selfish or even unjust. However it is God's purpose that remains and continues and his purpose reflects his attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power.

Young people have their own goals and aims which may start by passing exams and getting a job while also desiring to be married and having children even when they are also followers of Christ. Perhaps this was in the above artist's mind in choosing this text. Paul seems to understand such everyday hopes when talking about husbands and wives in Ephesians 5.

The apostle Paul was a man of purpose. Firstly following the plans of other men he took letters from the high priest to Damascus so he was legally able to capture Christians and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished. But following his Damascus Road experience he put that same strength of purpose into doing what the Lord would have him do. Napoleon was another man of purpose. He put his energies and skills into waging wars from Western Europe to Egypt and setting up his own dynasty in France. However they did not prevail for long and he died alone and separated from his family on the Atlantic island of St. Helena.

Even in Old Testament times men and women has respect to the purposes of God. Rahab certainly did. She saw they will definitely come to pass.

Many of the plans and purposes of God are centred on His son Jesus and were made before the world begun (2 Tim. 1 9). Paul refers to “the eternal purpose which he (God) purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”. (Eph. 3.11)

At the present time people have been making their own plans and decisions with the information they have at this present time. In the U.K. there is the so-called ‘Brexit’ referendum on whether to remain in the EU. People have the opportunity to vote and therefore make plans for this country in this ‘once in a generation’ decision. But this is dwarfed by God’s plans and purposes. Whether some of his plans and purposes will be worked by this vote or whether they have no significance He knows.

Seeing as it is God’s purpose that prevails its the words of James our Lord Jesus brother that ring true to come near to God and to humble ourselves in the sight of God. (James 4. 8,10) Such persons may have the opportunity of being of service in God’s purposes in the future.

Even if there is fear, distress or perplexity in the world when looking to what is happening in that world (Luke 21. 25-26) there is the comfort that God’s purposes will prevail and he is a God of love who is still caring for and preparing ‘jewels’ today and will continue to do so till his glorious purpose is accomplished.

Great and marvellous things hath he done for us so that we can give unto God the glory due unto his name.

songs of the nightingale

GOD'S PRECIOUS JEWELS

Part 1. They shall be Mine

GOD compares His people to quite a variety of earthly objects which serve to lend a lively interest to various truths. He likens them to trees, as the tall palm and the stately cedar; and to lovely flowers, as the lily and rose. Again they are likened to stars, and to the light of the sun. Likewise to doves, to portray their spirit of innocence; also to gentle lambs and even to lions to show courage and boldness. Eagles, too, are mentioned to picture far-sightedness and heavenly dwelling places.

When God compares His people to jewels, the similitude becomes worthy of special consideration. Their preciousness, value and beauty make them most apt in their symbolism. Goodly gems have been appropriately termed the “blossoms of the rock” and the “flowers of the caves and torrent-beds.” Their diverse properties well picture the many excellent qualities and characteristics of the Church of the Firstborns.

The jewellers of the East have been among the greatest travellers of the world. They have journeyed even to the remotest lands to secure, if possible, the finest stones. It has sometimes happened that they have come across a gem so valuable and costly, that they have sold all their possessions to secure it.

Our Master used this to illustrate a great truth. He said that “the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matt. 13: 45,46). The analogy becomes remarkable in the light of the Divine purposes. Before Jesus came to earth, He beheld the world a desolate region on account of sin. He reviewed, however, the possibilities. While the image of God in man had become blurred, He foreknew the results under wise treatment. From crude flinty material, the human race might again reflect, the manifold beauties of the light and love of their Maker which were lost in Adam. In due course the Father opened up to His mental vision “the pearl of great price,” in other words, the elect! Chosen from men and women, there were some capable, under given circumstances, of more expressly reflecting the loveliness of the Divine character. Impelled with these



thoughts, our Master emptied Himself of His pre-human glory and became a perfect being according to the flesh, and this He gave “for the life of the world” (John 6: 51).

At His resurrection He had the value with which He could purchase the “field” and all that it contained. His first request was for His “church.” He appeared “in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9: 24).

The Bride of the Lamb

The apostle uses the picture of the marriage tie to bear upon this teaching. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5: 25-27,32).

The writer of a well-known hymn tells of this sublime relationship, thus—

“The Church’s one Foundation,
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord.
She is His new creation,
By water and the Word.
From heav’n He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.”

“They shall be Mine.”

The great Creator of the universe and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, is intensely interested in His elect. “For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it” (Psalm 132: 13,14). For well-nigh two thousand years He has been watching and waiting for His precious jewels. He declares: “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isaiah 62: 3). The prospective heirs, in turn, become fully aware of the great love of the Father, and prophetically their words are as follows: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of

righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61: 10).

The prophet speaks of a time when this precious jewel class will be all gathered together in one. That this time is fast approaching there can be no doubt, for there are hundreds of prophecies co-ordinating in fulfilment. Harken to the voice of the Lord: “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. 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” (Mal. 3: 16, 17).

The word “jewels” in this text is from the Hebrew *segullah*, elsewhere translate “peculiar” or “special treasure.” Here is another passage where the word occurs: “Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure (*segullah*) unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19: 5).

History reveals that the children of Israel did not hearken unto the voice of the Lord. Their wayward tendencies became more and more pronounced. In the course of time the Messiah came among them, who “spake as never man spake,” Nevertheless, He was despised, rejected and ultimately crucified as a malefactor. Thus Israel clearly demonstrated that, as a people, they had neither the faith nor inclination to become the special-treasure of the Lord. For this reason God turned to the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15: 14). Thus the redeemed have arisen out of “every kindred and tongue, and people and nation,” for the Lord is no respecter of person, nationality or sex, but He is of character. The character attainments of His chosen, through the power of God, become superb, wonderful and glorious! For this reason they are spoken of as jewels.

The Breastplate of Judgment

To lend a pleasing emphasis to the symbolism, the Lord commanded twelve different, precious stones, embedded in gold, to form the breastplate of the High Priest of Israel (Exodus 28). It covered the heart to betoken the love and affectionate trust that Jesus, our great High Priest, possesses for His followers.

There is a little mystery attached to this breastplate. In some way, as yet unknown, it expressed the judgment of God. This is indicated by the words, “And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim (lights and perfections); and they shall be upon Aaron’s heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the LORD continually” (Exodus 28: 30). The suggestion of something supernatural is borne out by an incident in the life of King Saul. He one time sought the counsel of a witch at Endor, because “the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (1 Sam. 28: 6).

Thus the future judgment of saints was foreshadowed. Arrayed in light and perfection, the symbolic jewels will, as members of the Royal Priesthood, judge the whole world of mankind. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” (1 Cor. 6: 2). This judgment was early foretold through the mouth of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who declared that “the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds” (Jude 14, 15).

Some fear the judgment day as though it were an unending catastrophe! Read, however, the joyous song of David, which comes floating down the stream of time in sweet melody: “Let the heavens be glad, . . . let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because He cometh to judge the earth. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever” (1 Chron. 16: 31-34). The judgment day, therefore, is a time to be desired. “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory,” (Hag. 2: 6-7).

FL

The fathomless love of the Saviour’s heart is every drop of it ours; every sinew in the arm of might, every jewel in the crown of majesty, the immensity of divine knowledge, and the sternness of divine justice, all are ours, and shall be employed for us.

Spurgeon

CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS

“One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.” Matt.23: 8.

The Word of God is the unfailing guide for the Christian who is here “in the world but not of it,” and its pages reveal many relationships—so many indeed that to consider them all would take a very long time; but there are four in particular which we would do well to ponder over as we strive to follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Master. These are:—Our Relationship to Christ; Our Relationship to the World; Our Relationship to the Brethren, and Our Relationship to God.

Regarding the first, our Lord said, “Ye are my friends, if ye do what I command you.” He did not say “you will be called my friends,” but “ye are actually my friends.” At the time these words were spoken the disciples would not understand their full import; this was revealed to them later by the Spirit. The disciples had a great experience at Pentecost (so great that others thought they were intoxicated) and they there learned how they were really to be His friends. They had known Him, witnessed His crucifixion, seen Him laid in the grave, and thought their hopes were dashed; but then they saw Him raised and knew He was raised to the Father’s right hand, and their hearts were filled with joy. They were friends of the One Who died and was raised, and had fulfilled all the conditions that would give them life.

This friendship is upon conditions:—“If ye do whatsoever I command you.” For three and a half years He kept His Father’s commandments Himself, then He said, “Walk ye in my footsteps.” Our path, therefore, will be a difficult one, for it means we must strive for the perfection of Christ. He laid nothing upon us that is impossible. His commandments are all possible and we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts helping us to obey. The gospels from Matthew 5 to John 16 are full of our Lord’s commandments. They teach honesty of heart; we must bring no dishonour on the name of Christ. They teach purity of mind, for our minds are changed and purified and become the mind of Christ. They also teach forgiveness; we must be ready to forgive. Our brethren need forgiveness, and we are even to pray for those who harm us. The spirit of forgiveness must be strong in our hearts. Some say that the Sermon on the Mount is impossible of attainment; but if so, why did the Lord give it? He said “I will send you the Holy Spirit,” and this Holy Spirit shows us how to obey all His

commandments and so become His friends. Jesus has always been our friend, but we have not always been His friends.

Our relationship to the world. The first commandment in Matthew 5 is, “Ye are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” How can we glorify God before men? Our Lord came and let His light shine before men, but they did not glorify God; they blasphemed God and crucified His Son. Men do not yet glorify God; they still continue in the downward path. Light is best seen in darkness by those who are seeking for light. The astronomer does not work by day, but by night, and sees things never seen by others; so, only to the few, the “spiritual astronomers,” are these things revealed. Our Lord did not say “all men shall glorify God,” but, “they.” The reference is first to the body, but the day is coming when our lights will be gathered into one and in the Kingdom we shall shine forth as the noonday and then all men shall see the Lord.

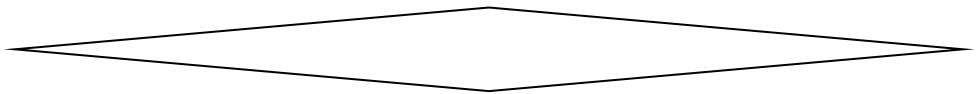
Our relationship to the brethren. Ephesians 4: 25 says “We are members one of another.” How very close this is, closer than being brothers. We are one body linked together. Every member of the body knows if another is ill. Are we neglecting one another in any sense? If we take the opportunity to help those with whom we come in contact we are fulfilling His commandment “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6: 2) This union with the brethren is brought about by our Lord calling us His friends, the Light drawing us together and we becoming bound by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15: 1 says “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” How are we to realise when we are strong? It is hard to know just who the weak ones are but the Lord will show us because the weak ones need our help and prayers, and by this they become strong and we become stronger. We are told in 1 Thess. 4: 18 to comfort one another and in Eph. 4: 32, to be kind one to another. We should esteem those who labour for us, praying for them, for we cannot pray too much for the brethren who are serving us. In the body of Christ nothing from outside can hurt us; nothing can touch our real life; only from within can that life be harmed. The “old man” is our enemy, for, paradoxical as it may seem, that which is dead may come to life again. The body of Christ must be holy, for without holiness no man can see the Lord. Have you seen the

Lord? Can you recognize Him? If so, you are holy. "Be ye holy, as I am holy." Holiness must be a habit, and this is not an easy habit to attain; but it is something we can practice in our daily lives and it will then become a part of ourselves. Prayer is essential to the attaining of holiness, and therefore let us pray without ceasing, lifting up our hearts to Him morning, noon and night.

Our relationship to God. There are many figures in which our relationship to God is shown in the Bible. We think of Him as our Father and we His children, or He our shepherd and we His sheep, but these show more His relationship to us. The particular relationship we are dealing with now is shown in I. Cor. 3: 16. "Ye are the temple of God." Psalm 132: 14 says "This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." He has called us out of the world to become the Temple in which He will abide forever. How glorious is the thought that when the Temple of God is complete we shall be stones in that Temple. We were in His heart before the foundation of the world and His Name is to be glorified in us.

In the Temple there was an Ark containing the Golden pot of Manna, representing Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, the Manna on which we feed continually. The Rod that budded is there also. Are there buds coming forth from us, promising fruit to the glory of God? The Ark also contained the Tables of the Law, written on stones representing the Law of God written in our hearts, and it is because we are in the Ark, Jesus Christ, that we can keep the law.

In our daily walk and conversation let us then strive to bear in mind these relationships which are so vital to our Christian life, and live as becomes friends of Christ, lights in the world, members one of another and stones of that Temple in which God will rest for ever.



So it is with our Heavenly Father. He is waiting for us to give up the earthly things in our lives so he may give us a beautiful treasure in heaven.

Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

RAHAB OF JERICHO

An Old Testament character study

One of the women mentioned approvingly in the New Testament as an example of sterling faith is Rahab the harlot of Jericho, the woman who gave shelter to the Israelite spies sent to reconnoitre the city before its destruction. The writer to the Hebrews says “*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace*” (Heb. 11. 30-31). James, in the course of his homily on the relation between faith and works, asks (2. 25) “*Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?*” These allusions are based upon the story as we have it in the Book of Joshua. St. Matthew appears to have had access to genealogical records not now surviving when he compiled the first chapter of his Gospel; he indicates that this same Rahab married Salmon, leader of the tribe of Judah, and that from this union came Boaz, who stands in the direct line of descent between Abraham and Christ (Matt. 1. 5). Thus this otherwise unknown woman of Jericho is an ancestress of our Lord.

Jewish Rabbinic sources many centuries ago propounded the suggestion that the word here rendered “harlot” can also mean “inn-keeper” and that in reality Rahab was a most respectable custodian of a local hostelry at which the spies booked in for the night. This hypothesis owes its existence to the Rabbis’ desire to relieve King David, descended from Rahab, of what they felt to be a stigma on his ancestry. It is perpetuated by some Christian commentators and others with the same intent as respects Jesus Christ. There is no foundation for the idea; the word occurs some ninety times in the Old Testament and never means anything else in Hebrew than the mediaeval English term by which it is always translated. And this little fortress town, only two hundred and fifty yards long by a hundred wide, is most unlikely to have had need of an “inn” of any description. Such places existed only in the country districts, where travellers might be caught after nightfall, and even then only in much later times. It is said by those who should know that at the time of the Exodus and earlier the whole idea of inns and hostelries for travellers was quite unknown; those caught out at night slept under the stars.

The story itself is related in the 2nd and 6th chapters of Joshua. After forty years sojourn in the desert, following the Exodus, Israel was encamped in the plains of Moab east of the Jordan waiting for the word to march. The river lay between them and their goal but they had been assured that God would remove that barrier at the crucial moment. Five miles from the other side of the river, inside Canaan, lay the military frontier fortress of Jericho, a town surrounded by high walls, crammed with defending soldiery, and thought to be impregnable. It probably contained a number of Egyptian troops, for Canaan was still nominally under the sovereignty of Egypt, although for many years now the land had been in a state of turmoil and rebellion, and Egypt had very largely abandoned any attempt to govern. But Jericho was obviously the first strong city to be besieged and captured as soon as the host of Israel invaded. So Joshua sent two trusty men across the river to investigate the defences.

The town was not large; a man could walk right round it in ten minutes. The spies, dressed like people of the land, apparently gained entry at twilight before the gate was closed and explored the little settlement unchallenged. They found it closely packed with small flat-topped houses and a central solid building which was the abode of the garrison. The defences consisted of two massive walls about thirty feet high, the outer one six feet and the inner one twelve feet thick, with a fifteen feet space between them. In many places the two walls had been bridged by masonry and stout timbers and houses built actually upon the walls, straddling between inner and outer. All this is known because the city lay, just as Joshua left it, concealed under an increasing mound of sand and earth, with little interference, for three thousand years, until in the years 1930-1936 Prof. John Garstang of Britain excavated and found everything exactly as described in the Book of Joshua, even to the remains of the houses on the wall, one of which must have been Rahab's. Going round the city, the spies discerned that the inhabitants were terrified of the Israelite menace and were not likely to offer much resistance once the walls had been breached. After all, the population in a town of that size could hardly have exceeded two or three thousand and there were six hundred thousand Israelite warriors threatening them only a few miles away.

By this time it was dark and the city gate closed. The intruders had to find concealment for a few hours and make their escape in the morning when

the town opened for normal business. They solved this problem by getting themselves accepted for the night at the house of a harlot named Rahab. Probably they felt that the presence of strange men at such an establishment would be less likely to excite suspicion than anywhere else. They could hardly have known that, despite her profession, Rahab was a woman who exercised belief and faith in the same God as they, and was prepared to run almost certainly a grave risk in protecting them. The hand of God must have been in this thing that they were led to this house in any case, and that Rahab knew them for what they were; they are not likely to have revealed their identity, even to their hostess.

They had not been so fortunate in escaping detection as they had thought. Someone had seen them go in and was suspicious. Before long the representatives of law and order were knocking at Rahab's door with a demand that the men be produced. Rahab was evidently quick-witted. The house had a flat roof like all in Jericho and on Rahab's roof there was laid out a quantity of freshly cut flax for drying—she evidently had a second source of income, in connection with some aspect of the local textile industry. She quickly hurried the spies up to her roof and concealed them under the flax. Whilst the investigators searched her house she blandly admitted that two men had been with her that night; that as usual she had asked no questions and eventually sent them on their way. Where they went afterwards she had no idea and was not interested, but if, as asserted, they were enemy spies it was not likely they had got very far. If her interviewers would stop wasting time in her house and go after them they might yet overtake and capture the men. The officers appreciated the point of this argument and were apparently out of the house and down the street with considerable promptitude; the city gates closed with a clang after them and they spent the rest of the night in an unavailing search of the countryside between Jericho and the fords of Jordan five miles away.

In the meantime this very practical woman had gone up to the roof and engaged her guests in very serious conversation. *"I know"* she said *"that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror (fear) is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt...our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in (the) heaven above and in (the) earth beneath"* (Josh. 2. 9-

11). That is quite a striking testimony from one whose life was lived among idolators and who probably had learned but little of the God of Israel. Perhaps Rahab was already sick of the life she led and looking for the light; like Mary Magdalene of much later times in similar circumstances, she was nearly ready to be cleansed of the “seven demons”. Israel had sojourned in the desert not much more than a hundred miles away for forty years past and some knowledge of their laws and standards and the God they worshipped must have filtered into Canaan, carried by wandering nomads and caravans of traders from time to time during that period. The wilderness of Sinai was on the highway between Egypt and Canaan and travellers were constantly passing through. Rahab may very well have heard something of all this and in her heart wanted to know more of this worship so much loftier in its tones and ideals than the sensual religions of Canaan. At any rate, on this night when the men of Israel came to her she took her stand with the people of the Lord, and in so doing, one might hope and reasonably expect, turned away for ever from the old life.

The two men readily agreed to her request that in recognition of her espousal of their cause they would see that she and her family were spared from the doom that was to fall upon the city. “*It shall be*” they told her “*when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee*” (Ch. 2. 14). With that assurance she planned their escape. This was, providentially, an easy matter. Her house was upon the two walls and a window gave access to the exterior of the city. “*She let them down by a cord through (from) the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall*” (Ch. 2. 15). Under cover of the friendly darkness they made their way down the rope to the ground, and following Rahab’s instructions headed westward away from Jordan and “*to the mountain*”—Mount Kuruntul, which still rises three thousand feet immediately behind the site of ancient Jericho. There, said she, they must remain hidden three days before venturing back to the lowlands and the river. Evidently she had anticipated several days’ search before the hunt was called off. Her judgment appears to have been pretty sound, for “*the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not*” (Ch. 2. 22). Eventually the intrepid pair arrived safe and sound in the camp of Israel and reported to Joshua the result of their mission.

A fortnight later the city fell to the besiegers and was utterly destroyed. Faithful to their promise, and in obedience to the command of Joshua, the

two spies went in amidst the turmoil and the fighting to the house now marked with the scarlet thread hanging from the window, the agreed sign that those within were waiting and trusting in the integrity of the promise. So they were brought forth, Rahab the woman of faith, her father and mother and all her family, and conducted to a place of safety away from the fighting. They were the only citizens of Jericho to survive. The ferocity of Joshua's troops saw to it that everyone else was slain, the city levelled with the ground and consumed by fire. Garstang found the evidence of that fire, earthenware pots containing charred and burnt foodstuffs, stonework and brickwork scorched and split by the heat, and layers of ashes six inches thick. Every single detail in the Joshua account has been verified by investigation on the site.

"And" concludes the ancient scribe who compiled the Book of Joshua, speaking still of Rahab, *"she dwelleth in Israel unto this day"*. If the book was completed in that generation this need only mean that she was still alive and amongst them, but it is unlikely that this is the meaning. It was always believed in after ages in Israel that Rahab became the wife of Salmon, and in such case this expression would refer to the perpetuation of her descendants in Israel. No reference to a marriage is found in the Old Testament and in fact Rahab is not mentioned again, but Matthew does state definitely that Boaz was born to Salmon and Rahab; this information he must have taken from a documentary source and not relied upon mere tradition.

The marriage raises the question of Rahab's nationality. It was against the laws of Israel for an Israelite to marry any of the "women of the land" i.e., native Canaanites, Hittites or any other of the Hamitic race (descendants of Ham). There was not, however, the same objection to Semitic women, descendants of Shem through Abraham and others, even though they were not of Israel, through Jacob. Zipporah, the wife of Moses, was of a tribe descended from Abraham through Keturah. There were many such descendants of Abraham's many children scattered through Canaan. Although there is no Scriptural evidence regarding Rahab's racial origin, it is at least possible that she was of Abrahamic stock, and this could account in part for her leaning towards the God of Israel and her faith in him in preference to the Canaanites' gods, besides rendering Salmon's choice of her as wife easier to understand.

A very significant fact is that Rahab's name is included in what has been called the "gallery of faith" in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. This chapter has long been renowned for immortalising certain "heroes of faith" of Old Testament times, prior to the establishment of the Christian Church, whose sterling faith and whose deeds springing from that faith place them in a special position in God's sight. It has often been suggested that those immortalised in this chapter are destined for inclusion in the company of world rulers in the next Age, administering the Millennial Kingdom in the name of the King, the Lord Christ. The terms "Old Testament Saints" or "Ancient Worthies" have been coined to apply to such. Out of sixteen names selected by the writer to the Hebrews two only are women. One is Sarah the wife of Abraham and the other is Rahab. That the writer was subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit when making his selection is hardly open to question. The logical and irresistible conclusion therefore is that this woman of ancient Jericho, despite the kind of life attributed to her, was one in the sight of God possessing the character and moral calibre and strength of faith which would make her a fitting choice as one of the "*princes in all the earth*" (Psa. 45. 16) who are to exercise functions of rulership "in that day". The one little scrap of history we have concerning Rahab the harlot shows her loyal, far-seeing, resourceful, courageous, and above all, inflexible in her faith that God is true and the purpose of God will certainly be carried out. If in fact, as appears to be the case, she did indeed marry Salmon prince of the royal tribe of Judah, and so became ancestress of Israel's Messiah and the world's Saviour, then again we have an instance of the wonderful power of God who can make vessels of honour out of weak and common clay. Once more we are reminded of the truth that God looks not at a man or woman's past, only at their present condition of heart and the possibilities that lie in them for their future.

AOH

What makes heaven? Not its jewelled walls and pearl gates and streets of golden pave and sea of glass and river of crystal, but its blessed obedience, its sweet holiness, its universal and unbroken accord with the divine will, and its spirit of love. Heaven never can be entered by any in whose hearts the spirit of heaven is not first found.

In Green Pastures, J.R. Miller

METHUSELAH

The antediluvian patriarch Methuselah, son of Enoch, is chiefly noted for living longer than any other man, a total of nine hundred and sixty-nine years. This is all that is recorded of him in the Bible, although Jewish legend can add a little more.

Seventy or more years ago a suggestion was mooted, by one Arthur Gook in a booklet entitled “Can a young man trust his Bible?” to the effect that the long life of Methuselah was a witness to the world of that day of the inevitable coming of the judgment of the Flood. The meaning of his name, it was claimed, was “*when he is dead, it shall be sent.*” This, so went the argument, the longer he lived the more cogent the warning, and the fact that he lived longer than any other demonstrated the forbearance of God until the last possible moment. According to the Masoretic chronology of Genesis, which is embodied in the Authorised Version, he is represented as dying in the very year of the Flood.

Arthur Gook evidently based his suggestion upon the Hebrew words *muth*, meaning to die, cause to die, be dead, and *shalach*, a verb “to send”, as sending an arrow from a bow, thus making “*Muth-u-shalach*” which correctly reproduces the consonants of the name (the last letter of his name in the Hebrew Received Text is *caph* (ch) and not *hay* (h) as in the A.V.). This would then mean “be dead—send” which unless elaborated as it was in the booklet, is not very informative. Unfortunately for the theory, however, one important point was overlooked. Methuselah was not a Hebrew, and he lived nearly three thousand years before the Hebrew language came into existence. If his name was intended to have any meaning at all, it would have been derived from the language of the day in which he did live, before the Flood.

There is no doubt that the ancients gave significance to names. Thus the Hebrew Je-ho-shua (Joshua in the AV) means “Jehovah saves”. Transliterated into Greek the name becomes Iesous and transliterated again into English it is Jesus. So Hebrew Miriam becomes Greek Mariam and thence English Mary. The spelling of the name changes as it passes from language to language but its meaning, if any, must be that which it bore in the language from which it originated.

Because that language in this case is unknown, there can be no certainty. It is possible though to embark upon a little exercise in possibilities and probabilities. The admitted earliest written language at present known is that of the Sumerians, descendants of Ham, son of Noah, in about the middle of the second millennium B.C. This was only seven centuries after the Flood and not far from the time when all the earth spoke “*one language and of one speech*” (Gen. 11. 1). It could be thought hardly likely that the antediluvian language spoken by Noah and his sons had changed much in that short time and it might well be that archaic Sumerian is not very far removed from that earlier tongue. In that case the Sumerian meaning of the name might form a better basis for assessing its significance, if any. In that language the genetic word for men or cattle in the plural is *adamutu* (from which comes the Hebrew word “adam” for man) and from *adamutu* is derived *mutu* for “husband” and *matu* as a prefix denoting men or women in the plural. The second part of the name could well be met by *u-sal-la* (peace) and suffix *ka*, a voice, to speak, to proclaim. Thus “Methuselach” transliterated back into Sumerian would appear as *Matu-usalla-ka*, literally “men of peace proclaiming” or as would be rendered in English, “preachers of peace”, or possibly “preacher of peace”. Noah his grandson is said in 2 Pet. 2. 5 to have been a “preacher of righteousness” and this expression in Sumerian would be *matu-dug-ka*, a very similar word.

If in fact Methuselah’s name did bear this signification—there can be no certainty—it does evoke an interesting reflection. Enoch his father was devoted to God; he “walked with God” according to Gen. 5. 24. Methuselah’s son Lamech was a godly man as shown by Gen. 5. 29. His grandson Noah was also and had divine approval (Gen. 6. 8-9). It could be a reasonable assumption that Methuselah himself, in this God-fearing line, shared and conveyed the same faith from father to son. If this be conceded, then from at least the early days of Enoch to the time of Noah, something like a thousand years of history, there was a consistent witness to God and righteousness in the world before the Flood.


There is some support for this conclusion in Jewish legends. Whilst mere tradition should not be taken too seriously, there is usually some basis of truth hidden at the kernel of such stories, handed down through the ages and being constantly modified and changed in the process. Nevertheless tradition does have some value. The British legend of St. George and the

dragon can be traced back to the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda, in which the hero delivered the maiden from the sea-monster of Joppa, and from that myth back to the story of Jonah and the great fish as narrated in the Bible. In this case the old traditions of Israel (preserved in this case mainly in the apocryphal Book of Enoch) depict Methuselah in this light. He is said to have been charged by his father Enoch to preserve the sacred books for future generations and to have received a vision of the coming Flood, whereupon he called together all his brothers to warn them. Later on his son Lamech at the birth of Noah came to him in great distress because of the striking appearance of his newly-born son, whereupon Methuselah took a journey to the ends of the earth to his father Enoch to seek advice and was given the full story of the coming Flood and the part the child Noah was destined to play. All legendary but at least tending to show that in the traditions of Israel Methuselah was credited with faith.

It may have been, then, that there was a nucleus of faithful believers almost up to the end in a world that had become so hopelessly corrupt that at the last God looked down and “*saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*”. So God sent the Flood.

Methuselah, if righteous, must have been dead by then. According to the Septuagint (Greek Bible) chronology, which is nowadays established to be nearer the truth, he died six years before the Flood, and his son Lamech pre-deceased him. Name or no name, if that was the case and he the last righteous man to die before the cataclysm, he was indeed a sign to that generation. There was at least a final six years for repentance. But no one repented. And they all perished.

AOH



God carries many of his children into the darkened rooms of affliction, and when they come forth again there is more of the beauty of Christ in their souls. We get many of the best things of our lives out of suffering and pain. It may be the easiest, but it surely is not the best, life and the most blessed that is free from trial.

The crown is not given to untried lives.

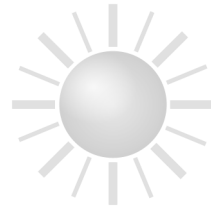
*In Green Pastures,
J.R. Miller*

WHAT SHALL I WISH THEE? TREASURES OF EARTH?

WHAT shall I wish thee?
 Treasures of earth?
 Songs in the springtime,
 Pleasure and mirth?
 Flowers on thy pathway,
 Skies ever clear?
 Would this ensure thee
 A happy new year?



What shall I wish thee?
 What can be found,
 Bringing thee sunshine,
 All the year round?
 Where is the treasure,
 Lasting and dear,
 That shall ensure thee
 A happy new year?



Faith that increaseth,
 Walking in light,
 Hope that aboundeth,
 Happy and bright;
 Love that is perfect,
 Casting out fear;
 These shall ensure thee
 A happy new year!



Peace in thy Saviour,
 Rest at His feet,
 Smile of His countenance,
 Radiant and sweet;
 Joy in His presence!
 Christ ever near!
 This will ensure thee
 A happy new year!



Here are some scriptures that may have inspired the writer-

Matthew 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Colossians 2:1-3 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Ecclesiastes 11:7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

Heb. 11:25-27 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

1 John 4:18 (RSV) There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

1 John 1:7 If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Romans 15:13 (RSV) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Acts 2:28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

Psalms 16:11(RSV) Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

THE PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE

After man was turned out of Eden children were born to him, and as these began to multiply some were good and some were wicked. As examples of faithfulness we have Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others.

It was after a great lapse of time from the creation and fall of man that God called faithful Abraham and promised him that in his offspring all mankind should be blessed. (Gen. 12. 1-3; Gen: 22. 15-18). God had previously stated that the offspring of the woman should bruise the head of “that old serpent the devil”. This was when the first man and woman were about to be turned out of Eden, with the curse of death upon them. (Gen. 3. 15). This statement was God’s promise of a coming deliverance for man from the power of the Devil. It meant that a deliverer should come from the offspring of the woman, who would destroy the Devil and bring blessing to man. The promise made to Abraham showed that the long looked for deliverer was to be of Abraham’s children. Perhaps Abraham thought his son Isaac would be the one; but not so. Isaac and his son Jacob were greatly blessed by God, but they did not fulfil the promise. Neither became the blesser or deliverer of mankind.

At Jacob’s death his twelve sons and their families, known as the Children of Israel (Jacob’s name was changed to Israel), became a special people to God above all others. (Exodus 19. 5). They were the descendants of Abraham, and so long as obedient to their God, received many favours, but did not, as a people, become the great deliverer of the world of mankind, as they may have hoped. Moses, their leader and lawgiver, prophesied that the great deliverer should be one of their brethren. (Deut. 18. 15). Many great men arose in Israel after Moses, such as Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, and others, but none of these proved to be the deliverer.

From time to time the prophets of Israel kept the hopes of the faithful alive, that God would send a mighty one who would fulfil the promise made to Abraham. In time this promise was limited to the house of David; the statement being, that of David’s children God would set upon his throne for ever. (Psalm 132. 11, 12). This would give the thought

that the coming deliverer would be a great King, one who would sit upon David's throne (the throne of the Lord. 1 Chron. 22. 10). The prophet Jeremiah prophesied concerning the deliverer, the great Messiah, that he would be a branch (offspring) of David, and that as a king he would reign and prosper, and execute justice and judgment in the earth. (Jer. 23. 5, 6). Thus the faithful in Israel would be looking for their long promised Messiah as a great Prophet and a great King.

When the great deliverer came the faithful recognised Him, but the majority rejected Him even though all were in expectation of Him. (Luke 3. 15). *The great deliverer, the seed of Abraham, is Christ.* (Gal. 3. 16).

FM

Pearl is produced by certain shelled molluscs, chiefly the oyster. The inner surface of the shells of the pearl oyster yield "mother-of-pearl," and distinct pearls are believed to be morbid secretions, caused by some external irritation. Many fine pearls are found in the actual body of the oyster. The Persian Gulf, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the north-west coast of Western Australia, many Pacific islands, and the Gulf of Mexico are among the most productive pearl fishing grounds. In ancient times Britain was renowned for its pearl fisheries, the pearls being obtained from a species of fresh-water mussel. Western Australia has produced a 40-grain pearl, the finest the world has seen. One of the largest pearls ever found was the "Beresford-Hope Pearl," which weighed 1,800 grains, over six times as much as the oyster that produced it.

Selected

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 Pratt (Cavendish, Sudbury)

MARTHA—A WOMAN OF ACTION

There is not a great deal said of Martha in the Gospel records, but of that which is said the least important is usually called to mind and emphasised. It is obvious from what we read of Martha that she was a devout woman sharing Messianic hopes and accepting Jesus as the Christ. She was the elder sister in the home at Bethany which was shared with Lazarus and Mary, that wonderful home which always had a welcome for Jesus when he came that way.

Luke shows one side of the character of Martha (Luke 10: 38-42). She loved the Lord as much as did Mary and had noticed that Jesus was tired, so she began to work hard preparing for His comfort and refreshment. Mary on the other hand realised that Jesus loved an appreciative listener, so she “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word.” Probably Martha desired just as much to listen to the Lord “but Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.” Martha was flustered and did not choose her words too well. It may be that Mary was so interested in what Jesus had to say that she forgot that her sister was being left to do all the work, but that did not excuse Martha for asking Jesus, her guest, to interfere; indeed it seems she rather blamed the Lord for not telling Mary to help. Jesus, however, did not give the sharp rebuke that many seem to think. It is in fact a gentle, loving, rebuke, “Martha, Martha,” note the repetition of her name, “thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her.” Martha’s mistake was not in serving, but in complaining. It may be that many since then have used this account as an excuse for not serving, yet Jesus Himself has shown that no one is too great to serve. We are not always to want to do the same service; by persisting in such an attitude we should miss many opportunities of service for the Lord’s people.

We get a further light on Martha’s character from John’s Gospel. In chapter eleven we read of her again. It is the occasion of the raising of Lazarus. The two sisters had sent to Jesus the message “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” In verse 5 we read “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister (Mary), and Lazarus.” What a wonderful tribute to that Bethany home! There is no room for doubt that Jesus appreciated the

devotion of Martha as well as that of her brother and sister. Jesus waited two days and then went on to Bethany. In the meantime Lazarus died and the house was crowded with many of the Jews who “came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother,” during the customary seven days mourning. As soon as Martha had news that Jesus was coming she “went and met him: but Mary still sat in the house.” Martha was the woman of action, and John in his Gospel record reveals her as one who had real faith in God, and in Jesus as the Messiah. She said to Jesus “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died; but I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give thee.” Jesus saith unto her, “Thy brother shall rise again”. Martha, saith unto him, “I know that he shall rise again, in the resurrection at the last day.” Her words show that she still had a mixture of the Jewish tradition of a final judgment day. Yet she drew forth those beautiful words of Jesus which have comforted and thrilled countless thousands of mourners and believers from that day to this. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” Jesus then asked her if she believed this. In reply Martha makes a further affirmation of her faith, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” These were words of encouragement to Jesus and they meant much to Him. We read of very few who made such a confession of faith to Jesus.

Martha then went back to Mary and told her quietly that Jesus was not far away and asking for her. Together the two sisters went out to Jesus and witnessed the raising of their brother Lazarus.

The third and last time we read of Martha is in John 12: 2. It was six days before the Passover and crucifixion of Jesus. We read that Jesus came to Bethany and “they made him supper, and Martha served.” This time there is no suggestion of Martha being cumbered: she is not impatient. This is the occasion when Mary anoints the feet of Jesus. Judas complains but Martha is silent. She is still the woman of action, but the activity is calmed by trust. One can hardly doubt that Martha, with Mary and Lazarus will be among those whom our Lord will confess before His Father in heaven.

The lesson we learn from Martha is readiness to serve and readiness to learn: the quality of being able to take a rebuke without offence: and a

devout faith. When we think of Martha serving we can think too of her great faith which encouraged Jesus and called forth the all-important truth “I am the resurrection and the life.”

AOH

PEARL

A smooth, relatively hard, globular and generally white gem with soft iridescent lustre, which has from ancient times been used for adornment. (1 Tim. 2:9: Rev. 17:4: 18:11-16; 21:2,21) It is a hardened mass of calcium carbonate that forms inside oysters and certain other molluscs. When a foreign particle (such as a grain of sand or a small parasite) enters the area between the body and the shell of a mollusc, this stimulates the creature’s secretion of a calcareous substance called “nacre,” which hardens into a pearly layer around the irritating intruding material. Successive layers of this shell-like substance are built up around the foreign particle that serves as a nucleus. If the nucleus remains free from the shell due to the contractions of the mantle lining the shell, a beautiful pearl is formed in the course of several years.

Selected



Job 28:18 No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies.

Matthew 7:6 (NKJV) Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

Rev. 21: 2,12,21 (NKJV) John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. She had a great and high wall with twelve gates....The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl.

THE CHARACTER OF PAUL

Paul, in his natural character, before his conversion, resembles Bonaparte more than any other man—I mean both in his intellectual development and energy of will. He had the same inflexibility of purpose, the utter indifference to human suffering when he had once determined on his course, the same tireless unconquerable resolution; the same fearlessness both of man's power and opinions, and that calm self-reliance and mysterious control over others. But the point of greatest resemblance is in the union of a strong, correct judgment, with rapidity of thought and sudden impulse. They thought quicker, yet better than any other men. The power, too, they possessed was all practical power. There are many men of strong minds, whose forces nevertheless waste in reflections, or in theories of others to act upon. Their thought may work out into language but not into action. They will plan better than they perform. But these men not only thought better, but they could work better than other men.

The same perfect self-control and perfect subjection of his emotions to the mandates of his will are exhibited in his conduct when smitten to the earth, and blinded by the light and voice from heaven. John when arrested by the same voice on the Isle of Patmos, fell on his face as a dead man, and dared not to stir or to speak till encouraged by the language, "Fear not." But Paul (or Saul) showed no symptoms of alarm or terror. The voice, the blow, the light, the glory, and the darkness that followed, were sufficient to upset the strongest mind; but he, master of himself and his emotions, instead of giving way to exclamations of fear, simply said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" With his reason and judgment as steady and strong as ever, he knew at once that something was wanted of him, and ever ready to act, he asked what it was.

From this time on, his track can be distinguished by the commotion about it and the light above it. Straight back to Jerusalem, from where he had so recently come with letters to legalise his persecutions, he went to cast his lot with those he had followed with violence and slaughter. His strong heart never beat one quicker pulsation through fear when the lofty turrets of the proud city flashed on his vision. Neither did he steal away to the dark alleys and streets, where the disciples were concealed, and tell them secretly his faith in the Son of God. He strode into the synagogues, and before the astonished priests preached Christ and him crucified. He

thundered at the door of the Sanhedrin itself, and shaking Jerusalem like an earthquake, awoke a tempest of rage and fury on himself. With assassins dogging his footsteps, he at length left the city.

But, instead of going to places where he was unknown, and where his feelings would be less tried, he started for his native city, his father's house, the house of his boyhood, for his kindred and friends. To entreaties, tears, scorn and violence, he was alike impervious. To Antioch and Cyprus, along the coast of Syria and Rome, over the known world, he went like a blazing comet, waking up the nations. From the top of Mars Hill, with the gorgeous city at his feet, and the Acropolis and Parthenon behind him—on the deck of his shattered vessel in the intervals of the crash of billows—in the gloomy walls of a prison, on the borders of the eternal kingdom, he speaks in the same calm and determined tone. Deterred by no danger, awed by no presence, and shrinking from no responsibility, he moves before us like some grand embodiment of power. The nations heave around him, and kings turn pale at his presence. Bands of conspirators swear to neither eat nor drink till they have slain him; rulers and priests combine against him; and people stone him; yet over the din of conflict and storm of violence his voice of eloquence rises clear and distinct as a trumpet call, as he still preaches Christ and Him crucified. The whip is laid on his back until the blood starts with every blow, and then his mangled body is thrown into a dungeon. But at midnight you hear that same calm, strong voice, which has shaken the world, poured forth in a hymn of praise to God, and lo! an earthquake rocks the prison to its foundations; the manacles fall from the hands of captives, the bolts withdraw of themselves, and the massive doors swing back on their hinges.

One cannot point to a single spot in his career where he faltered a moment, or gave way to discouragement or fear. Through all his perilous life, he exhibited that intrepidity of character and lofty spirit. With his eyes on regions beyond the ken (perception) of ordinary mortals, and kindling on glories it was not permitted him to reveal, he pressed forward to an incorruptible crown, a fadeless kingdom. And then his death, how indescribably sublime. Napoleon, dying in the midst of the midnight storm, with the last words that fell from his lips, a battle cry, watching in delirium the torn heads of his mighty columns, as they disappeared in the smoke of the conflict, is a sight that awes and startles us. But behold Paul,

also a war-worn veteran, battered with many a scar, though in a spiritual warfare, looking not on the earth but on heaven. Hear his calm, serene voice ringing over the storms and commotions of life: “I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day.”

AOH

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THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. (Col 1:11)

Ephesians 6:10-11 are key verses in exhorting us to be “.... *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*”. Why is this necessary? What is the spiritual meaning or reason behind being strong in the Lord and in the power of his might? The scriptures give many reasons one of which is found in the next verse itself “*that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*”. We have a powerful enemy to fight, therefore, he wants us to be strengthened in his might and grow stronger in the Lord.

How can we do this? The answer appears to be very simple; he wants us to put on the Armour of God so that we can stand against the schemes of the Devil. Paul speaks to Timothy ‘we are like good soldiers of Christ Jesus with God’s Armour on!’ (2 Timothy 2:3). But what is the Armour of the God? Ephesians 6:14-17 (NIV) records it is:

The Belt of Truth around the waist,
 The Breastplate of Righteousness
 The Feet fitted with the Gospel of Peace
 The Shield of Faith
 The Helmet of Salvation

and The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

The last one is the most important weapon of all in this Christian era. One of the best examples in the Bible to prove that Satan can be defeated through the word of God is Jesus.

God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power as the gospel writer Matthew records “*Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.*” (Matthew 3:16). Acts 10:38 also tells how God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power going about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil; for God was with him. Jesus was tested in the wilderness by the Devil after his baptism and his response to the devil was, “*It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every*

word that comes from the mouth of God'.” Later Jesus answered him, *“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”* and thirdly and finally Jesus said to him *“Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”* (Matt. 4:1-10 NIV). When Jesus was in the flesh he defeated Satan using the word of God since God’s Spirit was with him. He has set a good example for all.

The Comforter Forever

Jesus Christ promised us that our Father would give us a comforter who will help us forever *“Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”* (John 14:17). Even in the Old Testament the psalmist prays *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* (Psa. 51:10 NASB).

God’s Power

Since everything pertaining to God is holy, his power, or Spirit, is frequently referred to in the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures ascribe all the accomplishments or power of God as functions of his Holy Spirit. This has been since the beginning when ‘the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters’. Later the Bible informs us that God put his Spirit upon certain Israelites in the wilderness and thereby gave them the necessary skills to make the furnishings of the tabernacle (Exo. 31:3). Another function of the Holy Spirit was the enabling of God’s prophets to record his thoughts as they pertain to his people and to the development of his plan of salvation as it says in 2 Peter 1:21(NIV) *“for prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the New Testament

King Saul began prophesying when the Spirit of God came up on him. 1 Samuel 10:10 (NIV) *“When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying.”* Daniel was able to interpret dreams since the Spirit of God was with him as recorded in Daniel 4:18 (NIV) *“This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”*

In the New Testament Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to his apostles to enable them to call to remembrance the things which he had said to them and to guide them into all truth. John 16: 13 *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”*

The Working of the Holy Spirit

When we hear the Gospel of Salvation we will be sealed with Holy Spirit. Eph. 1:13 says *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise”*. As God’s first-fruits we are sanctified by the spirit by believing the truth. 2 Thess. 2:13 *“brethren beloved of the Lord...God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”*. Similarly another step is that *“we have purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.... see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (1 Peter 1:22).

The Spirit gives an understanding as stated in Job 32:8 *“there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding”*. When we read the word of God, the Bible, the Holy Spirit will gather our understanding together. Isaiah 34:16 (NIV) *“Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together.”* Just as God is holy when we are sanctified by the Spirit of God we are in a closer relationship with God. So Paul prays *“that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people”* (Eph. 1:18 NIV). Paul believed that the understanding of the truth comes from God’s might opening the believer’s mind.

God gave his spirit to Jesus Christ and in the same way God leads through his spirit which is his might. The Apostle explains in 1 Corinthians 12:6 there are *“diversities of operations”* of the Holy Spirit. Then he adds ‘It is the same God’ who works in each of us. He has given each of us the Holy Spirit, not only for our own individual benefit, but to the profit of the entire body of Christ.

Children Sons of God

If we are led by the Spirit of God then we are ‘Children of God’ as it says in Romans 8:14 (NIV) “*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God*”. Paul also said to the Romans that the spirit we receive does not make us slaves but sons of God and we cry, ‘*Abba, Father*’ (Romans 8:15-16). When this happens our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit. “*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19 NIV).

Spiritual Need, Meaning and Reason

The Father who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him at his right hand will also strengthen every one through his might which is the Holy Spirit. Through his Spirit it is possible to see things clearly and be strengthened spiritually to understand his word and the truth. If we have the spirit of truth we, the Christian, can defeat our enemy, Satan, who tests us in every second of our life, defeating him as Jesus Christ did.

Ephesians 3:16 The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “*....grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man*”.

RP

MADE BEAUTIFUL

“Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us.” Ps. 90:17. “How great is His Beauty!” said Zechariah. How can this beauty be upon us?....One way is by His covering us with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, looking upon us as if all the Saviour’s beautiful and holy life were ours, reckoning it to us for His sake. In this way He can call us “perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee.” Another way is by giving us the beauty of holiness, for that is His own beauty: and though we never can be quite like Him till we see Him as He is, He can begin to make us like Him even now. Look at a poor colourless drop of water, hanging weakly on a blade of grass. It is not too beautiful at all; why should you stop to look at it? Stay till the sun has risen, and look now. It is sparkling like a diamond; and if you look at it from another side, it will be glowing like a ruby, and presently gleaming like an emerald. The poor little drop has become one of the brightest and loveliest things you ever saw. But is it its own brightness and beauty? No; if it slipped down to the ground out of the sunshine, it would be only a poor little dirty drop of water. So if the Sun of Righteousness, the glorious and lovely Saviour, shines upon us, a little ray of His own brightness and beauty will be seen upon us.

(F.R. Havergal)

THE COMING OF THE KING

5. The Voice of the Archangel

One of the finest passages of Scripture relating to the Second Advent is that which enshrines St. Paul's words to the Christians of Thessalonica who were fearful that their departed brethren might be forgotten when the Lord came. Those words have been an inspiration to all succeeding Christian generations and they remain a stimulus and ground of confidence today. That some understand their background literally and others spiritually makes no difference to the assurance and incentive that all derive from them, but the very fact there are differences of thought on the structure of the passage makes it certain that no matter how sure one may be of the meaning, a fresh approach to the question will be of interest. There is no disagreement upon the principles of the doctrine itself, only differences of view as to precisely how and when the event comes to pass.

Let the glorious beauty of the words themselves rise before the mind again as prelude to consideration of what they involve. *"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so" (we must believe) "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming (presence) of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4.14-17).

There is an evident association of thought between this passage and the noteworthy words of 1. Cor. 15.51-52. *"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* In both passages there is a distinction between the "sleeping" and the "living" saints. The former are "raised" to the glory of immortal spiritual nature, the latter are "changed".

The descent of the Lord from heaven in this context, then, is intimately associated with the resurrection of the Church, the entire body of

dedicated believers in this Age, whether they be in the grave or still living upon earth at the time of the Advent. It may be said with justice that this entire statement in Thessalonians is concerned with the Advent only as it relates to the Church; the complete picture of the arrival, the voice, the trumpet, the air and the clouds, have to do entirely with the dead in Christ and their fellows who remain. The wider aspects of the Advent as respects the Lord's manifestation to all men, his work of bringing this Age to an end, and his initiating the Messianic Kingdom, is neither mentioned nor hinted at. In short, here is presented a picture of the Lord coming for his own, to gather them to himself preparatory to his being manifested with them for the evangelical work of the next Age. The popular idea of the "rapture of the saints" illustrates this principle; those dedicated men and women whose lives have been yielded to Christ, and who have been fitted by their Christian experience for the task of world conversion in the future Day, are now taken, from death or from life, to be ready for the commencement of that great work.

The nature and manner, both of the Lord's "descent" and the resurrected ones "ascent", come naturally for consideration at this point. Does our returning Lord appear visibly in the sky, as a gloriously radiant human being, attended by flying angels, to the sound of shouts and silver trumpets audible to the human ear, or are these expressions vivid metaphors expressive of a reality which cannot itself be defined without some such material analogy? Are the air and the clouds the literal atmosphere and vapour masses of this planet, or did the words convey a meaning to the Thessalonian believers which is not easily appreciated in our day and generation?

It is well known and accepted that the Scripture writers, including St. Paul himself, frequently used "figures of speech" to convey a meaning perfectly well understood by their readers, just as we do ourselves. We habitually refer to the death of an aged believer as "passing beyond the veil" without claiming that there is a literal veil which has to be passed in order to gain entry to the spiritual world. We speak of such an one as having gained his "crown" without implying that he is to be presented with a literal laurel wreath as adornment for all eternity. The "white robes" of the redeemed and the "robe of righteousness" of the justified are recognised for what they are, metaphors expressive of a reality which cannot otherwise be defined in human terms. All these allusions are

commonly used without further explanation and no one ever thinks of taking them literally. Likewise when Paul declares that the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout he is clothing a truth that we with our human limitations cannot understand in literal everyday terms that we can understand. And we have to remember that the extent of human knowledge in St. Paul's day was considerably more restricted than it is now so that in many respects truths concerning the celestial realities "on the other side of the veil" had to be stated in even more down-to-earth terms than are necessary today. After all, at the First Advent and right into the Middle Ages even the best scientific knowledge of the times held that this earth was the centre of the universe and that the heaven of God's throne was situated on the surface of a kind of crystalline sphere which revolved around the earth at not too great a distance away, so that the only possible manner in which any man could picture the coming of the Lord was by an aerial descent from "there" to "here" through the atmosphere. No one dreamed then that the air extended only a few miles up and the wings of the angel would be of no possible use in empty space!

In our own day, although we know so much more of the physical universe now, and the vast distances involved, and that this earth, so far from being the centre is but the merest speck in the immensity of God's creation, we ourselves are quite unable to visualise the reality. We must be frank and confess that we do not know *how* our Lord returns at his Second Advent or from whence He comes; what we do know is that He *does* come to earth at the appointed time. We cannot understand the nature of the celestial world and we do not know "where" it is, nor how one gets there. It might well be that when St. Paul says "the Lord shall descend from heaven" he was, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, framing his words to express the truth within the general knowledge and belief of his time; the value of his definition is shown by the fact that even now, two thousand years later and with a totally different understanding of astronomical science we still think instinctively of our Lord as coming down from above, although we no longer consider that heaven is only a few hundred miles up on the outside of an encircling glass sphere. The reality is that at the time of the commencement of the Advent our Lord leaves that sphere of being which we call the celestial, the company of its angelic citizens and everything of which that creation exists, and comes within the space and time framework of this material creation, with its stars and suns and circling planets, and this earth in which He once lived as man for thirty

three earth years. Such a coming can be a reality without demanding necessarily a visible appearance, any more than our Lord was visible to his disciples during the major part of the six weeks intervening between his resurrection and his ascension.

He will descend “*with a shout, the voice of the archangel*”. The shout and the voice of the archangel are one and the same. The word “shout” is “*keleusma*”, used nowhere else in the New Testament and evidently intended to convey a meaning which could not be indicated in any other way. It is a technical term for the cry of combined command and encouragement given to horses by charioteers, hounds by hunters, and especially to oarsmen of galleys. In order to ensure that these latter pulled on their oars in unison, an overseer known as the “*keleustes*” stood in a commanding position on the ship and at regular intervals uttered the “*keleusma*”, which, urging the men to sustained effort, became a call of combined authority, direction and encouragement. Michael the archangel was pictured in Jewish tradition as the leader of the hosts of heaven and the princely champion of the nation of Israel, standing in the presence of God as the executor of Divine judgment upon angels and men. The prophet Daniel was told that at the end of the age of evil, and the inception of the kingdom of righteousness, Michael would stand up and wage war for the overthrow of God’s enemies and the establishment of his kingdom on earth. (Dan. 12.1-3). The “voice of the archangel” thus becomes an allusion to the heaven-sent signal of command and encouragement which indicates that the Advent has begun—encouragement that the time is at hand, and command to recognise and accept the implications of the event and proclaim the fact of the Advent in positive terms. Such a proclamation has in fact been given; from the days of the Baptist minister William Miller nearly two hundred years ago, Christian recognition that the “time is at hand” became clear and positive. Miller’s own expectation of a visible descent from the skies in the year 1843 was not realised, but later in the century sober reflection and discussion showed that the initial stages of the Advent are not accompanied by an outwardly visible manifestation, and the voice of the archangel is heard, spiritually, only by those who recognise the significance of the times in which they live. This view began to be propounded and debated from 1840 onward, and that recognition, against the background of contemporary events, is abundantly demonstrated, not only by the work of William Miller and the Second Advent movement of the early nineteenth century, but also by a wide-

spread proclamation later in the century and a general awareness among thoughtful Christians of all schools of thought, then and since, that the world is moving into the “days of the Son of Man”. In England the interdenominational Mildmay conferences of 1873-1878 discussed every aspect of the Advent and gained the support of hundreds of ministers and students, as did similar conferences—notably Clifton Springs in America—at the same time. The level of understanding of both the purpose and manner of the Advent was higher—more enlightened and more sober—than that of the Miller thesis half a century earlier. It might well be true, therefore, that the voice of the archangel has been heard for more than a century past.

“And the trump of God.” This is the traditional “Last Trumpet”—popularly known as “Gabriel’s Horn”—announcing the onset of the Day of Judgment. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians was written at least twenty years before St. John, in exile on the island of Patmos, witnessed the visions of Revelation which still constitute the most familiar picture of this momentous event to Christians. *“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever...And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest...destroy them which corrupt the earth”* (Rev. 11.15-18 margin). St. Paul therefore drew his allusion from an earlier basis and both in Thessalonians and in Corinthians associates it with the resurrection of the Church. *“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”* (1 Cor. 15.51-52). This idea of the great trumpet which signals the coming of Divine judgment upon the evil things of this Age and the introduction of a new and better world “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3.13) has its origin in the Old Testament, where the prophets used the simile to picture God rising up to take action for judgment upon evil. Zech. 9.14 and Joel 2.1-15 are cases in point. It is a military metaphor; the trumpet is blown to announce that the forces are about to attack; many such references appear in the historical books of the Bible. Since an essential prerequisite to the destruction of man’s world edifice of evil and its supersession by the Messianic Kingdom is the resurrection to celestial conditions of all who are to be associated with Christ in the administration

of that kingdom, it follows that the “last trump” is the symbol, not only of the imminence of “Judgment day”, but also of the immediate resurrection of the Church, and this explains the close association in the mind of St. Paul between the two ideas. The medieval idea was that “Gabriel’s horn” sounding on the air would cause those hearing it to know that the time was at hand. The modern understanding is that when outward evidences in the world accumulate to the point where there is no longer any possibility of avoiding the obvious conclusion that the world of men is running into disruption and dissolution and judgment, then the “Last Trump” is sounding. Many Christians believe that this position has already been reached. Other men, far-sighted and sober thinking men of the world often, are increasingly coming to the same conclusion. “*Upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity...men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world*” was Jesus’ description of the position (Luke 21.25-26 RSV). It could very reasonably be held that on this basis the sound of the “Last Trump” has been heard upon earth for a number of decades past.

It is against this background that the age-old hope and aim of all Christians—to be translated at the end of earthly life to that celestial condition in which they will find their place of service in God’s purposes and be associated with the Lord Christ for evermore—must be set. When the outward evidence becomes conclusive that the voice of the archangel and the trump of God are both sounding in the earth, even although only those who “watch for his appearing” are as yet aware of the fact and the bulk of the sons of men, even if seeing the signs, do not know what they portend, then the implication is that the Advent has commenced even although the returned Lord is not discerned by human sight. The further implication is that the first work of the Advent, the “change” of the Church, is then in progress or is imminent. Until that work is completed there can be no advance in the manifold activities which are to characterise the Advent and eventuate in the replacement of this present world order by that which is to bring peace to the nations and an end to evil and death.

The resurrection of the Church is known in Scripture as the “First Resurrection” (Rev. 20.4-6; 1 Cor. 15.23-24; Rom. 8.19), because it precedes the general resurrection of the remainder of mankind, a process which commences only after the Messianic Kingdom is in operation with Christ and his Church in control. This “First Resurrection” has a dual

aspect; at the time of the Advent there is to be, initially, the resurrection of believers who are described as “asleep”—i.e. in the grave, having finished their earthly lives prior to the Advent. After this comes the “change” of those who are still living at the time of the Advent. The net effect is the same; in both cases the individuals concerned close their eyes to the earth, they come to the end of consciousness and existence as experienced through the human organism, which thereafter returns to its dust, and they open their eyes to a new and celestial world in which consciousness and existence is experienced through a new and celestial body, one adapted to that order of life. St. Paul only alludes to the fact in Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians 15.51-52, where the sleeping ones are “raised” and the living ones are “changed” or “translated”. The philosophy of the matter is much more closely set out in 1 Cor. 15.36-50 and 2 Cor. 5.1-4 where this whole question of the celestial body and environment of those who thus go “to be with the Lord” is discussed in detail.

This then is the first great event of the Advent. There will be no outward sign and it will not be known to, or suspected by, the general mass of humankind. This is essentially a preparation for the more spectacular manifestation of a later stage of the Advent when no living creature will be able to dispute the fact. 1 Thess. 4 in particular, and a number of related New Testament passages in general, afford a wealth of detail as to the nature and manner of this resurrection of the Church, and it is to this aspect of the subject that much Advent truth relates.

AOH

(To be continued)

FULL CONSECRATION

O sacred union with the Perfect Mind!
 Transcendent bliss, which Thou alone canst give,
 How blest are they this Pearl of price who find,
 And, dead to earth, have learned in Thee to live!

And thus, while dead to human hopes I lie,	With joy we learn this lesson of the cross,
Lost, and forever lost, to all but Thee,	And tread the toilsome way which Jesus trod;
My happy soul, since it has learned to die,	And counting present life and all things loss,
Has found new life in Thine infinity.	We find in death to self the life of God.

Poems of Dawn

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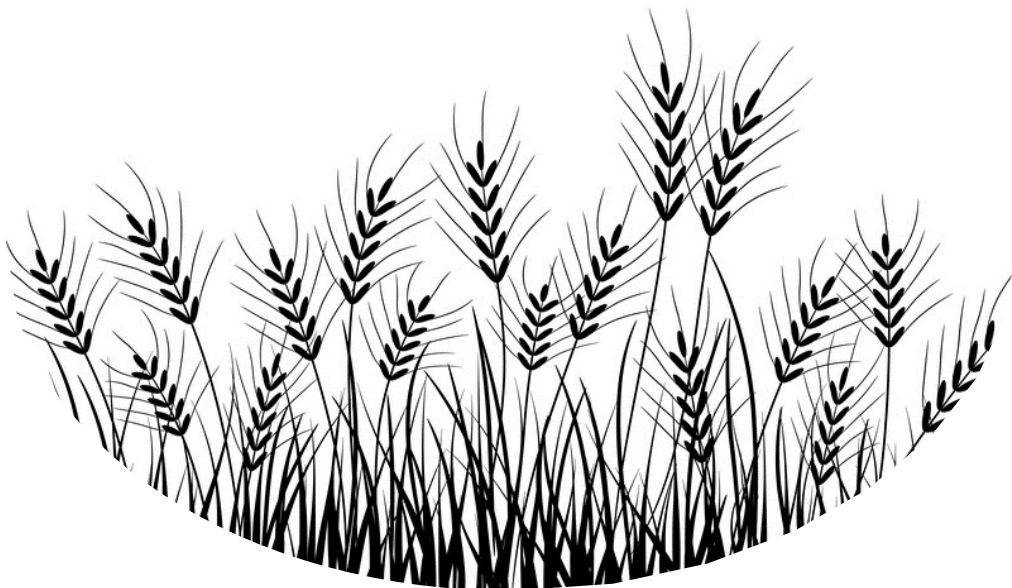
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You crown the year with
Your goodness'.
Psalm 65.11
NKJV



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“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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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

“You crown the year with Your goodness” Psalm 65.11

At this time of the year, we are especially aware of what we have grown and the fields in our country have produced. The miracle that a blackcurrant bush will produce blackcurrants that are edible, tasty and nutritious and that we get the necessary rain and warm conditions to produce that which we eat. All this produces a spirit of thankfulness for the food we eat.

In this corner of Europe we are in an area which has a plentiful supply of cheap food which means we can eat more than we need and the challenge is not to overeat. However it was not always so and there have been famines in this corner of the world.

In other parts of the world there have been famines, in Biafra in the 1970s, Ethiopia in the 1980s and North Korea in the 1990s. There is always a risk of famine somewhere in the world and the Sahel in sub-Saharan Africa remains an area at risk. Some of these famines have been exacerbated by political issues and by the failure to get food to the needy

from areas in the world where food is in plentiful supply.

So in the spiritual life there should also be a spirit of thankfulness for the loving care and goodness of our Heavenly Father who provides spiritual nourishment on a daily basis. It's an opportunity to count our blessing and 'name them one by one'. There are many blessings when we are close to the Lord. The apostle Stephen must have been thankful that the good news of salvation had been brought to his door. During his short life he must have brought forward sufficient fruit for the Lord to cut short his life after just a matter of months.

But the goodness of God extends even further from the land of Israel to every country in the world. Psalm 65 talks of abundance, fatness and joy which points to a time yet future when famines will be a thing of the past in the 'year of thy (His) goodness' when people going hungry for any reason will be a thing of the past recorded merely in history books.



Bread was the staple food. The better quality was made from wheat and a poorer quality from barley. Spelt was also used ("rie" in A.V.). It was a type of bearded wheat of poorer quality.

Parched corn i.e. ears of corn roasted in a pan over a fire was popular particularly amongst those who worked in the fields. (Ruth 2: 14). It was after David had brought parched corn and other victuals to his brothers that he met Goliath and slew him. (1 Samuel 17: 17). Sometimes corn was bruised and in both these forms it was used with oil and frankincense as a meal offering unto the Lord. (Leviticus 2: 14-16).

When wheat was finely ground and then cooked an ancient version of semolina pudding was produced.

The main grain crops were stored in the city in large jars with narrow necks. To conserve space these were usually buried in the ground up to their necks. During the excavation of Jericho, the world's oldest city, remains were found of millet, barley and lentils harvested over 4,000 years ago.

They Lived in Israel
Laurence H. Bunker

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.

WHAT SHALL WE HAVE ?

A new idea of respecting the nature of the kingdom offer was reaching the Apostles, and Peter, the spokesman for them, called attention to the fact that although they were not wealthy they had forsaken all that they did possess to become the Lord's followers, and therefore he desired an assurance as to the nature of their entrance into the kingdom. Our Lord's reply was surely amply satisfying to His dear followers; He assured them that there is no man that "hath left either house (home), or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands" for His sake and the Gospel's sake, but would receive again an hundred-fold now in this time, and ultimately in the world to come, eternal life. There was encouragement in this to the Apostles, and there is encouragement also to all who are the Lord's people today. If we could only have this thought well in mind continually, how we would vie with one another in our endeavours to spend and be spent in the service of so gracious a Master and in so glorious a mission and with so grand prospects and rewards.

Our Lord's words being true, it is very evident that some who receive little of the Lord in this present life and who have but faint prospects respecting a share in the Kingdom in the future have themselves to blame. They should ask themselves, "What have I sacrificed? What have I left for the Lord's sake, for the brethren's sake, for the Father's sake?" The stipulations are specific, hence those who have nothing to sacrifice can have no reward. But, who has nothing to sacrifice? We know of none so poor that he could not sacrifice something, and the poorer we are the more diligently should we strive to find something to render unto the Lord our God.

In this connection we are to remember that the thing which the Lord most appreciates and the thing which is most difficult for us to sacrifice is self. Hence we read, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (Psa. 51: 17.) If we have given our hearts to the Lord we have given Him all that we possess, and He will see to it that this shall cost us enough to test the loyalty and sincerity of our sacrifice; and as we see the test coming day by day, we are not to be intimidated, but to remember that the Lord has promised that greater is He who is on our part than all they that be against us, and again, that His grace is sufficient for every time of need. Hence, as trials and difficulties, pain and sorrow and

persecutions or slanders shall come upon us, we are to rejoice and be exceeding glad, first that these indications of our being in the hand of the Lord as pupils in the school of Christ are evidences that we are of the elect who are being shaped and polished, fitted and prepared for places in the Kingdom; and secondly, we are to remember that all those trials and difficulties rightly met, loyally responded to, are working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We are, therefore, to take the spoiling of our goods with patience, with joy, knowing that in Heaven we have enduring riches, enduring friendships, enduring knowledge and blessings of every kind.

But even in this present life, however much the Lord grants us to enjoy, our enjoyment will be proportionate to our loyalty of spirit in sacrificing. If we love much, and are prompt and liberal in our sacrificing, we will in turn be loved much by the Lord, be blessed and comforted, as He has stipulated, an hundred-fold more than all our distresses. Who are these who have an hundred-fold more than they give to the Lord? Who are these whose joys are more than an hundred-fold greater than their sorrows, trials and difficulties, pains and disappointments? They are the elect of God, whom Jesus is not ashamed to call His brethren.

TH



Harvesting. Grain was reaped with a sickle. Threshing was performed by dragging over the gathered corn a sled which had sharp stones or pieces of iron fixed to its underside. This threshed the grain out of the husks and cut the straw into smaller pieces. God used this sled as a metaphor when, through the prophet Isaiah He said "...I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small and shalt make the hills as chaff." (Isaiah 41: 15). Threshing was carried out on a flat circular site known as a threshing floor. After threshing the seed was winnowed by tossing the whole threshed corn into the air so that the wind carried away the chaff and husks leaving the grain behind. Threshing floors were therefore on eminences where they were exposed to the prevailing winds.

The harvesting of grain is a connecting theme in Israel's history. Grain was the subject of Joseph's dream and the lack of it brought Jacob and his family to settle in Egypt.

They lived in Israel
Laurence H. Bunker

SEEDTIME IN THE EVENING

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” (Eccl. 11. 6).

There is wise counsel in the Book of Ecclesiastes for both the youthful Christian and the mature Christian, for the one who is setting out on life's journey and the one who is within sight of its end. “Evening” in Ecclesiastes is the second half of life, the time when youthful vigour and enthusiasm has begun to temper into the more measured pulse and the more dispassionate outlook of mature years. It is in such an evening that the activity of earlier days tends to give place to relaxation of effort; the disappointments and disillusionment that come to everyone in life lead to a cessation of missionary effort and a settling down to enjoy the social fellowship of the Church without further shouldering of its responsibilities. It is in such a time that this exhortation comes with its urgent appeal, “In the evening withhold not thine hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that”. There well might be work done in the end of life that shows greater and grander results for the Lord than more spectacular work undertaken in earlier days.

The same thing is true in the life of the Church. The Nineteenth Century was a period unique in the annals of Christianity. During that century were seen the signs of the End as predicted by our Lord in that discourse of his to the disciples which is recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. The Nineteenth Century was the Watcher's time of realisation. It saw the commencement of the Harvest of the Age. The time came during that century when it could truly be said that at last the gospel of the Kingdom had been preached in all the world for a witness to all nations. Christian missionaries had reached the ends of the earth and all peoples, nations, and languages had received some part of the witness. That in itself was the first sign of the End Time, the first evidence that the days of the Second Advent were commencing. At the same time came the feast of Divine revelation and Bible truths promised by Jesus in his parable of the man taking a far journey. Another evidence of the Second Presence; the servants that sat down to meat and were served by their Master. These things are in the past; they cannot be repeated. The blossoming of the fig tree in Israel's revival dating from 1897; the apostasy from the faith resultant from misapplied science and the influence of the theories of

evolution, dating from 1859, when Charles Darwin published his "*Origin of Species*"; the steady breaking down of the Gentile powers, having its beginning in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the loss of Papal temporal power at the same time; all these events were signs that the end of this Age and the dawn of the next were at hand. And the message of God for those times concerned all those signs, pointed to them as evidences of what must shortly come to pass. In the power and enthusiasm of those visible happenings a great work was done and a mighty message was proclaimed. But the message was given and it has done its work. The signs have been seen and have receded into the distant years and now these things are a century old. The message that depended on those signs no longer has the force that it did because we live in a new day and a new generation that knows them not. The signs inspired and supported a great work in Christendom but now the signs are finished and the work is done. What comes next?

There are some who say that nothing comes next; that the time for the cessation of all Gospel preaching has come and that the remaining members of the Church on earth have nothing left to do but to "build one another up on their most holy faith", sit down quietly and wait for the Lord to take them away to heaven and bring this wicked world and all its wicked works to an end. It is virtually suggested that Christians who think otherwise, particularly if they still persist in preaching the Gospel, are nearly as bad as the said wicked world. At any rate, they are said to be "spiritually blind", "not continuing in Present Truth", "partakers of milk and not of strong meat" and, generally speaking, in a condition greatly to be deplored. The fact that the active prosecution of the Church's age-old commission to preach the Gospel is disparaged instead of commended, in the interests of that interpretation, only goes to show how easy it is, when the years have brought their disappointments, to lose sight of the first principles of the Christian faith. The Christian group that loses its missionary zeal signs its own death-warrant and will shortly die; that fact has been exemplified many times in past centuries and it is exemplified before our eyes today. Christianity is a missionary faith and we cannot enjoy a healthy Church life unless in some fashion we incorporate some kind of missionary endeavour in our activities.

On the other hand we should not necessarily conclude that the precise form of activity in which the message was enshrined during the Nine-

teenth Century must be continued without change. That is a very common mistake. There is a strong tendency to herald the Kingdom in the same manner and the same terms that were effective in 1916. They are not necessarily so appropriate in 2016. What guidance, then, may we take from the Gospels?

“Or whether they both shall be alike good!” Is it possible that in an “End Time” dispensational sense we may reasonably expect a “morning” and an “evening” sowing—the same seed, yet distinct works, each producing its own results and each, in the end, “alike good”?

It is a fact, at any rate, that our Lord enshrined two distinct thoughts in his final instructions to his disciples respecting their life work—and therefore our life work. According to Luke and Mark he told them to *preach* repentance and remission of sins among all nations, and to preach the Gospel to the whole creation. (Luke 24. 47; Mark 16. 15). According to Matthew he also told them to *teach* all nations, bidding them *“observe... whatsoever I have commanded you”*. (Matt. 28. 20). There is a world of difference between the words “preach” and “teach”, and there is no reason to doubt that all three Evangelists’ accounts embody part only of all that Jesus said to them at his departure, and each injunction was actually spoken separately and in its own setting. We might do well, therefore, to examine more closely than we have done heretofore the differences between these several versions of his parting words.

The word “preach” is from the Greek “*evangeliso*”, meaning “I tell good news”, or from “*kerusso*”, which means “I proclaim as a herald”. “Teach,” on the other hand, is from “*matheteuo*”, which denotes the instruction of pupils or learners, the making of disciples. In the Christian way preaching comes first and is followed by teaching. The Apostles at Pentecost first proclaimed good news and went about as heralds, announcing the Kingdom of Heaven, and then settled down to teach their converts. In the individual Christian life it is inevitable that the early years are taken up with declaring the message, telling out the good tidings of redemption that is in Christ Jesus; only when the experiences of the way, and progress in the faith, has brought maturity of knowledge and character, can the believer begin to teach. Preaching belongs to youth and teaching to mature age; preaching is the work of the morning but teaching that of the evening.

There are two notable instances of this principle in the recorded lives of great men of God—one in the Old Testament and one in the New. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit has provided in advance for the question that must arise in the minds of those who find their life's work apparently a failure. Here we have two of the mightiest men of faith in the Biblical record, men whose early life and middle age was spent in prominent activity, and who received esteem and honour from those whom they served, ending their lives in relative insignificance and obscurity. One of those men was Samuel the Prophet and the other was Paul the Apostle.

Samuel was dedicated to the service of the Lord from childhood and, as he grew up, rapidly became the leader of the nation in things ecclesiastical and secular. Israel looked to him for guidance and for strength. At the zenith of his power he travelled the country regularly, sitting in judgment annually in three different towns, administering justice and rectifying abuses. His wisdom as an administrator was no less famed than his sanctity as a prophet. He has very truly been called the greatest of the Judges. But the last glimpse we have of the life of Samuel shows him bereft of his power and glory, living in quiet retirement at Ramah, teaching a group of young men, gathered around him to learn of his wisdom and pass it on to the next generation, all that remained of his life's work. Yet there is no indication that Samuel fretted or repined at this apparently ignominious ending to all that he had achieved for Israel. He knew—none better—that he had fulfilled the place for which his Lord had selected him, and carried out the work He had given him to do, and if for the rest of his remaining days he was to labour in a much more modest and unnoticed way than heretofore, he was well content so long as he knew it to be God's will.

The Apostle Paul was in similar case. After a lifetime spent in travelling the length and breadth of the Roman world, the acknowledged leader of the Apostles and of Christians everywhere, he settled down at the end of his days—so far as the Scriptures reveal—to teach, contentedly, in his own hired house in the city of Rome, those who came to him. The last verse of the last chapter of the Book of Acts is wonderfully eloquent. Many years had Paul preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, proclaiming it as a herald, telling it as good news, but now those days were past and done. His mission now was that of a teacher, giving quiet but none the less effective instruction to those who came to his modest lodging to learn

of him. Did the stalwart old warrior, hero of a thousand battles, repine at being thus laid aside? We know that he did not; we know that he employed his powers with as keen diligence as ever to the new task his Lord had set him.

And for what purpose? What was the incentive that led Samuel quietly to remain in his house at Ramah, teaching those few young men who had gathered round him? What was in the mind of Paul as he stayed, day by day, in that house somewhere in the back streets of Rome, receiving and discoursing with those who came to him, the while the busy outer world pursued its interests and the millions of the great Roman empire waited for the Gospel? It was, to use words first uttered in another connection, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". (Luke 1. 17). John the Baptist was a man of the old dispensation, the Jewish Age, and he appeared in the end of that Age to make ready a nucleus who would take up the work of the new dispensation, the Gospel Age, and carry it forward to a glorious conclusion. John himself never entered the Gospel Age; his work finished, he was laid aside to await his destiny. The people he prepared took up the flaming torch and carried it on, passing it in turn to their successors. Paul knew that, and he devoted the last years of his life to teaching those who would guard the interests of the Christian faith in Rome and plant them firmly in the new Roman Age which was to dawn after the persecution in which Paul himself lost his life had ceased.

So it is with us now. We the members of Christ's Church still on earth, are, like John the Baptist, making ready a people prepared for the Lord. Our time on earth, like his, is limited; the end of the Age draws nigh, and with it the closing of the "High Calling of God in Christ Jesus". But when the last members of the Church have been gathered to meet their Lord, and the world is entering into the last stage of trouble that immediately precedes the Kingdom, what of the Truth? Will it be known in the earth? Of course it will! God has never left himself without witness in the earth, and in times of catastrophe and judgment such as that which will then be upon the world He will assuredly have some who know the Truth and the explanation of events and will declare them. Perhaps it is the final mission of the Church on earth, the "final witness" for which so many look, thus to "make ready" such a people, by quiet teaching and instruction in such manner as opportunity affords or opportunity can be made.

Elijah, disheartened at the apparent failure of his life's work, fled to Sinai. "Take me away, O Lord," he pleaded, "for I am not better than my fathers". But the Lord had yet a work for him to do. "Go back!" was the peremptory (absolute) command—and Elijah went back, not to stand before Israel and declare his witness to the one true God in public and spectacular manner as of yore; not to stride into the presence of kings and nobles and denounce them for their apostasy while other men looked on with bated breath; but to make preparations for the continuance of God's work after his own decease! "Go, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah to be prophet in thy room." The judgments of God, shortly to come upon Israel, were made sure by the anointing of Hazael the destroyer. The destruction of Israel's apostate worship was ensured by the anointing of Jehu the iconoclast. The continuance of the work of God and the knowledge of God was provided for in the anointing of Elisha; and it is significant that all Elisha's miracles are miracles that picture restitution—Millennial conditions. The healing of poisoned water and food; the increase of meal and oil, the giving of life to the dead!

So it may well be with us. The Lord calls us in our times of discouragement and slackness of effort to "GO BACK"; not necessarily to do the work that produced such good results over fifty years ago, but to do the work that is necessary to these present times. The Lord will not leave himself without witness in the coming years; but to us He surely extends the privilege of making arrangements, like Elijah, for the witness that is to be after our own earthly course is run. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

SOWING

Ever as I go thru life
 Help me, Lord, to brighten
 Those who journey with me,
 And their burdens lighten.
 Like a gift, a trust from Thee
 Help me so to use it,
 Knowing what on earth I sow
 I at last shall reap it.

GOD'S PRECIOUS JEWELS

Part 2. The Ruby

Jewels not only represent the elect of God, but they serve to remind us of the basic teachings of the Bible. This is borne out by a consideration of the first stone of the Breastplate of Judgement, which is mentioned in Exodus 28: 17 under the term of Sardius. The margin renders this Ruby, which is evidently a better rendering. The original word is *odem*, which means blood-red, and the letters are similar to that of Adam, which signifies "taken out of red earth." This physical make-up is corroborated by science, which proves that the human body is composed of the elements of earth and air. Thus we observe the solemn truth of the sentence passed upon our first parent: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3: 19).

An Amazing Symbolism. An analysis of the ruby reveals the astonishing discovery that it is red earth or clay in crystallised form. Its very colouring matter is the same as that which gives blood its hue, namely, oxide of iron. For this reason the ruby has been called "petrified blood." The test of a perfect ruby is when it compares most favourably to the fresh blood of a pigeon dropped upon a sheet of white paper.

With these facts before us, what an amazing symbolism is indicated by this precious gem! Adam was the bright jewel of all natural creation, but on account of sin, he gradually lost his glory and lustre. Then Jesus came to take the sinner's place. His blood was precious because He knew no sin, and, in virtue of His great sacrifice, He becomes the world's High Priest (Heb. 5: 1). In this sense, therefore, Jesus Christ is a jewel so exceedingly precious that it is destined to attract the attention of every eye. This is suggested in Rev. 4: 3, "And He that sat was to look upon like jasper and a sardine stone (ruby): and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

The preciousness of the blood of Jesus is likewise suggested by the intrinsic value of the ruby itself. For instance, a stone of sixteen grains is worth 400 guineas (\$2,000*). The most brilliant diamond of like weight, would cost about, half that sum.

Reuben. There is still another important feature relative to this first jewel of the breastplate. Upon it was engraved the name of Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob. Among the Hebrews the oldest son was, in the absence of the father, the representative of the family. To him would all the household look for guidance and judgment. Thus again Jesus the Anointed is brought definitely to mind as the representative of the Heavenly Father and “the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3: 14). To Him will all mankind look for guidance and judgment when “the government will be upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9: 6,7).

Imitation Rubies. Rubies can be so cleverly imitated by artificial methods that they bear a great similarity to real stones. The microscope, however, reveals in the manufactured article the presence of bubbles and striae. This reminds us of our Master’s warning of false Christs who shall deceive many (Matt. 24: 5). The Lord grants His true followers the power of perception through the Holy Spirit of truth; thus they can discern the character of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners (Heb. 7: 26).

There are many gems upon this earth which have strange histories attached to them. It would not surprise us if these have not been overruled by the Most High to teach some great lesson. For instance, there is a valuable ruby in the crown of English royalty valued at £10,000*. In the seventeenth century some robbers, led by a certain Colonel Blood, determined to steal it. They actually overpowered the guard of the jewel-room in the Tower of London and seized the crown. The thieves were overtaken at Tower Hill, where a soldier wrenched the crown from the grasp of Blood. Then a strange thing happened—some stones, including the valuable ruby—fell into the mire and were lost. Not even a diligent search could discover the whereabouts of this most, precious gem. Some days later, however, it was found by an old woman who was sweeping the crossing.

This brings to mind our Ruby—the precious blood of Jesus—which we must guard with jealous care. We need to be fortified by a growing appreciation, love and esteem of truths which centre around the Ransom Sacrifice, particularly those concerning our vital union with the Lord. We are warned of the serious consequences of treading underfoot the Son of God (Heb. 10: 29).

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* now reckoned to be priceless

STEPHEN—THE FIRST MARTYR

The man who appears for so short a time on the pages of the New Testament might well have been as prominent as the Apostle Paul himself had he lived. Tantalisingly brief as is the sketch of his character, it is enough to delineate a man of sterling worth and immense potentialities in the service of Christ. And yet, in the unfathomable wisdom of God, his consecrated life was abruptly cut short after not more than a few months service in the cause of the Faith.

Stephen was one of several outstanding men in the original circle of believers immediately after Pentecost who, although not of the Twelve, were nevertheless recognised by the Christian community in Jerusalem as “of honest report, full of faith and wisdom and of the Holy Spirit”. As such he was one of the seven chosen by the assembly to relieve the twelve apostles of much of their more mundane duties such as the administration of the temporal affairs of the church—the giving of alms to the poor, the care of the sick, the general welfare of the believers, and so on. The purpose of this innovation, as explained by the spokesman for the Apostles, was that they themselves might be the more free for the exercise of their pastoral duties, the leading of the church in prayer and instruction, and the ministry of the Word, which included exposition and doctrinal instruction. So the order of deacons came into being—the literal meaning of the Greek word is servant, and this is what the seven were ordained to be, helpers and assistants to the Apostles for the better conduct and the promotion of the work of the Church.

This had to include evangelism, which was of necessity a very important part of the life and activities of the infant Church. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” Jesus had commanded them, and the history of the Apostles’ later activities shows how literally they accepted this injunction and with what vigour they carried it out. But not only the Apostles were evangelists; in varying degree all of their converts took up the torch and spread the message of the risen Christ wherever they went. It is obvious therefore that these seven men would be outstanding in this direction also, and the fact that Stephen is mentioned first in the narrative in Acts Ch. 6 might well be taken to indicate that he was accepted as a leader among them just as Peter was the accepted leader among the Twelve.

They were all Hellenistic Jews, born in the Gentile world, perhaps Syria or Egypt, Greece or Asia, or even Rome, and all with Greek rather than Hebrew names. But they were all Jews, children of Abraham. There was apparently quite a colony of such (always called “Grecians” in the New Testament) in Jerusalem and many of them had become converts. The appointment of these seven was in consequence of a complaint that there was a certain amount of racial discrimination in the administration of benefits, in favour of native-born Jews, and it may well be that Peter and the others encouraged the selection of foreign-born Jews to this newly-created office in order to allay further fears of partiality. At any rate, Stephen, a Jew from overseas, found himself occupying the most important position in the Church next to that of the Apostles.

He was evidently an educated man and possessed of considerable ability and perhaps fluency. At first he became notable for the performance of wonders and miracles among the people. This, of course, was the hallmark of the Holy Spirit at that time and all the Twelve, and evidently some others also, possessed these gifts, necessary at the beginning to demonstrate their possession of Divine authority to represent Christ in the world and speak in his Name. But Stephen also possessed talents which probably none of the Twelve did possess, the power of debating with the educated and learned of this world to a degree otherwise manifested only by the Apostle Paul later on. Acts 6.9-10 tells how he engaged in debate with African and Asian and Egyptian and Roman Jews (the “Libertines” mentioned in this verse were Roman Jews who had been taken to Rome as captives during the many wars of the immediate past, and later granted their freedom and liberty to return to Judea) and quite evidently on an intellectual level. In consequence “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Ch. 6.10). It would almost seem as if by common consent the persuasion of the better educated Jews of the Dispersion as against that of the native Judean Jews was being largely left to these men of the same national origins.

A reflection arising from all this is that Stephen must have had much in common with the Apostle Paul as respects ability to talk and debate with the “wise of this world” on their own level. Had he been sent out to the Gentiles, as was Paul, he might well have had just as colourful a career and perhaps just as much influence on the establishment and the doctrine of the Church as has Paul. Why so apparently a promising and useful

Christian life should be prematurely cut short by a martyr's death is one of those questions which it is easy to ask and impossible to answer. One can only say, as did Eli in a different age and a totally different setting "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good".

Stephen's debates with his antagonists, or more correctly, perhaps, his effective presentation of the Gospel against all their arguments, roused them to fury and the determination that at all costs he must be silenced. They hired men to concoct false accusations of blasphemy against him and had him arraigned before the Sanhedrin—the same Sanhedrin which only a few months before had quailed before the iron resolution of Peter and the others over their fixed resolve to continue preaching Jesus and the resurrection. There is no evidence that these Pharisees and Sadducees were any less apprehensive than they were then. The complainants stated their case, the witnesses repeated their fabricated story as required by the ecclesiastical law; all that the High Priest could say after hearing it alleged that Stephen had predicted the destruction of the Temple and abrogation of the Mosaic Law, things which normally would have roused the assembly to fury, was the very mild enquiry "Are these things so?". It was only a few weeks when the same High Priest had let the apostles go free from a similar trial with the supine (lethargic) injunction not to preach Jesus again, knowing full well that his words would be entirely disregarded. It is very possible that Caiaphas was heartily wishing that this trial had not been foisted upon him; there was a power in this Christian evangel which he felt unable to withstand, and provided he could still retain his own position in the sight of the people generally, he would prefer to ignore it.

The foreign-born Jews who had laid the complaint were, however, of different stuff. They were out for Stephen's blood and they meant to have it. One recalls that when Paul was arraigned in Jerusalem nearly twenty years later, they were Asiatic Jews who stirred up the commotion. This particular episode has much in common with that one.

What has been called "Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrin" was a masterly one. He made no attempt to defend himself from the accusations. He did not even answer the question. He embarked straight away upon a recapitulation of Hebrew history in a fashion that immediately attracted the attention of his hearers. He started with Abraham, the

venerated father of them all, reminding them of their God-given calling and privilege inherited from the patriarch. “Men, brethren and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran” (Ch. 7.2). From Abraham’s first entry into the land of Canaan he passed swiftly to the famine which threatened his seed, the twelve patriarchs who became the fathers of their nation, and the deliverance which came through Joseph by the overruling providence of God. From that he went on to the second great deliverance, that of the Exodus under Moses, another saviour raised up by God. In masterly fashion he showed that Israel rejected the saviour, first demanding of him “who made thee a ruler and a judge” and secondly rebelling against his leadership in the desert and planning to return to Egypt. Then they turned to idolatry, forsaking God who had delivered them from Egypt and worshipping a golden calf. So God gave them up to their desires and yet He was true to his promise and at length He brought their children into the land of promise under the leadership of Joshua and established them as a nation, the nation of whom the assembly before which he stood were the present representatives and spiritual rulers.

So far Stephen had recited history, a history with which all his judges were perfectly familiar and which they were never tired to hear narrated. They were proud of their descent from Abraham and arrogant in their claimed position as the chosen nation of God. The man before them was talking now of the glorious days of David and of Solomon, days when the kingdom extended far and wide, and of the Temple which Solomon had built. They knew of the glories of that Temple before its destruction by the Babylonians and they also knew and took pride in the knowledge that their own Temple, built for them by Herod the king, was an even more magnificent structure. But the complacency vanished from their faces when Stephen went on to recite the very words of Solomon when he dedicated his Temple; “the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands”. “Heaven is my throne” God had said through the prophet “What house will ye build unto me that can compare with that? What place of rest can you offer that can reach up to my heavenly sanctuary, where I dwell in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see?”. That was the drift of Stephen’s meaning and his judges were not slow to appreciate the fact. He was getting perilously close to telling them that their treasured Temple and all that was connected with it was as nothing in the sight of God and must one day be swept away as had

Solomon's six centuries before, and they with it. The false witnesses had averred (asserted) that he had predicted the destruction of the Temple and the end of the Mosaic dispensation and it looked to them that it was this toward which his words were now tending. The interest with which they had listened heretofore evaporated into open hostility and Stephen could not fail to sense the change.

This is, most likely, the explanation of Stephen's sudden change of tone at vs. 51. Up to vs. 50 he was giving a sober and restrained recapitulation of the ways of God with Israel from earliest times. Now he breaks off, almost in mid-sentence, and pronounces a bitter and almost savage denunciation of their hypocrisy and unbelief. It is almost as if he read in their faces that which told him that no matter how eloquently he reminded them of their responsibility before God as custodians of the national mission they were impervious to all that God was waiting to do and to give. There was no hope of their repentance and Stephen knew it. So he gave vent to the feelings which had possessed him all along and he spoke the words of condemnation knowing full well that in so doing he was signing his own death warrant.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Ch. 7.51-52).

The words were spoken and they could not be recalled. Stung to fury, the members of the Sanhedrin ground their teeth in rage. Within themselves they knew the truth of Stephen's accusation; but to be told of it by this layman was beyond all toleration. Not that at that moment they intended to do anything about it. As in the case of Peter and the others a little while earlier they would probably have admonished Stephen to cease from preaching Jesus and the resurrection, and let him go. They had no power to pass a death sentence—that was vested in the Roman governor who had already shown his contempt for the ecclesiastical controversies of the Jews—and the most they could do was imprison the accused and sentence him to a flogging. And so far there had been no corroborative evidence offered in support of the accusation brought by the two false witnesses,

and the Sanhedrin at least observed the formalities of their judicial laws. So they fumed and threatened and for the moment went no further.

Stephen himself resolved the situation. Whether he was in fact vouchsafed a vision of heavenly things, or in the ecstatic state of his mind resolved his thoughts into a visual impression may be open to debate, but there is no doubt that as he stood there looking upwards he saw something. “...*he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God*” (Ch. 7. 55-56).

A moment's stupefied silence, and then a roar of rage and anger. He had uttered the greatest blasphemy possible to a Jew; he had claimed to see God, the God who had once told Moses that no man could look upon his face and live. There need be no further enquiry now; the accused had convicted himself out of his own mouth. For such a crime there could be only one penalty, that laid down in the Law of Moses, death by stoning (Lev. 24.16). It is true that the law in this respect had long since fallen into disuse, and in any case Rome did not allow the passing and execution of the death sentence for any reason by the Sanhedrin. But all that was of no importance at this present moment. In the vehemence of their anger they lost all control of themselves, rose from their seats and dragged their prisoner to a place outside the city walls where they could execute their design without interference by the Roman legionaries. And there they stoned him, the while he called upon God to receive his spirit and forgive his murderers. So Stephen died, the first martyr for the Christian faith.

There is good reason for thinking that Saul of Tarsus, afterwards known as Paul the Apostle, was at least in the forefront of those demanding Stephen's death. His own words in Acts 22.20 and of Luke in Acts 8.1 to the effect that he was “consenting” to his death implies much more than appears on the surface. The word there rendered “consenting” means to agree to a course of action emphatically and with considerable pleasure. The known actions of Saul immediately after the martyrdom are consistent with a bigoted and relentless opposition to all that Stephen stood for and preached. As required by the Mosaic Law (Deut. 17.7) the first men to cast stones at the condemned had to be the accusing witnesses. Ch. 7.58 says that the witnesses, in divesting themselves of their outer

garments in order to perform this duty, laid them at Saul's feet. His action in thus guarding their garments was a further tacit approval of all that they were doing. It must have been a bitter blow for Saul when later on, on the road to Damascus, he himself saw virtually the same vision which led to his condemnation of Stephen, and realised that after all Stephen was speaking the truth.

His was a short life in the Christian way, and yet, who knows, perhaps wonderfully effective and used of God. It might very well have been Stephen's faithful witness, and unflinching courage and faith in the face of death, which so worked on the mind of Saul that he himself, in his turn, surrendered his life to Stephen's Lord and became that instrument in the Lord's hand which has had so incalculable an effect upon the growth and instruction of the Church in all ages since. Had Stephen not acted as he did, there might never have been an Apostle Paul.

AOH



Rev. 4. 3 (NIV) *The one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne.*

Rev 21. 19-20 (NIV) *“The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone...the sixth ruby”*

THY KINGDOM COME

When Jesus was on earth He told His followers that He must die, that He must go away, but would come again and receive them to Himself. (John 14. 1-3). He further taught them that He would go away from earth and return to receive His kingdom. (Luke 19. 10-12). Since He was on earth the gospel has been preached in order that some might hear, believe and become true followers of Jesus; and being faithful unto death, should participate with Christ in His kingdom. (Rev. 20. 6; Rev 2. 10; Col. 3. 4).

For over nineteen hundred years the hope of the Christian has been the Second Coming of the Lord, and the establishment of His Father's kingdom on earth. These have prayed from the heart: *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”*. This is the kingdom which will bring deliverance to mankind, and which will bless all the families of the earth with the opportunity of life, liberty and happiness eternal. The

Revelator saw in symbolic vision the present order of things passed away and all things made new. After seeing the Devil, the adversary of God and oppressor of man (Rev. 20. 1-3) bound, he saw a new heaven and a new earth, a new order of things, and the present order of things passed away. He saw the time when death will be no more, when sorrow and suffering and pain will be ended.

He saw One on the throne (Christ, the new king of all mankind) saying “*He that overcometh shall inherit these things*”—the blessings of life, and freedom from sorrows and suffering, and the oppression of the Devil. (Rev. 21. 1-7). These blessings are for all, even those in the grave. To this end God has provided a resurrection of the dead through Christ His Son. Jesus said that the time was coming when those in the graves would hear His voice and come forth. (John 5. 28). The Revelator further saw a river of life proceeding to man from the throne of God and the Lamb, and Christ and His Bride, the Church, glorified, inviting whosoever will to come and drink of the water of life freely. (Rev. 22. 1-3, 17). The Apostle Peter spoke of “times of restitution of all things” when Christ should return. Restitution means a restoration of something lost. Through sin, man lost life and his Eden home. Jesus said that He came to “seek and to save that which was lost”. In His kingdom, the earth is to be made beautiful and fruitful. (See Isa. 35. 1-10 and Ezek. 36. 35 for proof that earth will be like Eden). Man will then be given a full opportunity to live for ever (Ezek. 18. 19-23), but those who are disobedient will be destroyed from amongst the people. (Acts 3. 19-23).

When Christ’s work on behalf of man is complete, every knee shall bow to Jesus’ name; all living creatures in heaven and earth will praise God. (Rev. 5. 13; Phil. 2. 7-11). Every follower of Jesus desires His kingdom to come. The disciples asked Him when it would come and for signs of His return and kingdom (Matt. 24. 3). The Lord’s reply (verses 7 and 8) tell us plainly that world wars and events following are the signs that His Kingdom is near. Before man gets the blessings of this kingdom he is to pass through a great wave of trouble which will completely destroy the present order upon the ruins of which Christ’s kingdom—the new heaven and earth—will be established. The Bible message for today is “*The Kingdom of God is at hand*”, which should be a message of joy and hope to all who desire better things for mankind.

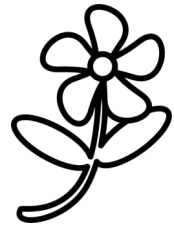
WE PLOUGH THE FIELDS AND SCATTER

We plough the fields and scatter
 The good seed on the land,
 But it is fed and watered
 By God's almighty hand:
 He sends the snow in winter,
 The warmth to swell the grain,
 The breezes and the sunshine,
 And soft refreshing rain.



*All good gifts around us
 Are sent from Heaven above;
 Then thank the Lord, O thanks the Lord,
 For all His love.*

He only is the Maker
 Of all things near and far,
 He paints the wayside flower
 He lights the evening star,
 The winds and waves obey Him,
 By Him the birds are fed;
 Much more to us His children,
 He gives our daily bread.



We thank Thee then, O Father,
 For all things bright and good;
 The seed-time and the harvest,
 Our life, our health, our food.
 No gifts have we to offer
 For all Thy love imparts,
 But that which Thou desirest,
 Our humble thankful hearts.



These are words by Jane M. Campbell (1817-1878) who translated this hymn from the original German. She is also well-known for translating 'Stille Nacht' into English. The German poet Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) wrote it in 1782 in 17 stanzas of 4 lines. He was born to a Lutheran Pastor at Reinfeld, between Hamburg and Lubeck, and began writing Christian poetry after a bout of ill-health.

Here are some scriptures which are believed to have inspired the writer.

Job 5:10 (God) Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields.

Job 37:6 For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength.

Isaiah 55:10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.

Ephesians 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God.

Genesis 1:31 God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

Luke 8:23-25 As they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake;...and were in jeopardy. And they...awoke him, saying, Master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased....What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.

Luke 12:24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them.

Matthew 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread.

Genesis 8:21-22 The LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake;...While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

THE COMING OF THE KING

6. The Sign of the Son of Man

That the Scriptures frequently speak of judgment and fiery destruction in the world of men as a feature of the Second Advent is a fact and there is no gainsaying that things worthy of judgment and destruction are, at that time, to go down in a manner fitly symbolised by consuming fire, which is so often a feature of Biblical descriptions. This is not a fiery destruction of men as such nor yet the literal passing away of heaven and earth in the manner suggested by some well-known hymns. The judgment of men associated with the Second Advent is one which includes provision for reclamation and reconciliation with God for those who will, and is described in much less sombre tones. The many passages which speak of Christ coming as a destroyer rather than a preserver have to do with the destruction of the evil systems and institutions of this world which have defied God and oppressed man, to the overthrow of the “kingdoms of this world” and their succession by the Divine government of Christ, who will reign as Prince of Peace over a world governed by the principles of truth and righteousness.

This final phase of the ages-long struggle between good and evil is a very real conflict. The powers of evil, of greed, oppression and injustice, have become firmly entrenched during the thousands of years of human history and they will not yield place to the incoming world order of righteousness without protest. The issue is not in doubt; the powers of good will prevail, but vivid pen-pictures in the Bible describe the intensity of the conflict and the magnitude of that final cataclysm which marks the overthrow of the present world order.

There are many Scriptures which speak prophetically of the time when the greed and selfishness and sin of mankind brings the world into its Armageddon, a time of trouble from which there can be no escape except through the coming of Messiah’s kingdom. Many of these passages show clearly that the early period of Christ’s Advent, besides being devoted to gathering his saints to their heavenly destiny, also sees the beginning of this work of destruction. That this climax to human misrule is the natural and inevitable result of man’s own course of conduct since creation does not make any difference to the fact that a higher Power is now intervening to overrule these events for ultimate good.

The first intimation that Divine judgment is in process of coming upon the world is when observers realise the fulfilment of St. Paul's word to the Thessalonian Christians in 2 Thess. 2. 8. This particular community seems to have been specially concerned over the possible imminence of the Advent and it was to correct their misapprehension that the Apostle devoted so much time to the subject in his epistle. In this second chapter he explained that the Day of Christ would not come until there had first been a great falling away from the faith (which Jesus also foretold in Matt. 24), followed by the development of the "Antichrist", the "man of sin", which development could not commence until "*he that now hindereth*" should be taken out of the way. Finally there would be a revelation of the Antichrist in full power, and only after that could come the time that he would be "*consumed by the spirit of the Lord's mouth and destroyed by the bright shining of his presence*". In this short passage, 2 Thess. 2. 3-8, the Apostle spans the entire Age from his own day to the Second Advent and pictures two powers, that which is against Christ throughout the Age and that which is of Christ at the age's end.

Many and varied suggestions have been made as to the identity of the Antichrist but the plain fact is that the whole edifice of pseudo-Christian institutional power throughout the entire Age, claiming to rule men in the name of God—as Paul here puts it, "*he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God*"—is the Antichrist of 2 Thess. 2. From quite an early period in the Age ambitious men began to introduce secular standards and practices into the Christian society with the view of increasing its standing and influence in the affairs of men. A concept took shape that if the Church was destined to reign over the nations then the sooner there was union with the secular power the better. This end could not be attained during the first three centuries; as St. Paul pointed out to the Thessalonians, "*he that hindereth*" must first be taken out of the way. The "*hindering one*" was the existing religious-secular system of Pagan Rome, firmly in the saddle in Paul's day and showing no sign of moving. By the Fourth Century, however, Pagan Rome, in its joint religious and political aspects, had passed away. It might be a fair appraisal of the position to say that when the Emperor Constantine in the early years of that century made Christianity the official State religion of the Roman Empire, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the day joined forces with him to create the power which in after centuries perpetrated many atrocities in the name of Christianity, Paul's foreview "*he who now*

hindereth will hinder, until he be taken out of the way, and then shall that Wicked One be revealed” was fulfilled.

For a period of fifteen hundred years this principle of Church-State union for the rulership of Christendom, and the rest of the earth so far as European influence extended thereto, claiming so to do in the name of Christ but in reality being completely alien from him, had its day. Now it has almost completely dissolved. During the past century and a half such powers have lost or are fast losing their secular influence. No longer regarded as equal partners by the world’s political rulers they become almost nonentities in the world’s affairs. The increasing force and scope of democratic and communistic forms of government having little or no interest in religious faith and no intention of sharing functions of rulership with representatives of religion is another factor tending towards the destruction of Antichrist “with the bright shining of his presence”. The fact that this dissolution is now manifestly in progress is one of the indications that we now live in that time, in the “*days of the Son of Man*”.

This is not the end of Divine judgment upon world evil. Modern as well as ancient paganism may have crumbled into ruins but the political and social institutions of earth remain and these too must give place to the coming King. It is here that visions such as those of Daniel and Joel have their place. The seventh chapter of Daniel pictures the “*Ancient of Days*”, the Most High, presiding over the Last Judgment, the while a series of mythological living creatures representing the empires of the world are brought before him for condemnation. One “*like the Son of Man*” comes in the clouds to receive the dominion of earth thus relinquished by those creatures; his kingdom, it is said, is to endure for ever. Here is shown the passing of human rule in a time of disruption and disintegration as by a devouring fire. The prophet Joel (chap. 3) sees the same thing in the guise of a fierce military battle between the kings of the earth and the forces of the Most High; the outcome is the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth and a reign of universal peace. Very similar previews are recounted by Ezekiel and by Zechariah, and all of these are brought to a focus in the most spectacular vision of all, that describing the conflict between the combined forces of this world and the Rider upon the White Horse.



This climax to the whole sequence of prophetic imagery is found in Revelation 19, verses 11-21. The seer of Patmos tells how he saw heaven opened and the emergence therefrom of a majestic rider mounted upon a white horse, coming forth to “*judge and make war*”. This Rider, John goes on to say, is the King of kings and Lord of lords, his name the Word of God. He wields a sword wherewith to smite the nations and He “*treadeth the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God*”. Behind him stream his followers, the armies of heaven.

Now John turns his eyes to the earth and there he sees the kings of the earth and their armies, drawn up to give battle. With them there are the mystic “beast” and “false prophet”, Revelation’s symbols of world evil. The opposing forces meet and the powers of Heaven are victorious. The defeat of the coalition is utter and complete and the vultures of the skies are called to feast upon the bodies of the slain. The sequel to this, continuing into the twentieth chapter, is the inauguration of the Millennial reign of Christ, the time of world reconstruction.

There are in the Bible some fifteen detailed descriptions of this aspect of the Second Advent, the direct intervention of the powers of Heaven into human affairs for the purpose of ending the present unsatisfactory rule of man and introducing the Messianic kingdom with its new and better order. All of these are couched in metaphorical language and against the background of current events and the state of society in the days in which they were written. They should not be interpreted in strictly literal fashion as is so often done, for this strikes at the very basis of the prophetic principle. These passages are called “apocalyptic”, a term which has been coined to define symbolic literature produced by the ancient writers in deliberately veiled language, using symbols, parables and the like, to describe what they saw of the ultimate end of evil and triumph of righteousness, in such fashion that their message could be received and appreciated by men of any generation familiar with the storehouse of the Old Testament.

In line with this principle, the falling mountains and crashing rocks of so many prophetic utterances stand for the breaking down of political powers, the toppling of kings from their thrones, which is so characteristic of this era. Mountains in this type of literature stand for kingdoms, such as the “stone” of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which became a “*great mountain*

which filled the whole earth”, interpreted by Daniel (2.35) to symbolise the coming Messianic kingdom. This is one of the most obvious “signs of the end” of today, the division of erstwhile great powers into increasingly smaller “independent” nations, and the re-composition of these into “blocs” of influence which themselves are unstable and easily disrupted. The stars falling from heaven are symbols of the decline of organised religious interests, coming down from their original high estate more and more to an earthly level at which they not only lose the spiritual leadership which alone gives them Divine authority amongst men, but also lose the esteem and support of men so that they finish up having no power at all. This is true not only of many nominally Christian interests but also of the other great world religions such as Islam and Buddhism. The disease is world-wide and it is another sign of the judgment. The consequence of these developments is an increase of anarchy in world society, both in organised democracy and communism and in individual contempt for law and order, so that crime reaches unprecedented proportions. In parallel with this there is the cumulative effect of human greed and selfishness, particularly in the commercial world, whereby the physique of the human race is being steadily undermined by unnatural ways of living. Medical science is increasing the average life span but there are more diseases to combat and the cost of maintaining that longer life span becomes steadily greater. The stresses of modern “civilisation” and ways of living give the lie to any pretence of improving physique, physical or mental, and with the despoiling of the earth’s natural resources and the poisoning of land and sea by man-made chemical products, reacting upon vegetable and animal life alike, the earth can conceivably be brought to a condition where it will no longer bring forth food for man. The misuse of expanding scientific discovery and the rash experiments men make without knowing what world-wide disastrous effect may be involved, create an ever increasing risk that unless halted by Divine intervention, there might one day be reached the “point of no return” where the planet itself is rendered uninhabitable and the human race extinct. These are not idle fancies, for they have all been foreseen by far-seeing men of the world qualified to speak with authority on things of this nature.

This is how the age comes to its end. Before men do reach that point of no return, and with the ruins of this world crashing around them, Divine intervention takes place. The planet itself will not be destroyed; the mountains will still rear their lofty heads into the upper skies; the

alternations of day and night, of summer and winter, of seedtime and harvest, will continue as of yore. The sun will still lift the seas into the atmosphere and send them down over the earth as rain, bringing seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The darkening of the sun and moon, the earthquakes and the fire, all are symbolic imagery to be understood as metaphors. That which is destroyed is the sovereignty and the work of man. This is the purpose of the Second Advent, and men will realise the fact of Christ's presence when they begin to accept that the old order has passed irretrievably into the hands of the new.

There has to be a point in the succession of events constituting the Second Advent at which the fact becomes universally recognised and accepted. "*Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him*" is the Revelator's ecstatic outburst (Rev. 1. 7) alluding to the visions of Daniel and Zechariah. The significance of world happenings during the early stages of the Advent is known only to those who have correctly related the contemporary scene to the principles of the Divine Plan as laid down in the Scriptures; a time comes in the progress of those happenings when the outward signs and evidences are so pronounced and unmistakable that men generally can no longer deny that the powers of Heaven have taken control of affairs on earth. Those signs and evidences will have to be very conclusive to convince this modern sophisticated world—in olden times the visible appearance of the glorified Lord in the sky, descending to earth with attendant angels, would have been enough, and the poetic language of the Bible is written in terms of such an expectation, but this scientific world will demand much more. It is only when the phenomena associated with the Advent cannot be understood or explained by men or affected by weapons of man's devising that, like Pharaoh's magicians of old, they will say "*this is the finger of God*".

It is this phase of the Advent to which our Lord referred in Matt. 24. 30 when 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*". This is the second coming as it is seen by all the world; Jesus gave no detail or even hint in explanation of his reference to the "sign" but that it indicates something universally seen and acknowledged is beyond dispute.

From this point of view the Messianic prophecy in Isa. 11. 1-5 is significant in that here also the entry of Messiah into world affairs is described as a sign. *“In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for in ensign”* (same word as “sign” in the original) *“of the people; to it shall the Gentiles (nations) seek”*—*“he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel...from the four corners of the earth”* (Isa. 11. 10-12). The latter quotation is significant in that a final gathering of purified Israel is associated with the “sign”, just as in Matt. 24 where, upon the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, the angels *“gather his elect from the four winds”*; comparison with Matt. 24. 22 would seem to identify that elect with Israel. Isa. 66. 19 supports and amplifies Isa. 11. *“I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations... and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles (nations).”*

There is really only one prophetic foreview in Scripture which yields sufficient detail to enable some concrete idea of the “sign” to be formulated. The twelfth to fourteenth chapters of Zechariah present a detailed, although highly metaphorical, picture of the events surrounding the transfer of sovereignty from the present earthly holders to the coming powers of Heaven, particularly as they affect regathered and purified Israel in the Holy Land. That particular piece of the earth’s surface, set at the meeting place of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa, and of the three great divisions of mankind, is peculiarly fitted to be the federal capital of the new order of society which comes in with Christ’s Kingdom, especially when it is occupied by a people who will then have achieved their long-promised destiny, a holy nation, a people for a purpose. That has never been the case in the past and is not so at present, but in the twelfth chapter of Zechariah we are translated into the time when it will be true. The people that will then hold the land of Israel will be in process of repudiating the policies and standards of this world and in fair way of becoming an instrument in God’s hand. The nations round about will have lost none of their old enmity and are threatening a mass attack. At that critical pass, the governors of the nation announce their faith and the faith of their people in God, that God will deliver. When the attack takes place God does deliver, and that so mightily that in the outcome the Lord alone is recognised as King over all the earth. These *“governors of Judah”* are to be *“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). In

other words, they are irresistible, and under their Divinely-inspired leadership the land of Israel will become the nucleus of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

This then, is the “*apokalupsis*”, the revelation of the Lord from heaven to all the world. The fact of his assumption of power is declared by events; the visible presence of his human representatives ruling in Jerusalem, the “city of the great King”, and the obvious hopelessness of any further resistance to their beneficent authority, is the signal to all men that the old evil world has ended and the “*new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*” (2 Pet. 3. 13) has commenced. This is the time spoken of by Jesus in Matt. 24 when the peoples of the earth shall mourn—the mourning is also alluded to in Zech. 12 where it is shown to be one of contrition and repentance; the light of the new Day will reveal to many their heedlessness and unbelief and create in them a desire for better things—and from this moment the reconstruction of the world upon a better and an enduring basis will commence.

This is not the end of the Advent. The presence of the King must continue until it becomes true that “all that hath breath shall praise the Lord”, and this implies an evangelical work of colossal proportions extending over a considerable span of time. But the bad old days will be days of the past and mankind will look forward to a glorious future. The return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, a process involving a number of interrelated events occupying an appreciable period of time, as human beings know time, commencing when He first revealed the fact of his presence to his own watchful ones, will now have become reality to all who dwell upon earth. The execution of judgement upon evil world powers will have commenced and progressed and been completed. The opposition of the enemies of righteousness will have been brought to bear upon the incoming influences for goodness and will have been utterly defeated. The Christian society, the Church of Christ upon earth, will have been completed and taken into eternal association with Christ in the heavens, to rule over earth during the entire period of his Presence. The earthly missionaries of the new Age, stalwart in their loyalty to God, will have been gathered from every corner of the earth and established in the Holy Land, centre of the new Administration. All these things will become evident to the sons of men when at the last, when all things are ready, they perceive, by the stern logic of world events and the visible presence of the

ambassadors of Christ in accepted control, the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Then it is that Isaiah's rhapsody will become a reality "*it shall be said in that day. Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him and He will save us. This is the Lord. We will rejoice and be glad in his salvation*".
(The End)

AOH
(1987)

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

Margaret Willey (Derby)



Proverbs 3:15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.



Proverbs 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.



Proverbs 20:15 There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.



Proverbs 31:10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

DIVINE SECRETS

It is surely true to say that we share our deepest secrets with those nearest to us and with those we love. How much more so do we find this to be true with our God. As we read in Deut. 29.29 “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children...” and “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”

Throughout the Old Testament we read of God revealing His secrets to His chosen ones whom He loved, whether by vision or dream, or angelic visitation or even by the prophetic gifts of knowledge and wisdom and understanding. From such manifestations Abram was able to look for a city whose builder and maker was God. Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder reaching to heaven. Joseph realized his ultimate position and glory through a dream and Moses at the burning bush had a vision of that glory which must have remained in his memory throughout his trying ordeal in leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. Noah, Joshua, David, Elijah and so on, all were given some revelation which was concerned with their destiny.

Many were the secrets God revealed to Daniel and incidentally his attitude to them is an object lesson as we too seek to understand some of the deep things of God, for not only do we read of the large part prayer played in this but also in Daniel 2. 20-23 and in verse 30 it says “But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living”. He was not puffed up by these things but his heart was humbled within him as he realized that all came from God and he gave Him back the glory.

In the Septuagint version of the O.T. one of the Greek words used for “secret” in this book of Daniel is “musterion” familiar to many no doubt as the word translated “mystery” which occurs so often in the A.V. of the N.T. What a pity it is that this word was so translated, for the very word mystery seems to shut the door of love in our faces instead of opening it wide. And yet from the use of “musterion” in the Apocrypha that it does not imply something mysterious or inexplicable but simply a secret which could be understood by those who were initiated. It is in this sense that the Greeks used the word. The outsider might try ever so hard yet could not,

even with the greatest mental effort, find out its meaning, yet the simple, once initiated, could understand perfectly. And this is the sense in which we are to understand the word.

The first occurrence of the word “mystery” “secret in the N.T. is in Matt. Ch. 13. and here too we read for the first time the word “parable”—that of the Sower. Now the disciples couldn’t understand why Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables and Jesus therefore tells them the reason in verse 13.

The quotation from Isaiah chapter 6 is important. Isaiah was another of those who had many secrets revealed to him besides having many visions which he perhaps did not understand. We are told that it was in the year that King Uzziah died that he had the vision of the Lord sitting upon a throne. In 2 Chron. 26 we are told about this king Uzziah. He began very well, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. (vs. 5-7) But in v.16 we are told that “when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense”. In other words he was seeking to unite the offices of Kingship and priesthood, which was a great sin against God, for one and one only, the Son of God has been fore-ordained to fulfil that united function, and it is therefore of him that Isaiah had the glorious vision and in that very year King Uzziah died, smitten with leprosy.

After Isaiah was cleansed, for a vision of the Lord in glory ever brings the consciousness of sin to the individual, he was given the message he was to take to idolatrous Israel, and it is these words which our Lord quotes in Matt. 13.

Further on in Matt. 13. 35 our Lord quotes from Psa. 78. After the first four parables of the secrets or mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven we read in verse 34 and 35 “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world’”. This reference is to Psalm 78 which is a ‘Maschil of Asaph’. That Asaph was indeed a prophet as our Lord said, is confirmed in 2 Chron. 29.30. All the titles of the Psalms are of deep significance and

the title of this one ‘Maschil’ means ‘instruction’. Not all the Psalms are for instruction in the same way as we know, for some are for praise others cries for help etc... But this word Maschil implies ‘an understanding’ arising from a deep consideration as we find in Neh. 8.8 “So they read in the book of the law of God (and Ezra the scribe) gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading”.

The first two verses of this psalm read “Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old”. (Psalm 78. 1-2) When however, our Lord quotes these verses he translates the words “I will utter dark sayings of old” by the words “I will utter things which have been kept secret since the foundation of the world”. Furthermore the Psalm itself speaks of God’s desire and purpose to set up the Sanctuary and the history of Israel’s continual rebellion against His Law, and their complete inability to cooperate.

The setting of these first parables of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven is also important. Our Lord had already on so many occasions given evidence to His Messiah-ship yet certainly by the time we reach Matthew 12 it is obvious that the people would reject him, even though he tells them that he was greater than the temple (v.6) greater than the prophet Jonah (v.41) and greater than King Solomon (v. 42).

So it is that our Lord follows on to quote the prophecy of Isaiah showing the blindness and deafness of Israel as a whole whilst to his chosen ones he begins to instruct them in some of God’s purposes which He had kept secret since the foundation of the world, and hence his quotation from Psalm 78. Furthermore the importance of all this we cannot over-estimate in reading in Mark 4. 13 concerning the first parable, that of the sower, “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables” showing this to be a key to others.

All Scripture is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness, however there is a difference between the interpretation and application of Scripture. As far as the application goes we are entitled to take what lessons we can from them. Nevertheless it is suggested that when we are told that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises made unto the Fathers and that he

“was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel” then to interpret these parables as referring to the glorious doctrine of the Grace of God to which we are called as when they are so obviously centred around Israel and the Kingdom as some commentators do is like playing a one string fiddle and a failure to rightly divide the Word of truth and thus to rob the wonderful and intricate jig-saw puzzle or tapestry of the Plan of God of some of its vital pieces or threads.

In further consideration of our Lord’s use of Isa. 6. 9-10, showing that blindness had come upon Israel, we take a look at the second mention of this passage in the N.T. which is John 12. 41. Isaiah was the sent one sent forth with the message of blindness upon Israel and in verse 46 our Lord calls himself the sent one and has a similar message for Israel quoting Isaiah’s words. He had first warned them in verses 35 and 36 “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you” words which were of no avail and so it says “Jesus departed, and did hide himself from them”. Oh what significant words for truly the darkness did descend upon Israel and the Lord has been hid from their eyes ever since.

Nevertheless our long-suffering God whose mercy endures for ever, having heard our Saviour’s cry from the cross “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” again showed forth His long-suffering and kindness towards Israel by sending forth His servants the disciples endued with the Holy Spirit and armed with the message of “Repent and accept Jesus as your Messiah” that the Kingdom may indeed come and Israel be delivered and confirming it with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2. 3-4). However throughout the Acts of the Apostles we again find the continual opposition from the Jews until we come to the last chapter where Isaiah’s prophecy is quoted for the last time, this time by Paul under very dramatic circumstances. This was when he called together the leaders of the Jews to whom he expounded and testified the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets. When they could not agree among themselves, Paul made that dramatic pronouncement of the words of Isaiah again telling them that the Salvation of God would be sent unto the Gentiles who would hear it. (Acts 28.28) When he had said these words the Jews departed, and “had great reasoning among themselves” and they have surely had much of this ever since. Instead of the Sun of

Righteousness arising with healing in His wings, darkness, complete and utter, enveloped the nation and Ichabod...“the glory has departed” was once more written in its history.

The importance of these words taken from Isaiah 6, in as much as they are used in the New Testament, always marks a crisis in Israel’s history even as they did when first proclaimed by the prophet himself, and furthermore they are usually followed by a mystery or secret of some kind. Following the first quotation, the Secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven set forth the future course and final coming of the Kingdom, showing that although the proclamation seemed to have failed the disciples might be able to see that God would finally accomplish His purposes.

Then in John 12. 23 our Lord says that the hour had come that He should be glorified. This was followed by the voice from heaven and from verse 31 he proclaims the judgement of this world and the casting out of its prince. This was the time of our Lord’s official rejection as the record goes on to show and which includes the second quotation of Isaiah’s words pronouncing blindness upon Israel. Then come five whole chapters deserving of separate treatment in which we read of so many secrets or confidences which our Lord conveys to His chosen, in the words of sublime love which have been such a comfort.

After the third and final quotation of Isaiah’s words in Acts 28 darkness and blindness descended upon Israel, and surely it had not been without warning as Paul had told them in Acts 13. 40 “beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets”. Once again we find that this was followed by mystery or secret.

In the first place Paul calls the whole question of Israel’s blindness a “mystery” or secret (Romans 11.25) and moreover tells his Gentile listeners that he would not have them ignorant of it or as Moffatt renders the verse “to prevent you from being self-conceited, brothers, I would like you to understand this secret: it is a partial insensibility that has come over Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in”.

How wonderful is the plan and purpose of God. As we consider some of its various aspects some of its depths and heights we marvel and exclaim with David “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high; I cannot

attain unto it". Surely something like this must have been Paul's feelings when he exclaimed in Romans 11. 33-34 after explaining something of the hidden purpose of God in blinding Israel, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? or who hath been His counsellor?"

As the curtain comes down on Israel as a nation we pass on to consider another mystery or secret that one which was committed specially, in the first instance to the Apostle Paul. The last two verses of Acts 28 say "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching...and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." He was both preaching and teaching, quite different in themselves and furthermore he was able to do it unhindered. In the past he had been forbidden to preach in Asia (16.6) prevented from visiting the Roman saints (Rom. 1.13) forbidden to speak to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2.16) hindered by Satan (1 Thess. 2.18). But now "he could preach and teach with shackles on his wrist but with liberty in his heart, or as he himself said "I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2.9).

What, then, was Paul teaching at this time, which might have been different from that connected with the Hope of Israel, which he mentions Acts 28. 20. We believe this to be truth which is embodied in the Ephesian and Colossian Epistles. Today we are richly blessed in that we have the whole body of revealed truth enshrined within our Bible. But this was not so in the early days of the Christian Dispensation, and we need to continually travel back in thought to those days to appreciate this fully.

The setting aside of Israel must have been a matter of deep concern to the believers in those early days, for be they Jew or Gentile their hope was bound up with the Hope of Israel. We are told in Heb. 2. 4 that the witness to Israel was with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and we can imagine these things being manifested among the groups of brethren as they met together from time to time. But now gradually, if not suddenly, these things must have become less evident in their midst, as we note for instance that instead of the gift of healing one was advised to take a little wine to help his bodily weakness. They must

have wondered as to the reason for this. If we cannot seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit what should we pray for and how should we conduct our meetings, were probably some of their unanswered questions.

At such a time the revelation of the Mystery or Secret committed to Paul, or the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, must have provided a great uplift although we think much questioning in the minds of the believers. But Paul told them that he prayed that the Father of Glory may give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him and that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened to know what is the hope of His calling and what was the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

This was surely the deepest, the grandest and the most sublime secret of all, a secret never before revealed, not hid in the Old Testament but “hid in God”, not heralded by a quotation from Isaiah 6 but standing on its own.

God was going to make of Jew and Gentile one new man in Christ and Paul tells the believers, possibly in his own hired house but certainly in his Ephesian letter that they had been chosen in Christ, not **from** the foundation of the world, but **before** the foundation of the world. Previously they had been dependent upon Israel for their blessing as being part of the Olive Tree, whether a natural branch or a wild branch grafted in.

We can and do, rejoice in this revelation of a heavenly destiny. Dr Schofield says in a note on Eph. 3. “That the Gentiles were to be saved was no mystery. The mystery “hid in God” was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing “the church which is His (Christ’s) body. The...mystery...was committed to Paul. In his writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk and destiny of the church.”

We began by referring to the visions which various men of God in the O.T. had regarding their destiny etc... The same purpose seems evident in Paul’s words in Eph. 1.18 for the first thing he prays for the saints is that they might know what is the hope of His calling, and when we realize that previous to the revelation of the “dispensation of the mystery” they knew full well what their hope was, we might well ask what this new calling with its hope means. Praise be to God, it means blessings beyond our

dreams, nothing less than being changed into His image and raised up and seated together with Christ in the Heavenlies, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

We are conscious of the fact that we have merely touched the fringe of the Secrets of God, but enough to make us exclaim with David of old, How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them. If I should count them they are more in number than the sand...”

JS



Job 28:18 No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies.

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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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Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Christmas

The hinge of history is on the door of Bethlehem's stable

Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

The story of the virgin birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it, especially the account in the book of Luke, never fails to deliver with the miracles, the presence of angels and the message of hope to all people. At this time Christians today are stewards of that event which happened over 2,000 years ago.

In the giving of gifts in the season of gifts there is the opportunity for believers to examine their reasons for giving for all that we have comes from above. James states every good and perfect gift come from above. (James 1.17)

The subject of gifts cannot be limited to wealth and possessions. Jesus in Luke 16 in the parable of the unjust steward appears to accuse the scribes and Pharisees as unjust stewards. However it was impossible to keep the law so there was a change that it may be not the works of keeping the

Law but that faith would be important.

People of old such as Enoch, Abraham and Sarah give good examples of faithful stewards perhaps the more so because they were imperfect like we are today. Today the consecrated Christians are guided to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4.1-2). Whatever gift we have comes the joy and responsibility to use it as our heavenly Father and Lord Jesus would have us use it.

CHRISTMAS ALPHABET

Angelic hosts have worshipped you
Before the world began
Christ of the crib, the cross, the crown,
Delight of God and man.
Eternal are your attributes
Foretold by bard and sage
God of all gods and Lord of lords,
Heaven's gift to every age.
Into our hearts you seek a place,
Jesus, thou Son of man,
King of all heaven, the Father's joy,
Loved ere the world began.
Majesty, might and meekness all
Now seek to fill our lives.
Open our hearts to know your love,
Perceive your sacrifice.
Quietly come and find your place,
Room in our hearts, your own
Spirit divine, our hearts transform
To make each life a throne.
Under your rule our hearts rejoice,
Vile though we were, now cleansed,
Willingly now we own you Lord,
Beginning and the end.



Pauline Lewis

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.



GIVING AT CHRISTMAS TIME



As Christmas approaches the interest in buying gifts for relatives and friends increases until for some it reaches a panic situation by Christmas Eve. Many Christians are aware that Jesus was probably born in October and not December. Nevertheless we continue to celebrate and give presents and so remember that Jesus came into the world because God gave the greatest gift of all. Lovingly He had provided mankind with a lovely home and in it, all that could make for a happy life. When men and women got their lives into a mess, He did more than look down from Heaven and feel sorry for them. He personally intervened with the most costly of gifts, his only son. In a sense there is nothing which we could give him but he gladly receives the joy and thankfulness and fellowship from those who appreciate his goodness. He also gladly receives the surrendered life and places it in his great plan of salvation. Believers are therefore bound to examine the reasons for all generous action, for what they can give is held in trust as stewards for God.

At this time of year charitable causes benefit a great deal by the popular upsurge of generosity. Children become the centre of a great deal of the interest in the giving of gifts. Can we not approve activity which bears something of the image of a generous God which remains in men and women, boys and girls, even though it has been somewhat tarnished and defaced by selfishness and commercialism? So what is our motive for giving? Jesus once said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20. 35). He also said *“...give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you give will be the measure you get back”* (Luke 6. 38 RSV). There are similar sentiments in the proverb *“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”* In more modern idiom that reads *“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty”* (Prov. 11. 24 NIV). Some might suggest that this is more a matter of getting rather than giving but it is all to do with the quality of love expressed in one of the most well known of texts *“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten son...”* The motive for our giving is plainly love, unselfish concern for others without thought of getting anything back. Love has its own reward, the more we express God’s love in action, the more we find ourselves loved.

This attitude of kindness was enshrined in Israel's law. In Exodus 23. 11 the rich are told to harvest their crops in a manner which would allow the poor to benefit from gleaning. In Deut. 15. 7 Moses exhorts the people of Israel not to be hard hearted or tight-fisted to a poor brother. This spirit is caught up in the words of the wise man when he wrote "*He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD*" (Prov. 19.17 RSV) and later the prophet Jeremiah said 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).

Taking their cue from great father Abraham, the people of Israel were expected to be hospitable to their own people and to strangers alike. Among the records of Israel's history examples of this kind of generosity is seen in the lives of Boaz and the welcome he gave to Ruth; Abigail and the kindness she showed to David and the Shunamite who was hospitable to Elisha. Records are not lacking concerning foreigners who showed the same traits of character. Rahab who entertained and cared for the two Israelites reconnoitring the land and the widow of Zarephath who took in Elijah during the famine were given very honourable mention. God's ancient people were expected to give, not for duty or grudgingly, but with the sense of generosity which God demonstrated when he gave them a lovely land.

In 2 Cor. 8. 9 (NIV) Paul draws attention to "*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*" This is the true spirit of Christmas. He was rich in his heavenly home with his Father, beyond our imagination. He was prepared to sacrifice that blissful environment and to share our life, stricken with poverty because of sin, in order that we might eventually share with him the glories of his home above. More than that, even now we can begin to experience the beauty of that place by living in his presence every day. His provision and protecting love make us rich already. His impoverishment provides for our eternal wealth.

By worldly standards Jesus may have been rich for a short time after the visit of the magi presenting their gifts. What became of that extravagant wealth we have no record. Only we know that for most of his life he appears to have been associated with the poor of the world. Glimpses of generosity in the Gospels are seen in his 'banquet' for more than five thousand men, women and children on a hill side in Galilee. Jesus loving

attitude calls forth the best in others, and the women believers took care of his material wants. Most noteworthy was the generous outpouring of the anointing oil by Mary at Bethany.

It is clear that this same spirit was rapidly developed in the early Christians. The records in Acts 2. 42-47; 4. 32-37; chapters 5 and 6, show that the whole company of believers shared their material possessions just as they shared the things of their faith. No one was left destitute. This principle was particularly important throughout any period of persecution when families could readily be left without a 'bread-winner' and their possessions could be vandalised. Such an attitude transcends human boundaries of class and background. The outstanding example among them was Barnabas of Cyprus who sold his own property and gave the proceeds to the Church. Just how long the system worked in the history of the Church is not clear but the teaching of generosity continued to flourish throughout the Gentile churches. In Ephesus while Timothy was there, widows were being cared for and Paul told him to admonish the rich to be generous and to share with those in need.

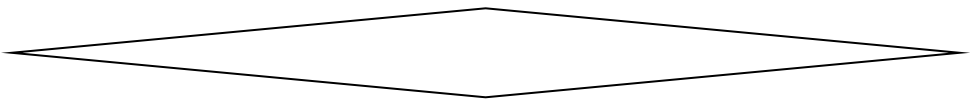
Surprising acts of kindness were shown in Antioch by the new converts among the Gentiles. The prophet Agabus spoke, through the Spirit, of the famine about to "*spread over the entire Roman world*" (Acts 11. 27-30 NIV). Spontaneously, members of the church decided to send gifts to their brethren in Judea. They were poor and would be among the first to feel the pangs of food shortages. Here again the love of brethren surmounted national and racial barriers. It is a surprising gesture because this kind of relief aid was unknown in the ancient world. Perhaps it was not so surprising in the light of the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' and in the fullness of the Spirit which those early churches experienced. Jesus was at work in a very real way among his people. One of the most touching stories of hospitality is found in Paul's visit to Philippi when the rich Lydia humbly begged Paul and Barnabas to stay in her home.

Perhaps the most forceful teachings about generosity are to be found in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians to which reference has already been made. The apostle believed that the churches in Europe should co-operate in sharing their material wealth with the poorer churches in Judea. He wrote to say that the churches in Macedonia not only gave liberally for the benefit of other Christians but first "*gave themselves to the Lord and to us*

by the will of God" (2 Cor. 8. 5 RSV). This is the outworking of Paul's words in Rom. 12. 1 (NIV) when he urged the brotherhood in Rome to offer their "*bodies as living sacrifices*". He wanted the Gentile brethren among whom he had laboured so long and arduously, to excel in this quality of generosity, not by coercion but as a willing offering to the Lord for their brethren. The fruitage of Paul's example and teaching was seen in the gifts that were sent by him and those who journeyed with him, to the church in Jerusalem. When Paul eventually arrived in Judea for the last time (on record) he was brutally treated by those he had come to help. When he stood before the governor Felix to defend his action, he spoke of how he had brought to his "*nation alms and offerings*". (Acts 24. 17 RSV).

Gun and knife violence in city streets, displaced people from areas of conflict and famine in desert wastelands testify to the terrible need of our time. It is a day when the wealth and resources of the Earth continue to be exploited running the risk of ruining our fragile planet. Yet on an international scale rich nations give grudgingly with one hand and grab back even more with the other. How concerned are we with our giving this Christmastide? Will it make the giants of the commercial world richer or will our brethren and neighbours benefit? There is only one way to discover how to give. It is to live in the very presence of God, acting by his spirit. Jesus said. "*Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" (Luke 11. 13 GNB).

DN



ECHOING CHRISTMAS SONGS

What Christ is to us we ought, in our human measure, to be to others. Christmas means love. Christ came to our world to pour divine kindness on weary, needy, perishing human lives. The Christmas spirit in our hearts should send us out on the same errand. There is need everywhere for love's ministry. We should learn the true Christmas lesson of gentle, thoughtful kindness to those we love and to all we meet in life's busy ways.

In Green Pastures
J. R. Miller



GOD'S PRECIOUS JEWELS

Part 3. Stones of fair Colours



Referring to His future spiritual new Jerusalem, the Lord has stated, “Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires” (Isaiah 54: 11). The differing stones of the Breastplate indicate that pleasing variation existing among the members of the little flock. Variations are apparent everywhere in creation. Even the designs noted in snowflakes, when magnified, reveal a marvellous difference one to another, though all are perfect in geometrical arrangement. This lends an unending charm and interest to the universe, and portrays the mind of the Omnipotent illumined with sublime greatness and grandeur. “All Thy works shall praise Thee, O LORD”! (Psalm 145: 10).

The differing stones are due to differing materials and processes of formation. The elect are not all called upon to pass through precisely the same experiences. It is a trial of faith, but those trials vary according to the make-up of the individual. Nevertheless there is a relationship which the apostle likens to the members of a human body (1 Cor. 12). They co-ordinate, and are perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Following the ruby, there were other stones as follows:-

Topaz

There is no reason to think otherwise, but that the Topaz has been correctly named as the second in the Breastplate. The finest oriental gems remind one of the sun. Strabo describes it as transparent and shining with a golden light. Ruskin speaks of it as “symbolic of the sun, like a strong man running his race rejoicing, standing between light and darkness and representing all good work.” Its symbolism is heightened as we learn that the topaz is strongly electrical in its nature, whether created by heat or by friction. This distinguishes it from other stones bearing a similar appearance.

With our attention turned to the sun, we fleetingly remember the sun-worshippers who looked to the object rather than the living and intelligent source of creation. While fully admitting the marvellous potentialities of the burning orb, and realising that, if the earth was suddenly deprived of its influence, everything breathing would cease to exist, yet we view it merely in the light of symbolism—“(Our) God is a

sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa. 84: 11). The intrinsic magnetic powers of the topaz suggest the attraction which God’s precious jewels possess for Himself. Even among the jewel class there are some who more expressly manifest an intense desire to be like Him (1 John 3: 2). In the words of the beautiful hymn they sing fervently and prayerfully—

*Sun of mv soul, my Father dear,
I know no night when Thou art near.
O! may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide Thee from Thy servant’s eyes.*

Carbuncle.

The third stone of the Breastplate was the Carbuncle. This is noted for its deep purplish-red colour mingled with scarlet. The word carbuncle signifies “burning coal,” given on account of its fiery appearance. The Hebrew word *Bareketh* means “flashing,” and is derived from *barak*, “lightning.” Its Greek equivalent is *keranos*, which means “thunder-stone.” It is positively electric by friction, and affects the magnetic needle.

From its general description it brings to mind the fiery judgment of the Lord, which burns against all injustice and unrighteousness: “The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice; hail stones and coals of fire...He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them” (Psalm 18: 13,14).

God is tender, gracious and merciful! His lovingkindness is a precious thing to experience! IF—how much is implied by that little word!—one is pursuing an evil course, then, sooner or later, he will meet with the fiery indignation of the Most High—for “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12: 29).

Our glorified Lord Jesus, the Representative of the Father, is in possession of this same disposition. He is the “Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth...make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire” (Rev. 19: 11,12). The saints of God partake of this same spirit. In evidence, we recall Peter, James and John, whom our Lord called Boanerges, meaning “The sons of thunder.” Under the direction of their Captain they will bring to ashes those things which are in the way of the glorious kingdom of peace. This means the complete overthrow of sin and all unrighteousness.

Emerald.

The fourth stone was the Emerald, the beautiful grass-green which is well known. It was at one time supposed that the colour was due to a mineral oxide, but an authority gives, as his conviction, that it is produced by an organic substance termed *Chlorophyll*. In support of this thought, the stone loses its colour when subjected to heat, while those tinted by mineral oxides remain unaffected. The remarkable thing is that chlorophyll is the life-giving green sap of plants, and for this reason it becomes a striking emblem of eternal life. The emerald is indeed a wonderful symbol, for, unlike the green leaf which fades through time and exposure, it tenaciously holds its life-giving product in possession.

Our Master said, "For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5: 26). Graciously He promises life to all who put their faith in Him. Hence the rainbow surrounding the glorified Redeemer is "in sight like unto an emerald" (Rev. 4: 3). God's precious jewels are promised life-inherent, Divine Nature! Stupendously great will be their reward! (2 Peter 1: 4). For this reason the emerald was placed among the jewels as a symbolism to encourage and stimulate the Lord's own.

It is recorded that there is now at the Vatican an emerald bearing the presumed true likeness of our Lord. We are informed that it was engraved by the order of Pontius Pilate, who presented it to Tiberius Caesar. If this be so, then this jewel becomes a most appropriate emblem of our Lord's present nature of immortality.

The story is told that the Czar of Russia gave his wife on her birthday, November 26th, 1887*, a necklace of forty large emeralds. For nine months his agents had been secretly travelling over the whole continent seeking the most precious of stones. When the Czarina received it she danced around the room with supreme delight. It was indeed a royal present, and a worthy one where love desires to be ever green!

What a day of rejoicing it will be when the King of the Universe will present to His dear Son and Heir, His jewels! That will also be the birthday of birthdays for the "church of the firstborn, which (whose names) are written in heaven" (Heb.12: 23).

Sapphire.

The Sapphire, with its beautiful sky-blue colour, was the fifth stone. The Hebrew *sappir* makes its identity certain, for almost every language has a similar word to describe it. Its hardness is equal to that of a ruby, and nearly approaches that of a diamond. It has always been considered valuable, and was most highly prized by the ancient inhabitants of the East.

The heavenly blue of the sapphire reminds us of God and the unchanging laws which govern the universe. The eternal safety of all things depend upon Divine faithfulness in maintaining those vast and intricate movements. The sapphire, therefore, becomes an emblem of faithfulness: “Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds,” “Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens” (Psalms 36: 5; 89: 2).

For this reason blue has a very prominent place in sacred colours. The high priest had a blue robe underneath his ephod, and the breastplate was fixed by a blue lace (Exodus 28: 28,31). When the sacred furnishings of the tabernacle were moved, they were covered with a cloth of blue to remind the Israelites of their need of faithfully fulfilling the Divine requirements with respect to these (Num. 4: 5-12).

The sky-blue of the sapphire amply illustrates this same truth, “Behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.” Hence, “faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5: 24). The faithfulness of the glorified Christ is beautifully portrayed in Ezekiel 1: 26, “And above the firmament...was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and...the likeness as the appearance of a man upon it.”

The sapphire of the Breastplate indicates the faithfulness of God’s precious jewels in the performance of their vows of sacrifice. It also suggests some who particularly shine in their one desire to be true to God, who is worthy of the first place in all things. Thus “blue meets blue”,—in other words, God’s own faithfulness inspires a similar faithfulness in the souls of His beloved.

FL

THE PASSING OF ENOCH

“Enoch...was not, for God took him.” Gen. 5:24.

A singular Old Testament character is the antediluvian patriarch Enoch—seventh from Adam in natural descent and of whom it was said “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” (Gen. 5: 24 RSV.) To that strange expression the writer to the Hebrews adds his comment “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” (Heb. 11: 5.)

This unusual ending to the brief record of a saintly man’s life has given rise to endless conjecture and speculation; so much so that the question “What really did happen to Enoch?” is by no means an uncommon one.

The usual conclusion favoured by nineteenth century commentators was that Enoch was taken to heaven without dying—a kind of instantaneous passage from the scenes of earth to the presence of God. This has remained a satisfactory answer for many, but the fact that other words of Scripture are contradicted by this conclusion is sufficient justification for an endeavour to attain a deeper and more accurate understanding of these two cryptic texts.

In such an enquiry any suggestion which may be of assistance, no matter from what source it comes, will be of value as an aid to thought.

Beside the two texts quoted above, Enoch is mentioned in only one other place in the Scriptures. Jude (verse 14) quotes him as predicting the coming of the Lord with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment. This reference contributes nothing to our knowledge of the life of the prophet and does not materially assist our enquiry. It does however stamp Enoch as one of the prophets who spoke of the coming of the Day of the Lord and assures us that, like Abraham in later years, he “rejoiced to see my (Christ’s) day:...and was glad.” (John 8: 56.)

The first point of enquiry is as to the precise meaning of the words in Genesis 5: 24. Does the phrase—“Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” really mean that he was taken to heaven without dying as is so often supposed, or does it bear another meaning?

“What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?” asks the Psalmist (Psa. 89: 48). “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;” are the words of Paul (1 Cor. 15: 50) and again “the King of kings, and Lord of lords...dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom **no man hath seen, nor can see.**” (1 Tim. 6: 15-16); whilst our Lord Himself declares “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man.” (John 3: 13.)

Such Scriptures as these should be sufficient to confirm that no man, not even Enoch, can hope to have escaped the hand of Death, even had not the writer to the Hebrews stated so definitely, after including Enoch in his portrait gallery of heroes, that “These all died in faith.” (Heb. 11: 13.) It should be an accepted conclusion therefore that Enoch, when his allotted span was expired, did pass into death and “slept with his fathers.”

The use of that latter expression serves as a clue to this strange word in Gen. 5: 24. Although we must believe that Enoch did eventually sleep with his fathers, there is no record to that effect in Genesis. This is the more strange when it is noticed that in every other case the formula is consistently the same “Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son...and called his name Seth: and the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters: and all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: **and he died.**” (Gen. 5: 3-5.) The same expressions are used for each one of the patriarchs up to Methuselah, **except Enoch.** Why the exception?

Is it not a reasonable conclusion that the time and circumstances of Enoch's death were not known to the men of his day, and therefore the record could not be completed? There is another fact that helps to confirm this thought. The ages of the antediluvian patriarchs ranged between 895 and 969 years; but Enoch again is an exception. The record states that he lived 365 years and God took him. Can it be possible that the ancient historian intended his readers to understand that Enoch lived 365 years among men, becoming famed for his piety, and at that age disappeared unaccountably and was never heard of again? Can it be that God in his inscrutable wisdom took Enoch away from the habitations of men perchance to carry out some work for Him during the remainder of His earthly life, living perhaps as long as his fellow patriarchs and, like Moses, at length ending his life in a solitary place known only to his God?

Let the Scriptures and such other records as are available be examined in this light and a reasonable understanding of the story comes into view.

“Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” The Hebrew here has the significance of “walking to and fro” as a man does with his bosom companion. Thus is depicted the fact that Enoch was a man living in close and habitual communion with God in a day when quite certainly the wickedness of man was increasing on the earth and “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Gen. 6: 5.) Heb. 11: 5 confirms this view by saying **“before** his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Picture then this venerable man surrounded in all probability, by a godly family—for one of his great grandsons was Noah, a man who was “seen righteous” before God (Gen. 7: 1)—attaining what would be considered “middle age” of nearly four hundred years. One day Enoch was not to be found; he “was not” for he had been “translated.” What had happened?

“God took him” says Genesis. The word is **“laqach”** meaning “to be taken away” or “removed” as in Amos 7: 15 “The LORD took me as I followed the flock,” and Josh. 24: 3 “I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood” (river). A more definite word is used by the writer to the Hebrews when he declared that Enoch was “translated.” The two occurrences of this word in this verse are from the Greek **metathesis** and **metatithemi**, meaning to take up an object and put it down somewhere else. These words appear frequently in the New Testament and a clear idea of their usage is gained by noting the following occurrences:

Heb. 12: 27 “signifieth the **removing** of those things that are shaken.”

Acts 7: 16 “And were **carried over** into Sychem.”

Luke 16: 4 “When I am **put out of the** stewardship.”

Acts 19: 26 “Paul hath persuaded and **turned away** much people.”

It is not necessary to insist that the expression “was not” must imply death, or the death condition. It need only indicate that the one referred to is not present or not to be found. A striking example of the usage of this expression occurs in the Babylonian story of the Flood. (It is probable that Genesis 5 was originally written in the same style of writing and perhaps not very much earlier than the Flood story which has survived in its purest form in Genesis and in a much more distorted form in the Babylonian

account). Telling of the time when he sent forth the birds from the Ark, Uta-Napishtim (the Babylonian Noah) says “To and fro went the dove, and returned, for a resting place **was not**...to and fro went the swallow. She too returned, for a resting place **was not**.” In this light the expression need only mean that Enoch was not to be found, and this is exactly what Heb. 11: 5 declares.

It seems then that both the inspired writers intended their readers to understand that Enoch was taken away from amongst men and found himself, in the providence of God, in some other part of the earth. From that day onward, Enoch was never seen or heard of again, and the ancient chronicler who first compiled the history which now appears in Genesis 5—probably in the days immediately after the Flood—was unable to say any more about this venerable character beyond the well-known fact that in the three hundred and sixty-fifth year of his life he “was not—for God took him.” Where He had taken him was not known, and for that reason the length of his earthly life and the time of his death could not be recorded.

Now it is a remarkable fact that the traditions of the Israelites shed a distinct light on the fact of, and reason for, this mysterious disappearance. The apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus declares (44: 16) that “Enoch pleased the Lord, and was translated, being an example of repentance to all generations.” This can only be taken as a reflection of Jewish understanding of the Genesis account, but one is impelled to ask in what way Enoch could be an “example” to “all generations.” Perhaps the answer is to be found in the Hebrews verse, where it is said that in faith was Enoch translated, having already pleased God (Heb. 11: 5.) Now in that chapter Enoch’s faith is placed on the same level as that of Abraham, Moses and others, who at the call of God left their home, kindred and country and went out to a place which God would show them, **not knowing whither (they) went.** (Heb. 11: 8). Perhaps Enoch also went out to a solitary place, away from men, in close communion with God, to do a work for God just as did Abraham and Moses in later days, and maybe that was the secret of his translation.

Many have wondered from what source Jude took his famous quotation when he said (Jude 14) “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his

saints...” and so on; for the quotation is not to be found in the Old Testament. It was more than a hundred years ago that a complete copy of the “Book of Enoch,” in which this passage occurs, was made available in the English language, and although none would now claim that this book was written by Enoch, competent authorities declare that not only Jude but our Lord Himself were quite familiar with it. It is to this book that we are indebted for sufficient light on Judaistic tradition to confirm the suggestion advanced above as to the nature of Enoch’s disappearance.

Although the Book of Enoch was put together in its present state no earlier than one or two centuries before Christ, its nature suggests that certain portions are taken from written records which are considerably older. Apart from a great deal of pseudo-astronomical lore with which we have no immediate concern, the book purports to tell of the conditions prevailing immediately before the Flood—an amplification of the story told briefly in chapter 6 of Genesis. It is evident that various “fragments” of older records, some considerably distorted by their passage through the generations, by copying and re-copying, translation and retranslation, have been put together in a very clumsy and disjointed fashion with much material of later composition, but a careful study of these “fragments” does reveal one very interesting fact.

That fact is that the prevailing theme of the book was the taking of Enoch away from the world of men and his establishment in some part of the world where he could not be approached except by one or two favoured ones who were aware of the secret. The story tells of both Noah and Methuselah visiting Enoch thus, and of the family of Methuselah coming to him to hear his words. Perhaps the most eloquent passage in this connection is 1 Enoch 12: 1-2, which says “before these things Enoch was hidden, and no one of the children of men knew where he was hidden, and where he abode, and what had become of him. And his activities had to do with the Watchers, and his days were with the holy ones.” Again chap. 70, verse 1 declares “It came to pass after this that his name during his lifetime was raised aloft to the Son of Man and to the Lord of Spirits from amongst those who dwell on the earth. And he was raised aloft on the chariots of the spirit and his name vanished (from) among them.”

The similarity of this to the story of Elijah is very striking, and this likeness is heightened by words which are accredited to Enoch himself (1

Enoch 39: 3) “And in those days a whirlwind carried me off from the earth, and set me down at the end of the heavens.” Elijah too was separated from Elisha by a chariot of fire and carried up by a whirlwind into the heavens (2 Kings 2: 11) and the translation of Enoch is depicted here as having occurred in very similar fashion. The sons of the prophets besought Elisha that they might go and search the mountains, believing that the “wind of the Lord” (Heb. **ruach**, translated “wind” or “spirit” as required by the context, and incorrectly rendered “spirit” in this instance in the A.V.) might have dropped Elijah somewhere within reach (2 Kings 2: 16). They searched, and found him not. So with Enoch; it seems the Israelites believed that he had been removed to some inaccessible part of the earth and throughout the Book of Enoch he is described as continuing in a closer and more direct communion with God and the spiritual powers of heaven than man had enjoyed since the Fall in Eden. They believed that he bore God’s messages to the “fallen angels” of whom both Jude and Peter speak in the New Testament (Jude 6, 2 Peter 2: 4), warned Methuselah and Noah of the coming flood and declared that the judgment of God would come upon the ungodly; but as far as mankind generally were concerned, they knew not where he was and they never saw him again. Incidentally the Book of Enoch depicts the events of Genesis 6: 1 as first taking place in the time of Jared, the father of Enoch.

There is a hint in Heb. 11: 5 that some search for Enoch was made after his translation, for the verse declares that he was “translated that he should not see death, **and was not found**,” as though men searched for him and their efforts were fruitless.

The most difficult part of this verse is the expression “that he should not see death.” Once only is the same expression used elsewhere in the Scriptures, and that is in the well known saying of our Lord “if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (John 8: 51). It should not be thought that this promise implied the escape of the physical human frame from the inevitable end which comes to all men when life’s allotted span is past. Our Lord referred to a far deeper truth, and a far more enduring life than that which men today are pleased to call “life.” Those who are the faithful of Christ, who have been “born again”, and have a life within them which is from above and not of this “corruptible seed” (1 Pet. 1: 23) shall truly “never see death” even although their “earthly house of this tabernacle” (2. Cor. 5: 1) be dissolved. In like manner the ancient worthies of old

who are said in Heb. 11: 39 to have obtained a good report through their faith have not failed of their reward and it can truly be said of them that having manifested their loyalty and allegiance to God by their faith there is a city which God hath prepared for them. (Heb. 11: 16). They too, shall not “see death.” Enoch was one of these; and his faith, exercised as was that of Abraham, Moses and Daniel, is an assurance that he inherits the promise which God has prepared for him and so does not “see death;” but just as surely as Abraham and Moses and Christian believers throughout the centuries, finishing their course with joy, have gone down into the grave, so, in some lonely place far from his fellow-men. Enoch yielded up his breath to the One Who gave it. If it be assumed that Enoch lived to the average age of his fellow patriarchs, he could have been alive within half a century of the Flood. In this event he might well have been used of God to communicate those messages to Methuselah and to Noah, which the Book of Enoch declares he did in fact communicate. In such case one can well visualise this saintly old man in his quiet retreat spending his time in meditation on the things of God, perhaps seeing in ever clearer vision the trend of events in the world of sin and death, and—who knows—being the one who first discerned that impending fate which hovered over the antediluvian world. It may well have been that he perceived the natural signs of the impending catastrophe many years before it happened—perhaps with knowledge born of long observation of the heavens, undisturbed by other distraction, realising something of the mighty changes which were at work in the earth and which at length culminated in the breaking of the great waters of the abyss and the opening of the floodgates of heaven (Gen. 7: 11 margin). Some dim memory of this may be the reason why those long passages about the stars, winds and forces of Nature in the Book of Enoch are accredited to this mystic personage. It seems then that he lived as a righteous man in a world fast giving itself over to every form of evil, that he prophesied to it concerning coming retribution, and that in the heyday of life he was removed from his place among men and until the day of his death lived in his peaceful retreat serving and living in “quiet fellowship with God.”

AOH

Christmas

The hinge of history is on the door of Bethlehem's stable

Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook

IN THE BELL TOWER

A visitor to Amsterdam, wishing to hear the wonderful music of the chimes of St. Nicholas, went up into the tower of the church to hear it. There he found a man with wooden gloves on his hands pounding on a keyboard. All he could hear was the clanging of keys when struck by the wooden gloves, and the harsh, deafening noise of the bells close over his head. He wondered why the people talked of the marvellous chimes of St. Nicholas. To his ear there was no music in them, nothing but terrible clatter and clanging. Yet all the while there floated out over and beyond the city the most entrancing music. Men in the fields paused in their work to listen, and were made glad. People in their homes and travellers on the highways were thrilled by the beautiful bell tones which fell from the tower.

There are many lives which, to those that dwell close beside them, seem to make no music; they pour out their strength in hard toil; they are shut up in narrow spheres; they dwell amid the noise and clatter of common tasks; they think themselves that they are of no use, that no blessing goes out from their life; they never dream that sweet music is made anywhere in the world by their noisy hammering. But out over the world, where the influence goes from their work and character, lives are blessed, and weary ones hear, with gladness, sweet comforting music.

*A.C. Frey Collection
Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook*

A pattern for bells

1	2	2	4	4	5	5	3	3	1	1
2	1	4	2	5	4	3	5	1	3	2
3	4	1	5	2	3	4	1	5	2	3
4	3	5	1	3	2	1	4	2	5	4
5	5	3	3	1	1	2	2	4	4	5

SWEET CHRISTMAS BELLS

WHILE shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

Sweet chiming Christmas bells (x2)

*They cheer us in our heav'nward way, Sweet chiming
bells (x2)*



“Fear not,” said he (for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind),
“Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you, and all mankind.

“To you, in David’s town, this day
Is born of David’s line
A Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord;
And this shall be the sign:



“The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid.”

Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, and thus
Addressed their joyful song:



“All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
Begin, and never cease!”

This is a variation on the carol ‘While shepherds watched their flocks by night’, which was originally published by poet Laureate Nahum Tate (1652-1715) in 1700 A.D. but with an added chorus.

Luke 2:8-20 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel 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 in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Isaiah 9:6-7 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Philippians 2:8-11 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Romans 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.

SOMETHING BETTER FOR US

Hebrews 11:40

“And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect”. (Hebrews 11:39-40 NASB all texts from this version unless noted otherwise)

Hebrews 11 is often referred to as the faith chapter of the Bible. The writer to the Hebrew reader sets out the case for faith rather than the works-based religion that the Jews were so familiar with.

Man’s experience since creation.

God foreknew that mankind would have to experience many things, suffering the effects of disobedience to their Creator. Even those who God had not dealt with individually or as a nation were without excuse. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:18-20)

Adam and Eve had direct access to God and yet Eve failed the test by allowing Satan to deceive her. Adam was not deceived as recorded in 1 Timothy 2:14 “And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” However both were sentenced to death and driven from the Garden.

God allowed the angels to rule over mankind. Again because of the influence of Satan this only led to the increase in wickedness. Only Noah and his family were saved.

In Genesis 11 there is the account of the tower of Babel. God said “Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” (Genesis 11:7) Mankind needed another lesson.

God called Abram to leave Haran a place of idol worship saying “Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;” (Genesis 12:1-2) Abraham’s faith in God was tested until he proved his faithfulness to God.

God then made a strange statement to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.” (Genesis 15:13)

Again God had a purpose, He was giving Abraham’s descendants time to learn that being under another nation’s control resulted in them being slaves to a foreign master therefore preparing them for nationhood.

After the experience in Egypt God gave the children of Israel the Law and the Priesthood, the sacrifices and the worship service to prepare them for the promised land. Total obedience to the law could have brought everlasting life, but imperfect man could not keep the law. Gal. 3:19 (Diaglott) asks the question “Why then the Law?” And then follows with the answer “It was appointed on account of transgressions”. It was a temporary measure “till the seed should come to whom the promise related” that is Jesus Christ.

After 400 years under a theocracy, the Israelites demanded that they be allowed to be ruled over by a king and they said to Samuel, “Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” (1 Samuel 8:5) Samuel was displeased but “The LORD said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.’” (1 Samuel 8:7) God warned them that they would pay a high price for being like the other nations with taxation, the use of their men as soldiers or servants, claiming their land, their produce and so on, but they still wanted an earthly King.

Because of their disobedience and especially that of their kings, they were then placed under Gentile rule from 606 B.C. under the Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks and then the Romans. Surely the Jews should have been ready for the coming of the Messiah. All their prophets had

proclaimed that the Messiah would come and they looked forward to that day. The devout Jews wondered at the words of Daniel “So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.” (Daniel 9:25) As a result they were in a state of expectation of the coming of the Messiah, even wondering if John the Baptist was the one.

Sadly, they were not ready for the Messiah that came. A carpenter’s son from Nazareth was not what they had expected. They were expecting a strong king who would throw off the Roman Yoke and restore the Kingdom of Israel with the glory of the times of David and Solomon. Even his Apostles after his resurrection misunderstood the purpose of his first advent “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) They had missed all the information recorded about the Messiah’s first advent in Isaiah 53.

The Religious leaders of the Jewish Nation rejected Jesus and he was crucified as had been prophesied. With the temple veil torn from top to bottom the need for the law and the sacrifices had ended.

Paul had pointed out the weakness of the law and the sacrifices. “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near...But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year”. (Hebrews 10:1,3) Their attempt to keep the law had not earned everlasting life.

Many Jews from the time of Moses and the law did not live by faith but rather by the works of the law. By Christ’s First Advent this had even been replaced with their traditions. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Scribes saying “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites in these words: ‘This people pays me lip-service, but their heart is far from me: their worship of me is in vain, for they teach as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You neglect the commandment of God, in order to maintain the **tradition of men.**” (Mark 7:6-8 NEB)

Paul shows that the faith that the Christian needs is not something new, something exclusive to them, but was from the very beginning of the hu-

man race. “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” (Hebrews 11:3)

People of faith

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the faith of Abel whose offering was his best and had God’s approval. Paul also stated that “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”. (Hebrews 11:6 NASB) Faith must be exercised as James stated “faith without works is useless” and that “faith without works is dead”.

Paul uses Noah as an example of faith “By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” (Hebrews 11:7) Here is a great example of faith and works. Noah had faith that what God had stated would come to pass even though it had never rained nor had he seen or possibly understood what a flood would be like. God had created a way for his salvation but it required him to build the ark according to his (God’s) instructions.

The writer to the Hebrews continues to speak about other heroes of faith. Abraham had faith in the promises of God. Abram asked God to accept Eliezer as his rightful heir because he had no children. God promised that there would be an heir from his own body. “Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6) Paul goes on to explain “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land.” (Heb. 11.9)

Women of faith

Abraham’s wife is also mentioned (Hebrews 11:11) “By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised”. Paul also mentions another faithful woman, Rahab, a Gentile from Jericho. Rahab said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.” (Joshua 2:9)

These all died in faith having not received the promises but having perceived them in the future and realizing they were temporary residents in the land they lived in their time. Not looking to return to their place of birth or some previous land otherwise it would have been a straightforward matter to return to that place instead they looked for a better place a heavenly country. "Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them", (Hebrews 11:16) which is the New Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation 3:12.

Paul speaks of the faith that Moses had in God, a faith fostered by his parents. Although Moses had all the trappings of wealth he chose "rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward." (Hebrews 11:25-26).

Paul states that although those of faith were tortured, they refused to recant their faith preferring death so that they might receive the promises of God. He stated that "others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." (Hebrews 11:36-38)

Paul then makes the statement that "all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised" (Hebrews 11:39). Abraham gained approval through his faith because he had "respect to the promise of God,...did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore, it was also credited to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:20-22)

Paul explained that Abraham was not actually righteous because "there is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10) but because of his faith it was credited or counted as such. Paul then states "Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead," (Romans 4:23-24) Righteousness now is only

through having faith in Christ. In fact Jesus gave his life so that the Christian might be seen as justified in God's eyes.

The question is why could they not be made perfect?

“And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:39-40) They had gained approval through their faith and it had been credited for righteousness and yet they had not gained the promises.

The problem was that they were born in the wrong dispensation (period of time) and so the opportunity to partake in the better thing God has provided in this Christian era and participate in the Kingdom of Heaven was not available to them.

Matthew 3:1-2 says “Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” John was preaching to those Jews that would listen that there was about to be a change, an opportunity to run for the High Calling. After John was thrown into prison we read “From that time Jesus began to preach. ‘Repent,’ He said, “for the Kingdom of the Heavens is now close at hand.” (Matthew 4:17 Weymouth)

So are those now of the household of faith more deserving of this offer than the faith heroes of old? No, but Jesus states “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:11) When John the Baptist was executed Jesus had not finished his earthly ministry, nor paid the price for Adam's sin. For the way to be opened, Jesus had to die on the cross, be buried, raised on the third day, ascend into heaven and place the merit of his sacrifice on the mercy seat, and have it accepted by Jehovah before the opportunity to partake in the Heavenly calling could take place.

Just before Jesus told the disciples that he was the way he reassured them “In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2-3)

The need for Christ to be glorified before the way could be opened is shown in the following verses:

1. (By) this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:39)
2. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. (Hebrews 10:19-20)
3. and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph. 2:6)

Was God unfair to those people of faith?

The answer in human terms would be yes. However when looking at it from God's perspective it can be seen that He had the right as the omnipotent supreme creator of the human race and it is His prerogative.

Isaiah states "But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand." (Isa. 64:8) Paul expands this reminding the reader "O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Romans 9:20-21)

The promise made to Abraham and his descendants was an earthly promise. "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:7-8) Psalm 45:16 adds "You shall make them princes in all the earth."

God has a plan and a timetable. From before the creation the Heavenly Father knew what mankind would do. 1 Peter 1:19-20 says "but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world..." God foreknew that man would sin and need a Redeemer. God foreknew the experi-

ences that mankind would need before he would, willingly of a freewill, submit to God. Once Christ had been raised God could have instituted the Millennial Age, but his plan included selecting a bride for His son who would share the work with him. The better resurrection for the Church of this Christian era is a spiritual resurrection which second death has no power over.

Satan knew of this plan and has tried to thwart it by creating a false Church, one that worshipped Mary, through the mass continually crucified Christ, it introduced the new doctrines not taught by those who lived while Jesus was in the flesh and setup the false Kingdom on earth. Yet during all this time there were those faithful that did not worship the image of the beast. When the Church is complete then the kings and religions of this world will be destroyed.

Resurrection of the righteous

In the resurrection of the faithful men of old that Paul mentions in Hebrews, he seems to indicate in his statement before Felix “do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” (Acts 24:14-15) Certainly these men of old were considered righteous by God and so will be raised perfect on earth to help administer first to the Jewish Nation and then to the world.

These righteous ones will help God’s grand purpose which “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4). God does not force all of mankind to accept his rule and authority in the millennial reign to come so they will be a great help.

RC

AMEN, AMEN

I cannot say,
 Beneath the pressure of life’s cares today,
 I joy in these;
 But I can say
 That I would rather walk this rugged way,
 If Him it please.

PROMISES SHOWN IN GEOGRAPHY OF ISRAEL

The blessings awaiting mankind in God's kingdom are pictured for us in yet another unusual way. The Jordan River together with its lakes were carved out of the promised land of Israel by God in a peculiar way that illustrates the death and resurrection of mankind.

The Jordan is the most unique river in all the world in that it is almost entirely beneath sea level. Its winding crooked path is eventually swallowed up by the Dead Sea—the lowest and deadest spot on the face of the earth—a sea from which there is no outlet.

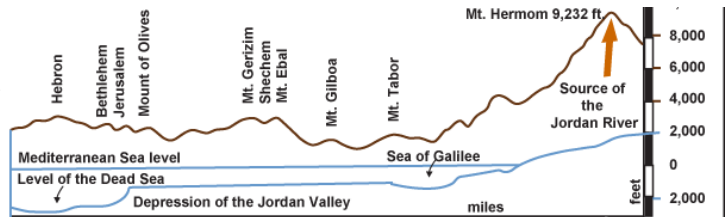
The source of water for the beginning of the River Jordan is the majestic Mount Hermon. Its name means “prominent;” a fitting name, since it is the highest spot in Israel—silently keeping watch over all the land of Israel from its northern border. Mount Hermon pictures God; for He is above all, omnipotent...the source of all creation and life. The fact that Mt. Hermon is a scriptural symbol of God is shown in Psalm 133. There it speaks of the holy spirit of God as “*the dew of Hermon that descends upon Zion from God.*”

The melting snows and springs of Mt. Hermon form four small streams—Hasbani, Leddan, Baniyas and Bareighit. When they unite, they become a very tranquil and beautiful sight—the beginning of the River Jordan. The name “Jordan” is significant. It means “descender”—describing its downward course as it descends from Mt. Hermon to 1300 feet below Sea Level, at the Dead Sea. In addition we will see how the name descender aptly describes mankind's sinful downward descent that ends in death, pictured by the Dead Sea. As the River starts its path, we find it forms its first lake, called Lake Huleh, at Sea Level. The lake now for the most part has been drained. Only small fish pond hatcheries remain, the water being used to irrigate a very productive valley.

In Old Testament times Lake Huleh was called Merom, meaning elevated. How well this pictures Adam. He was elevated by being given dominion over all things on earth. He was created perfect—

pictured by Sea Level.

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After leaving Lake Huleh, the Jordan plunges rapidly below Sea Level—picturing the fact that when Adam fell man started his downward course of sin towards death. Its rapid downward course from Huleh is stopped briefly at the Sea of Galilee. The waters of Jordan enter Galilee very muddy, but they are clear and clean when they exit Galilee.

As Galilee slowed the descent of Jordan, so we find the great Flood of Noah slowed man's downward course. By destroying the violent condition of society and removing the influence of the angelic "giants" (Genesis 6) it had a purifying effect upon the human race. But even this purification was temporary. Soon the human race was swiftly degenerating again. This is clearly pictured by the fact that as the Jordan leaves Galilee, it again rapidly plunges downward. It follows a crooked and winding course for 65 miles until it ends in the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea is a sea with no outlet. It is the lowest spot on the earth—1300 feet below Sea Level—you can't go any lower on earth! The Dead Sea pictures Adamic death: the death into which all mankind are descending.

It is the only sea on earth that is completely dead. No living substance—fish, animal, or vegetation—can survive its 25% salt content: 5 times more salt than the oceans. Thus man traveling the crooked path of sin and depravity cannot survive, but ends up in death—pictured by the Dead Sea.

The Jordan River pours 6 million tons of water into the Dead Sea daily; yet it does not overflow, even though there is no outlet. How well this depicts the tomb of death into which millions flow...no one escapes the grim reaper death.

It was God who carved out this oddity of nature. But how thankful we are the picture doesn't end with all mankind just going into death and remaining there. There's a silver lining to our story! God promises us in Ezekiel 47 that the Dead Sea will be brought back to life—a picture of man receiving life again through the resurrection taught by Jesus.

Briefly, Ezekiel 47 prophesied of a river of water of life that will come out of the "temple" (Temple here being a picture of the Heavenly seed, Jesus and His Church; John 2:20,21; 1 Cor. 3:16,17; Rev. 3:12). This river would go out of the East gate, then flow to the Jordan and the Dead Sea.

Everything the river touched would receive life, and the Dead Sea would come alive as even its bitter waters are sweetened. “...*at last it will reach that sea whose waters are foul, and they will be sweetened. When any one of the living creatures that swarm upon the earth comes where the torrent flows, it shall draw life from it. The fish shall be innumerable.*” (Ezekiel 47: 8,9 NEB)

Yes, the waters that were once foul, shall be sweetened. There shall be abundance of life to all mankind. “*The prison house of death shall be opened.*”...“*He will swallow up death in victory.*”...“*The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*”... “*Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*” (Isaiah 42:7; 25:8; 26:9; Rev. 22:17)

But now notice Ezekiel. 47 verse 11: not all waters will be healed. “*But the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.*”

Marshes refer to stagnant waters, and would so aptly apply to those few of mankind who after being resurrected from the dead will consistently refuse to make any progress toward perfection, even after every possible assistance is given to them by Jesus and the Church. (Acts 3:19-23)

So this Bible picture in Ezekiel shows us that the vast majority of mankind, after being resurrected, will gradually have their characters developed—uplifted—until bit by bit they reach perfection...they will be healed. But those who will not respond to the influences of God’s kingdom will be “given over to salt” again, picturing second death—total extinction—a death from which there will be no resurrection.

When the last of mankind reaches perfection, God’s promise through Isaiah will be fulfilled: “*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth*”—notice the EARTH; the earthly “seed of Abraham”—“shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9)

This is the great cause for which Jesus came...that through the ransom sacrifice of His life, man could be brought back into harmony with their Creator...to enjoy the blessings God originally intended for every man, woman and child who has ever lived.

For This Cause

DIVINE SECRETS—MORE

Written in the last issue the article, entitled ‘Divine Secrets’ the Greek word used for ‘secret’ is ‘musterion’ (Strong’s Greek word 3466) which is familiar to many as the word translated ‘mystery’. It occurs 26 times in the A.V. of the N.T. What a shame it is that this word was so translated for the very word ‘mystery’ seems to keep a door shut instead of opening it wide for investigation. The sound of ‘musterion’ does imply something mysterious yet it is a ‘secret’ which can be understood by those given the key to unlock the door. It is in this sense that the Greeks used the word and that Christians today can use it too.

This article will continue to look at some of the other scripture references to mysteries, 23 or more. The other article considered the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven or God mentioned by our Lord Jesus who first used the word mystery when speaking about the parable of the sower in Matt. 13 as well as in Luke 8 and Mark 4. Therefore no more mention of those is made here.

The Mystery of Christ and the Church

Paul describes it as a ‘great mystery’ that is Christ and the Church (Eph.5 32). Paul likens it to a husband and wife becoming one body or one flesh (Eph. 5.31) and also to a body having many members with one head, our Lord Jesus and one body, the church. Previous to that there was no plainly stated reference to the Messiah needing a special group who would also come by a covenant of sacrifice to assist like any queen consort would in the role of her husband The King. But that which was hidden was now clearly written down. It was to the brethren living in Colosse, now modern day Turkey, that Paul wrote of “*the mystery which hath been hid..., but now is manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery...which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory*”. Col. 1. 26-27. This would be an honourable group. It opened the door to go up higher, much like the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 14.7-11. Previously it had not been known for someone to be elevated to a higher plane. Till our Lord Jesus came and gave up his spirit nature and came down a plane to be a human being, albeit perfect, before dying and being resurrected with a new type of body without the need for blood to be pumping round it. More than that he was exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2.33) and Paul says as much to the brethren in Philippi, that he

(Jesus) was supremely exalted and given a name above every name. (Phil. 2.9)

During this Gospel age or Christian era the preparation and selection of the body of Christ, who have a heavenly hope, has been going on. But this may not necessarily be the mystery of the 'hope of glory'. Could it be that the 'hope of glory' is simply the glorious work of the millennial reign helping the world of mankind up the highway of holiness?

The mystery of Jew and Gentile making one man in Christ

For hundreds of years God only dealt with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Any others were foreigners and strangers from the commonwealth of God. Jacob especially as he had his name changed to 'Israel' so sometimes he is referred to in Genesis as Jacob and sometimes Israel. The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, from the house of David. Jesus the Messiah when he did come came only to the lost house of Israel. (Matt. 15.24) Nevertheless even he had special time with the Samaritan woman at the well and the Roman centurion whose servant he healed.

But then after Pentecost a certain Jew by the name of Saul hears a voice and sees a blinding light on the road to Damascus. In Damascus itself there was a disciple named Ananias and he is told that "he (Saul) was to carry the name of Jesus to the Gentiles".

Another day the apostle Peter fell into a trance and saw a vessel full of unclean animals that it was forbidden to eat under the Mosaic Law but was now instructed to eat. Change was the word of the day! God had moved to the next phase of His plan. Also in Acts 10 Cornelius a Roman Centurion had had a vision to send for a man called Simon Peter residing in Joppa. After Peter's trance Cornelius' men came to call for Peter. So Peter knew to go with them and it seems Cornelius' household were baptized having the Holy Spirit come upon them even though they were Gentiles.

So it comes now as no surprise that Paul said in the mystery of Christ that the Gentiles, should be fellow-heirs and be part of the body of Christ. (Eph.3.6) Paul once again told this to the brethren at Colosse that "*God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among*

the Gentiles” Col. 1. 27.

The Mystery of Opposition

There are three in this category: 2 Thess. 2.7, Rev. 17. 5 and Rev. 17. 7. This appears to be the work of Satan, the self-appointed leader of the opposition, in opposition to God and now still in opposition to God’s Plan. The first scripture says “the mystery of iniquity doth already work...” after saying that there would be a falling away and the ‘man of sin’ would be revealed. This one would exalt himself above all that is called God as he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself as God.

H. Grattan Guinness in his book ‘Romanism and the Reformation’ states one of the 12 new articles added to the Nicene creed that the Head of the Roman Church was “to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures”. Article 10 says “Images of Christ and of the mother of God ever virgin, and also of the other saints, are to be retained, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them”. These two articles amongst others not mentioned show at that time that man put himself in place of God and His Son. This was to be expected if 1 Tim. 4.1 is applied to this as a departure from the faith. Furthermore it contradicts the scripture that Christ is the head of the Church (1 Cor. 11.3).

Revelation 17 writes of the “Mystery, Babylon the Great” and “the mystery of the woman”. By the time John was writing Babylon had long ceased to be a great nation. Verse 6 of this chapter draws attention that this threat would have “*the blood of the saints*” on their hands. The Roman empire of the First Century certainly persecuted the early church and several notable Christians were executed. During the period of the reformation the Roman church killed many Christians that taught in opposition to that church and its doctrines and traditions.

The mystery of the 7 Stars and the 7 Golden Candlesticks

This comes from Rev.1.19-20 where there are the messages to the 7 churches beginning with Ephesus and ending in the 7th Laodicea. What those verses say is that the 7 stars are the angels or messengers of the 7 churches and the 7 candlesticks are the 7 churches. Looking at a map shows that the 7 churches were actual churches in a small geographical area where Paul served but also not far from where John wrote Revelation, on a small island overlooking the south-eastern part of what is now

modern day Turkey formerly people would have called it Asia Minor. There seems no literal mention of seven different messengers, such as Paul or John, whether human or angelic in form. This creates some uncertainty and opens the door to examine what it can be interpreted to mean.

Could the mystery be the challenges that would come upon the Gospel Age Christians? Or that even individual Christians would have from the time of giving their lives to the Lord? Those in the early days of the church endured the persecution of the Roman Caesars like Nero till the days of Constantine, when Arius stood up against the trinity. Then during the Dark ages when the Roman Church was at its most severe early reformers like Wycliffe and later ones like Luther, Tyndale and Knox stood up against that tyrannical body of men. Since then there have been other messengers.

Therefore a good explanation could be that the seven churches represent seven periods of time during the Christian era and the seven messengers are seven individual men or groups of men who have served in those time periods. The likes of John Wycliffe, Martin Luther and Charles Russell must be of the most likely candidates at different times to be such messengers. It would then follow that the seventh church of Laodicea relates to the end of this Christian era. Accordingly the warning to that seventh church, of being lukewarm would apply now. So the message is now to be hot or cold.

The mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3.9,16)

The context of this chapter is overseers or elders (*episkopon*), deacons, women (in the church) their qualifications and conduct. How they ought to behave in a serious, sober manner and to be hospitable and trust-worthy at home and in the church avoiding the vices of this world.

Or could it be that Jesus came to earth from God, was seen and believed in by many and was taken to glory, to wit heaven? The second half of 1 Tim. 3.16 (Diaglott) says "*He who was manifested in Flesh, was justified in Spirit, was seen by Messengers, was proclaimed among Nations, was believed on in the World, was taken up in Glory*". But the answer may lie in the words of Jesus in John 14 when he said 'if you have seen me you have seen the Father', Jesus being godlike.

All these could be covered by belief in the existence of God, that salvation comes by Christ Jesus who was sent by God, that Christ has body members by the preaching of the good news to all nations, that same Jesus returned to his father and to heaven ‘in glory’ as an immortal being.

The Mystery ‘we shall be changed’

It is called a mystery. How much of a mystery is it? The scriptures record that Jesus died on the cross, then on the third day after his death rose from the dead as a spirit being. This had not happened before. This has been the hope for the individual Christians ever since.

How the resurrection of the last members of the Church happens is a secret and what procedure is used to produce a spirit being with the same memories that the person had stored while in this mortal body is also a secret. But they *“shall all be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye...and the dead shall be raised incorruptible...and this mortal must put on immortality”*. 1 Cor. 15.51-53

Israel

Back on the subject of Israel there is another mystery that “blindness...has come over Israel until the full number of the Gentiles come in” as was stated in last issue’s article. That day seems close at hand with Israel being back as a nation since Britain found it (Palestine) too difficult to govern and gave up. 1948 saw the nation established and then in 1967 Jerusalem was captured in a war it appeared they had little chance of winning. Luke supplies a similar prophecy that ‘Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled’. (Luke 21. 24) Therefore blindness for Israel will come to an end.

Stewards of the mysteries of God

Such as the mysteries are, 1 Cor. 4. 1-2 tells “of us , as...stewards of the mysteries of God”. The word steward comes from the Greek word 3623 in Strong’s concordance ‘*oikonmou*’ giving the idea of a manager, overseer in a capacity extending to a fiscal agent, chamberlain, governor, relating to the gospel a preacher. This comes following the chapter where people were talking of being of Paul or of Apollos. Individual Christians in this era are responsible to be faithful, to keep the faith and show it out by faithfully doing those small things the Father has given them to do.

Love

The word ‘mysteries’ is in the 13th Chapter of 1 Corinthians. It gives good advice to those who have had all mysteries made manifest to them. It is that without love such knowledge is as nothing. What a good reminder this is that with all this technical understanding without love it is wasted.

Conclusion

All in all it can be said that there are a number of related mysteries or secrets in the New Testament of things which were unknown or unclear in the Old Testament that Jesus began to reveal, telling us that at this time they would not be revealed to all, that Jesus would require a bride and that this group would be made up of Jews and Gentiles. Then at last this bride she will be upgraded from having merely fleshly body to spiritual one as long as she is a good steward and loves God and her neighbours. After that time all mysteries and secrets will have been fully revealed to all from the least to the greatest.



ISAIAH 30:15

“In quietness and confidence shall be your strength”

Casting our care on Him

Until, at length

The secret of His purpose

we shall know

Then all the past will

shine with heavenly glow

Hushed will be every question

Why? or How? and we

In humble gratitude will bow

So glad we trusted when

the light was dim

Thankful our faith was strong

TO FOLLOW HIM

PJ

**BIBLE STUDENTS SEMINAR DAY
SATURDAY 28 JANUARY 2017**

Crick Village Hall, Bucknills Lane, Crick, Near Rugby,
Northamptonshire, NN6 7SX
11 a.m.—4.30 p.m.
All welcome

For a programme, please email nick.charcharos@btinternet.com
Or by post 12 Stanley Gardens, Tring, HP23 4BS

Saturday 10 September

A blest time was had by all at the recent Bible Students Seminar Day at Crick Village Hall. There was a talk by Br. Richard Tazzyman on Romans 9 relating to Esau and Jacob in the morning, followed by a discussion on Rom. 12. 9-16 with 2 further discussions on the third and fourth commandments in the afternoon. The day was concluded by a singing session.

**BIBLE STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE
WEDNESDAY 16 AUGUST—SUNDAY 20 AUGUST 2017**

Thanks to the anonymous donor

HIGH FLIGHT

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of; wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sun-lit silence. Hovering there
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air;
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
Where never lark nor even eagle flew;
And while, with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

John Gillespie Magee

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