



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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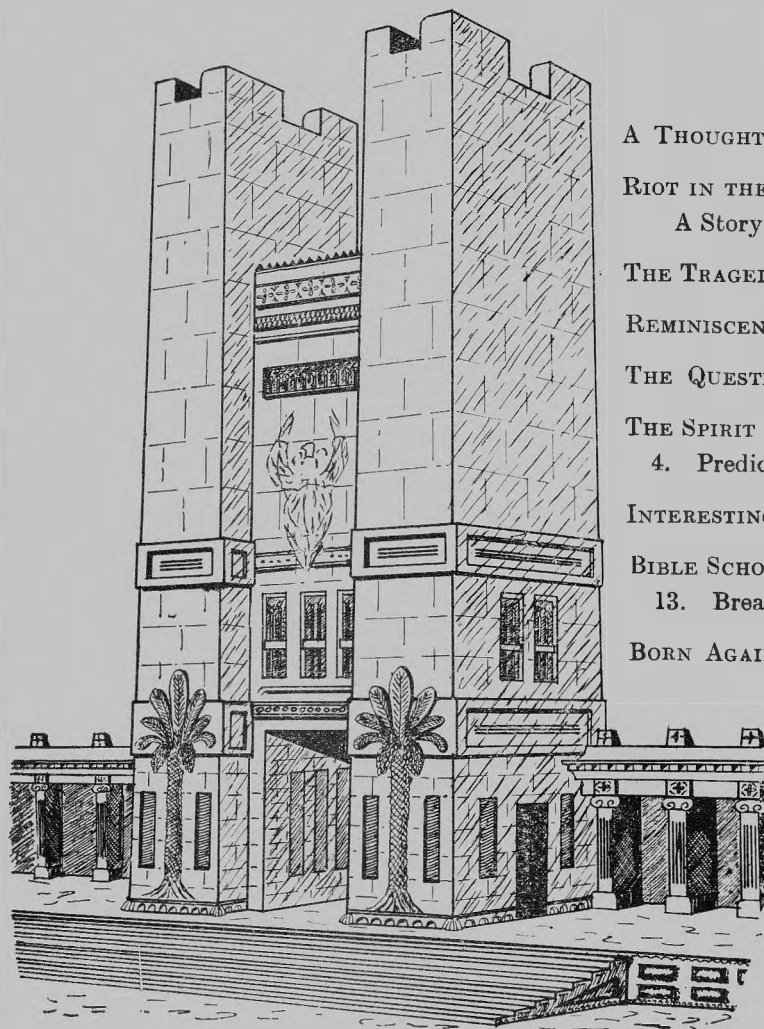
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## A Thought for the Month

*"Thou crownest the year with thy bounty; the tracks of thy chariot drip with fatness"* (Psa. 65. 11 RSV).

The supreme optimism of the Psalmist would find scant endorsement in the world to-day. With incipient war raging in half-a-dozen countries, an upsurge of violence in Africa, the brooding menace of China with her increasingly tense population problem, and above all the continuing threat of the nuclear bomb, fear rather than confidence has become the keynote of daily life. The Psalmist goes into rhapsodies over the abundance of the crops, the wealth of the pasture-lands, the joy of harvest, but the world to-day is facing the grim spectres of hunger and starvation for the greater part of its inhabitants. And one might say, hastily, what is God doing to allow it?

That hasty questioner forgets, or perhaps has never known, that similar causes produced similar effects in ancient as in modern times. During the fourteen centuries that the Psalmist's people were bound to God by a special Covenant it was laid down that material prosperity would be theirs while they observed the terms of the Covenant and adversity when they departed from it. Their national history is evidence for the reality of that arrangement. If David was able to sing of prosperity and peace, as he does in the 65th Psalm, it was because at the time his people were measurably guiding their lives by the principles of the Covenant, of Divine Law. And if the world to-day suffers scarcity and insecurity it is because men in the mass have departed from Divine Law. There is no other and no further explanation needed. God has done His part in providing this terrestrial habitation and a course of Nature which is capable of supplying all human need and if man refuses to play the part for which his God-given ability fits him then the consequences must be laid at his door and not at that of God.

This is a fundamental law of Divine creation—the law of retribution. What a man soweth, that shall he also reap. That is not the arbitrary dictum of a vengeful Deity. Neither is it the callousness of an indifferent Deity. If either were so, then the parable of the Lost Sheep would never have been uttered. But parallel with that parable there is also that of the Lost Son—the Prodigal Son. The prodigal had to learn for himself, to experience retribution for his mispent life, before he "came to himself" and said "I will arise and go to my father" and the father received him. So it must be with men. The present course of human history must proceed until the works of man and the pride of man without God alike perish in utter ruin. Then God will intervene just as the Shepherd went out after the lost sheep; will meet the erring son halfway just as did the Prodigal's father.

Therefore the Scriptures, rightly understood, insist that the Messianic Kingdom, when Divine power intervenes to govern human affairs for an Age, will come at the time of human extremity, and the principles of Divine Law be exalted in the eyes of all. *"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf be unstopped"*. Men will learn that the life they have lived on earth is but a commencement, a preparation, for progress through future ages of experience and activity in scope and magnitude inconceivable by our present mental powers. But not until they have learned to use that exalted destiny aright. Not until they realise and accept the truth of the saying *"As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death"*. And, most important of all, not unless and until they have acknowledged and repented for their own failure and rebellion, and pledged alliance to their rightful sovereign, the Lord Jesus Christ.



## ACTS 21.

**RIOT IN THE TEMPLE**No. 15 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

There was a long silence in the room after James had finished speaking. The faces of his colleagues, elders of the Jerusalem church, revealed their satisfaction with the manner in which he had put their proposal. Paul and his companions, men of Asia and of Greece, sat with grave countenances. They had not expected this fundamental difference of outlook between Jew and Gentile, the question of observing or not observing the Mosaic law, to be introduced so soon after their coming together, but introduced it had been and now they had to face it and come to a decision.

The Asiatic and Greek churches had been collecting a money gift for the benefit of the hard-hit believers in Jerusalem for a number of years past. Now Paul was in the city, together with eight representatives of those churches, formally to hand over the money. As an evidence of Christian love and good fellowship this gesture ranks high; there had been no contact, or at least very little, between the Gentile assemblies and the native Church at Jerusalem and the spirit which inspired the gift reveals an intense awareness, on the part of the Gentile believers, of the essential unity of all believers in Christ, transcending differences of race or nation, of culture or of doctrine. These Judean disciples were in dire need and the newly-formed Gentile communities in the first flush of their Christian experience were doing what they could to relieve that need. The importance they attached to their gesture is high-lighted by the fact that in addition to Paul's personal co-workers, Luke and Timothy, six others had made the long journey with him to Judea to testify to the Jerusalem disciples by their presence how real was the concern of the Gentile churches for the distressful condition of their fellow-believers in Jerusalem.

It is rather puzzling that the account of the meeting in Acts 21 says not one word about the actual presentation of the gift. The stern ascetic James, a natural half-brother of Jesus, was the acknowledged leader of the Church, and all the elders, it is said, were present. It is hard to resist the idea that the travellers were somewhat disappointed in their reception. All that Luke saw fit to record was that Paul gave a detailed account of the work he and his fellow-labourers had carried out in Asia and Greece and the results they had

achieved in terms of conversions and assemblies established. The response from their hosts seems almost perfunctory: "*and when they heard it, they glorified the Lord*", and they immediately plunged into discussion of a totally different and purely local interest, the manner in which suspicion of Paul's orthodoxy in matters relating to the Mosaic Law might be allayed whilst he was in their midst. It seems almost as if that subject was of infinitely greater moment to them at that time than the gift and the loving spirit which had prompted so many believers in so many churches to make sacrifices for the well-being of these brethren whom they had never seen. It might well be that Luke, himself a Greek, and probably having little patience with these pettifogging arguments about the detail and ceremonial of the Mosaic Covenant, felt too sick at heart to record anything more about the gift which he and his had carried with such pride as emissaries of their home churches.

All faces now were turned to Paul, for his was to be the decision. The proposal put forward by James was clearcut enough. The Jerusalem Christians still observed the Mosaic Law, including the rite of circumcision, the distinction between clean and unclean foods, and the observance of the great feasts. To what extent they realised that the coming and the death of Christ, and the new message which He taught, had abrogated all these things, is not now known, but they did certainly continue to observe all the outward ceremonial. Paul they knew as the man who proclaimed in no uncertain voice that "*Christ is the end of the Law to everyone that believeth*", that nothing of all the ceremonial and restrictions associated with the Mosaic Covenant was of any validity or value to the Christian. They also knew that he refused to draw any distinction between Jew and Gentile, saying that God Himself had broken down the wall of partition between them, that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian or Scythian, but that all were one in Christ. Their own Christianity was not yet mature enough to prevent them resenting these sentiments with all their native Jewish pride and insularity. Matters were not helped by the accession of a great number of priests and Pharisees to the

Church—according to James at this time there were “many thousands which believe” (the Greek word is *myriados* which, literally meaning tens of thousands, was used colloquially to indicate a multitude that was well-nigh uncountable). It is probably true that the Christian Church in Jerusalem was in real danger of becoming merely a sect of Judaism, and it was only the catastrophic ending of the entire Jewish polity a few years later that destroyed its Judaistic leanings and transformed it into a true Christian community.

In the light of this position James made his suggestion. He wanted Paul to indicate his personal orthodoxy in things Mosaic by participating in a Temple ceremony. Four of the local Christians had taken the Nazarite vow—to abstain from strong drink and allow their hair to grow uncut—and the time of their ceremonial release was at hand. This involved an elaborate seven day ritual at the Temple, where alone this release could be effected, and the priesthood had seen to it that the procedure cost money. It was the custom for wealthy Jews, as an act of piety, to pay these costs on behalf of men too poor to meet them themselves, and this involved association in the relevant ceremonies. If, suggested James, Paul would thus associate himself with these four men and spend the necessary week in the Temple, all concerned would see that he was still a loyal son of Israel conforming at least to the outward trappings of the Law of Moses.

Although James' purpose was to allay criticism of Paul's reputed views regarding the Law, there was nothing in the course suggested to which Paul could logically take exception. The Nazarite vow was a formal means of declaring in public the intensity of personal dedication or consecration to the service of God. As a ceremonial it had been regulated by definite provisions in the Law of Moses but there is reason to think that the practice existed long before the Law. The term “Nazarite” itself comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to be separated” (it has no connection with the town Nazareth or the term Nazarene applied to the early Christians). A man desiring to express in symbol, for the edification of his fellows, the fact of his dedication to God, took the Nazarite vow, which involved abstaining from strong drink in symbol of keeping the mental faculties clear and vital for Divine worship, and allowing the hair to grow long—the ancient idea was that physical strength resided in the hair—to picture the preservation of the physical pow-

ers for Divine service. The vow was for a period at the end of which the hair was cut and offered to God by the priest with an appropriate ritual. The full law on the matter appears in Numbers, chapter 6; several instances of its application are found in the Old Testament, Hannah and Samson being noteworthy examples. The ceremony was equally appropriate to Christian and Jew; Paul himself took the vow on one occasion (Acts 18: 18) so that he was violating no principle of conduct in assenting to the proposal. The only question was whether his presence in the Temple for an entire week at the time of the feast—for this was Pentecost and the city was full of pilgrims from all parts of the world—might spark off trouble with some of his inveterate enemies. Perhaps he reassured himself with the thought that only a few years earlier, at the end of his second missionary journey, he had undergone the same seven days ceremonial in the Temple on his own account when he himself had taken the vow, and no untoward circumstance occurred. At any rate, he assented.

But this time the outcome was different. Five or six of the days had passed. The priests were conducting the ancient ceremonial in their usual perfunctory unhurried fashion, offering the unleavened bread, and the meat offering, and the drink offering, and the peace offering. Paul and his four companions were standing in their allotted places, carrying out their part of the ritual in harmony with the movements of the priests. At a respectful distance around them clustered a crowd of spectators, curious pilgrims whose own sacrifices had been presented and who now were going round gazing with wide-open eyes at every new spectacle this wonderful Temple could furnish. The offerings passed from hand to hand; the droning voices of the priests went on . . . . .

There came a sudden interruption. “*Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the Law, and this place; and further brought Greeks into the temple and hath polluted this holy place*”. The stentorian voice roared over the quiet court. A group of men—provincial Jews, Asiatics by their dress—had rudely broken into the circle of priests and laid violent hands on Paul, shouting to the crowd as they did so. In an instant all was confusion. The mere mention of Greeks in the sacred precincts was enough to rouse the entire concourse to raging fury. Paul was surrounded by an angry mob and hustled out of the

"Court of the Women" where the ceremony was taking place, down the fifteen steps of the Gate Beautiful into the Court of the Strangers where there was more space and less sanctity. As they did so the priests hurriedly closed the ponderous gates to avoid risk of bloodshed in the sacred court. What happened in the Court of the Strangers was not so important and not so much their concern.

Somebody else, however, was concerned. At the north-west corner of the Temple area stood the Tower of Antonia, headquarters of the Roman garrison, specially built so as to overlook the Temple because so many riots had their beginning within its courts. A flight of steps had been built by the Romans, leading down from the castle directly into the Temple outer court to facilitate the rapid descent of troops when necessary. The Romans had found by experience that it was frequently necessary. Now the centurion on duty looked down upon the melee below, saw the riff-raff of the streets hurrying in to take part in whatever was afoot, and without more ado sent urgent report to his commander that another riot had started in the Temple and "*all Jerusalem was in an uproar*". That long-suffering functionary, Claudius Lysias, dropped what he was doing, doubtless with a muttered imprecation upon these turbulent Jews who would never let him rest in peace, called up a detachment of soldiers and centurions, and dashed down the stairs into the Court. At the well-known sound of clashing Roman weapons the tumult momentarily lessened; there was probably a bit of a stampede to get out of the Gate and into the street. Citizens of Jerusalem knew what it meant when Roman soldiers sailed in to stop a fight. Even the Asiatic Jews who had started it all and were in process of beating Paul to death desisted when they saw the stalwart mail-clad soldiers forcing their way with scant ceremony through the crowd to get to them. In a moment, with typical Roman efficiency, the central figure was picked up from the ground and shackled to two soldiers. The remainder pushed the crowd back a little and then Lysias demanded to know what the trouble was all about. Immediately a babble of voices broke out mingled with abuse and threats aimed at Paul, standing silent in the midst of the soldiers. With a gesture of contempt the commander turned from the crowd; at a curt word of command Paul's custodians began to march him toward the stairs. Seeing themselves being balked of their

prey, the crowd broke through the barriers and surrounded the little party, yelling like wild beasts. Quickly the soldiers formed a tight ring to push back the mob while several of them hoisted Paul up bodily and carried him up the stairs, their comrades holding back the crowd meanwhile. Once at the top the emergency was over for no Jew would dare to follow on to the garrison ramparts.

It seems from the record in Acts that Lysias had formed the impression that his prisoner was a certain Egyptian false Messiah who only a few months previously had led four thousand deluded followers up the Mount of Olives under a promise that the walls of Jerusalem would fall before them and the Roman power be destroyed. Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, had acted promptly and quelled the insurrection, slaying many and taking other prisoners to be sent into slavery, and the false Messiah himself had escaped and was never heard of again. Lysias seemed rather astonished to find that he had on his hands instead an apparently respectable, educated Asiatic Jew, and he, perhaps rather reluctantly, assented to Paul's request that he be allowed to address the multitude from the top of the stairs.

Standing there in full view of the people, Paul raised his hand in token of silence. The shouting died away; with a swift reversal of feeling the mob which a moment ago had been crying out for his blood was now curious to hear what he had to say. "*And when there was made a great silence he spake unto them.*" Paul spoke in Aramaic, the native language of the people. That one fact alone must have contributed to the attention they gave him. Greek was the official language, that of the Romans, of the highly placed, the rich and influential, but Aramaic was the tongue of the common people, the tongue of their ancestors. And many of them would be maliciously conscious that most of the Roman soldiers listening would not understand a word of what was being said, so they gave Paul their close attention.

It was a masterly discourse. "*Men, brethren and fathers*" was his introductory mode of address, conciliatory and giving due deference to the men of authority amongst them. He told them of his credentials as a Jew, his education under Rabbi Gamaliel, the famous Pharisee whose name was even then, in his own generation, famous throughout Israel. He described how as a zealous Pharisee himself he had "*persecuted this way unto the death*" and told of his conversion on the

Damascus road when his eyes beheld the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. He related the details of his commission to preach that same Jesus and how he obeyed. To all this his hearers gave respectful attention, for nothing he had said transgressed Jewish national or religious feeling. But then he came to the historic occasion when in this very Temple he had seen a vision of Jesus saying to him "*Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles*". At mention of the hated name and Paul's bold assertion that God intended His salvation to be offered to the Gentiles, the entire assembly erupted in uncontrollable anger. "*Away with such a fellow from the earth*" they cried, "*for it is not fit that he should live*". They tore their clothes, threw dust into the air, and probably made an involuntary dash to the stairs as if to drag Paul down into their midst again.

Lysias had had enough. He probably did not understand Aramaic and had become increasingly impatient as he stood by listening to Paul's oration. Now he intended to get to the root of the matter. He told his soldiers to take Paul inside for interrogation and to preface the examination with a severe scourging, which was the accepted way of getting the truth out of an unwilling prisoner. Paul had been in this position before and knew his rights. He quietly reminded the centurion of the illegality of scourging a Roman citizen. The centurion was startled; it was unusual but not unknown for Jews to hold the privilege of Roman citizenship and he knew the severity with which any breach of the law in this respect was treated. He suspended the proceedings for the time being and went straight to his commander. Lysias came down in what was probably a state of near panic to

verify the fact for himself. He seemed doubtful at first. He himself, he said, had obtained his citizenship at considerable monetary expense. He was probably a Greek or an Asiatic who had spent his life as a professional soldier and acquired citizenship as a reward for some contribution made to State interests or even, not impossibly, by bribery. "But I," said Paul, "was free born"—born a citizen. That meant that his father or grandfather must have held Roman citizenship before him. Lysias could doubt no longer; the penalty for falsely claiming to be a Roman citizen was death, and he was convinced. He was also very worried, for in merely binding Paul preparatory to the scourging he had laid himself open to severe punishment should his prisoner make an official complaint to the governor Felix at Caesarea. It is very probable that Paul spent that night, not as a prisoner, but as the guest of Claudius Lysias in the latter's private apartments. The next morning the members of the Sanhedrin—who had not been involved in the riot of the previous day anyway—received a peremptory summons to arrange a session at which Paul, under Roman surveillance, should appear and have the matters in dispute settled once and for all.

So, at last, the wheel had turned full circle. Some twenty-five years previously Paul himself, as a member of that same Sanhedrin, had seen Stephen arraigned and condemned to death for blasphemy. He himself had given his vote for the death sentence. Now he, in his own turn, was to stand before the same judicial body to defend his advocacy of the identical principles for which Stephen had given his life.

(To be continued)

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"The outward features of our life may not be all that we would choose them to be; there may be things we wish for that never come to us: there may be much we wish away that we cannot part from. The persons with whom we live, the circumstances by which we are surrounded, the duties we have to perform, the burdens we have to bear, may not only be other than what we should have selected for ourselves, but may even seem inconsistent with the formation and discipline of character which we honestly wish to promote. Knowing us better than we know ourselves, fully understanding how greatly we are affected by the outward events and conditions of life, He has ordered them with a view to

our entire and final,—not only our immediate happiness: and whenever we can be safely trusted with pastures that are green and waters that are still, in the way of earthly blessing—the Good Shepherd leads us there."

(Selected)

\* \* \*

If God has once shown that He will make any sacrifice for the salvation of the guilty, must not that be always true of Him? must He not continue to manifest His blended severity and mercy in the ages to come?

(Dr. Samuel Cox)

## THE TRAGEDY OF JUDAS

*Thoughts on the story  
of the great betrayal*

The name of Judas is emblazoned on the pages of history as that of the greatest traitor of all time. His crime has been held to be the greatest of all crimes, and the old-time theology had no doubt that the fiercest flames of Hell were reserved for the man who sank so low that he betrayed the Son of Man with a kiss.

The common impression is that Judas betrayed his Master for sordid gain—that for the paltry inducement of thirty pieces of silver he was prepared to forswear his allegiance, relinquish his prospective place in the Messianic kingdom, and deliver to certain death One whom he knew to be innocent. That impression comes from a superficial reading of the narrative; a closer examination of the story shows that there was much more involved.

Judas was not a Galilean. Alone of the twelve he was a southerner, a Judean. "Judas Iscariot" is the Greek form of his Hebrew name "Judah of Kerioth" in south-east Judea. As a Judean he probably rather despised his Galilean comrades and perhaps cherished the belief that by birth and breeding he was the one best fitted to be the immediate confidant and lieutenant of the Son of David. In joining the band of disciples he must have been perfectly sincere; we cannot imagine Jesus choosing him otherwise. It was afterwards that he conceived and followed the course of conduct which had such terrible results.

Of the life of Judas as a disciple little or nothing is known. On only one occasion does he occupy the central position and in that instance it is to his discredit. When the repentant woman broke her alabaster vase of perfume in the house of Simon (John 12. 1-8) it seems that Judas protested at the apparent waste, suggested that it were better that its value be given to the poor. John declares that he said this only because he was a thief and stole what had been contributed to the needs of the disciples. In this connection it should be noted that Mark and Matthew credit the same remark to "his disciples" and to "some" at the feast. (Mk. 14. 3-9; Matt. 26. 6-13). It might well be that several of the disciples were disposed to criticise Mary's action and that Judas merely uttered the thoughts that were in several minds.

But this statement, that Judas was a thief, cannot be dismissed without further examination. Why was he a thief? Why should this man, living in communal fellowship with his fellow-disciples and their Master, purloin any portion of what must at best have been extremely slender financial resources? They were men whose needs were few and simple; they lived plainly and austere; if the motive was to "get rich" surely he would not continue to waste his time with this band of pilgrims when there were plenty of roads to financial prosperity for a quick-witted man like Judas. Is it possible that Judas, who was the treasurer anyway, was setting aside money, secretly as he thought, to build up a fund to be used for the advancement of the interests of Jesus when the time should come? That hypothesis may seem more feasible after we have turned our attention to the story of the betrayal, and in particular Judas' motive for acting as he did.

Was the motive greed for money? The price paid was "thirty pieces of silver" coins known as the "tetradrachm of Antioch" worth intrinsically about two shillings each, but having regard to the difference in purchasing value of money between the First Century and today, representing a much greater value by our standards. Judas received what would be the equivalent of about £130 or 360 dollars to us at the present time. It is said that this was the price customary in Israel for the purchase of a slave, and it certainly was the compensation fixed by the Mosaic Law for the death of a slave or servant (Exod. 21. 32). Is it likely that if Judas was driven by purely monetary considerations he would have bartered so valuable a "prize" for the traditional price of an ordinary servant? Knowing of the priest's anxiety to secure Jesus, one would have expected Judas to stand out for a considerably higher figure before setting his seal to the arrangement. That his ideas in matters financial were of an exalted nature we know from the incident in Simon's house where he assessed the value of the perfume at three hundred denarii, equivalent to a purchasing power to-day of £450 or 1250 dollars.

All this talk of theft, trafficking, bargaining, does reveal one fact. Judas was not of the same mental calibre as the others. Although slow of heart to grasp the meaning of Christ's

life and death, they were nevertheless men devoted to a purpose, the following of their Master where He would lead them, away from earthly things and toward the world of the spirit. Judas, on the other hand, saw nothing beyond earthly things. He was evidently obsessed with the idea of a purely earthly Messianic kingdom and utterly failed to comprehend anything beyond that. His mind was saturated with the vivid stories of Old Testament history, when the power of God was displayed against His enemies in spectacular manner; his whole idea of the Messiah coloured with the popular belief in a mighty King who would relentlessly crush all resistance; his Jewish patriotism stirred as he pictured Israel at the head of affairs and he himself a leading statesman in that kingdom. He must have hoped and lived for one thing, the day when Jesus would drop the mask of humility and gentleness, and reveal Himself as the "*King, travelling in the greatness of his strength*". (Isa. 63. 1).

For three years Judas had waited for this climax. He endured the hardships of the ministry and the persecution of Pharisees and priests, solacing himself doubtless with the thought that the tables would soon be turned and he would then crush these proud rulers into the dust. Whilst the other disciples were taking in, however imperfectly, the teachings of their Lord, and being prepared for the great change in outlook and understanding which was to come at Pentecost, Judas was wrapped up in his dreams of future power and glory. The others went forward to loftier heights of understanding; Judas stood still.

Nevertheless, he did believe that Jesus was the Messiah. He had seen Him work miracles, even to the raising of the dead. He had seen Him feed the thousands with food miraculously brought into being. He knew—none better—the powers that Jesus had at His command, and when this fact is realised the impossibility of Judas having intended to sell Jesus into death for the sake of the money is manifest—for he knew that Jesus possessed the power both to avoid arrest and to deliver Himself should He be arrested. Judas must have seen that power exercised on occasions when men sought to take Jesus, and could not. We must therefore accept the evident fact that Judas never expected the betrayal to result in the death of his Master.

Picture his state of mind as the months went by. From the beginning of his ministry our Lord had pursued his mission without effective interference by the authorities.

When the people of Nazareth tried to throw him over the cliff he passed through them. (Luke 4. 23-30). When the officers tried to arrest him they could not. When He expelled the traders from the Temple none could stop him. Although He certainly had not assumed the privileges of a king in Israel, He had continued His work despite the authorities' attempts to suppress it. When He rode into Jerusalem five days before His crucifixion the heart of Judas must have beat fast—was this, at last, to be the moment of declaration? Was He now to declare war on Rome and lead the jubilant crowds in a great crusade to recover Jewish sovereignty? It is easy to imagine the eagerness with which Judas watched every action of Jesus at that time!

The moment passed, and the expected declaration was not made. What was even worse to Judas was the fact that Jesus now began to talk of imminent death. Perhaps for the first time, Judas began to be seriously alarmed respecting the materialisation of his hopes.

It might have been then that Judas decided to precipitate the crisis. If Jesus would not assert his kingship voluntarily, his hand must be forced. In ordinary times, knowing his Master's power, he would not have contemplated such a thing, but with Jesus in this strange mood, talking of suffering and death, desperate measures were necessary.

So the temptation came to Judas to contrive the arrest of Jesus now that he was in a frame of mind that would permit arrest, in the sure belief that, faced with the crisis, Jesus would assert his power to overthrow his adversaries. The standard of rebellion having thus been raised, Jesus would be compelled to continue to the destruction of all His enemies and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

It must have been with such thoughts in mind that Judas sought audience with the priests. Several considerations support this conclusion. In the first place it might well be asked why the priests should pay good money to Judas for pointing out a man whom they knew perfectly well already. Secondly, why choose the Passover, a most inconvenient time, when a week or so later Jerusalem would be quieter and the trial could proceed at leisure without the elaborate arrangements which did have to be made to avoid interference with the feast. Thirdly, that strange—perhaps ironical—remark of Judas "When ye have him, *hold him fast*". The most reasonable explanation of these factors is that the priests, knowing Jesus' power, were by no means sure



that they would be able to arrest him at all. They had to rely on Judas to tell them when the psychological moment had come, and when on the evening of the Last Supper he came with his news that now was the time, Jesus was in no mood to resist arrest, they got together a heavily armed band of men and set out to make the attempt.

Wherein lay the necessity of the kiss? It was, of course, a customary greeting between friends, but Judas had been with Jesus only a few hours before. Was there some idea in his mind that by this display of affection Jesus might understand his motive in betraying him, and realise that the purpose behind it was the furthering of the cause of the Kingdom? Did he hope that Jesus would look upon his action as one of mis-directed zeal, and when all had ended happily, perhaps reprove him mildly for taking the direction of things into his own hands, but grant him nevertheless a high place in that Kingdom which he had thus helped to establish?

So far the scheme had proceeded according to plan. Jesus was in the hands of His enemies, on trial for life, and it remained only for that assertion of His power by means of which He would extricate himself and inaugurate a new era. And it must have been at some time during the long hours of that night and the following morning, when Jesus was being taken back and forth between the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod, that Judas received the terrible shock which unhinged his brain and drove him to suicide in a frenzy of remorse.

*Jesus was not going to save Himself!* Too late, Judas realised that something had gone terribly wrong with his plans, and that Jesus had no intention of using the powers He possessed in order to escape His enemies. He intended to accept, unresistingly, the sentence they passed upon Him. Perhaps, at last, some dim understanding of words so far ignored penetrated the dark recesses of Judas' mind. It might be that he recalled other writings of the prophets, speaking, not of power and glory, but of a despised and rejected One who would be led as a lamb to the slaughter. Demented at the enormity of his crime, he rushed to the priests with his frantic cry "*I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood*". His pathetic action in returning the money, as though that could undo the fell work of the past few hours, is an index to his state of mind. A vivid contrast between the awful remorse of Judas and the callous disregard of the priests is revealed by their reply

"*What is that to us? See thou to that!*"

So he "*cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and went and hanged himself*". It may be true, as Origen suggests, that in his fearful stress of mind he may have had some idea of meeting the Lord in the world of the dead and confessing his guilt to Him. What is more likely is that in his unreasoning despair he saw no escape from Divine wrath, inevitably to be visited upon the man who had killed the Messiah. Israel had waited long centuries for their promised Deliverer, and now by his own precipitateness he had encompassed Messiah's death and frustrated the purposes of God. How could he expect mercy or forgiveness for so great a sin?

Paradoxical as it may appear, Judas was probably the only one of the twelve who never lost his faith that Jesus was the Messiah of prophecy. The others abandoned their belief temporarily when the crisis came. Judas never lost his, but he failed because his belief was a purely intellectual one, and never entered the heart. It was built upon the glowing prophecies of the Old Testament and he never saw the light of the new revelation which Jesus manifested.

The seeming discrepancies between the various narratives relating to the use of the money for the purchase of the "potter's field" are best harmonised by concluding that the priests used the money some time after the Crucifixion to purchase a field already unhallowed by having been the scene of Judas' suicide, and that this was known to Peter and the others before the Day of Pentecost.

What is to be the ultimate fate of the betrayer? When Judas' tortured spirit found quietness at last in death inflicted by his own hand, did he go down into the "*blackness of darkness for ever*", or will he yet have opportunity to demonstrate just how sincere was the remorse of that fearful night? St. Peter, in the only reference made to Judas after Pentecost, said "*It is written in the Book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric (oversight, charge) let another take*". (Acts 1. 20). Peter was not quoting accurately, and he seems to have been using the text in an illustrative manner rather than claiming the fulfilment of a prophecy. His quotation was taken from Psalms 69. 25 with possibly an added word from Psalms 109. 8. Many years ago Andrew Jukes pointed out that the same Psalm is applied by St. Paul in Romans 11. 9-10 to faithless Israel and by St. Peter in Acts 1. 20 to Judas. The Pauline application allows

that Israel's casting off is not irrevocable; eventually "*all Israel shall be saved*" (Rom. 11. 26) and logically therefore the Petrine application to Judas need imply no more than the betrayer's loss of his high calling as an Apostle, without any commitment as to his ultimate fate.

There is also the statement in John 17. 12 "*Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition.*" This has been interpreted to mean that Judas is irrevocably condemned, but in fact the expression is intended to be taken in relation to the Kingdom glory which Judas had lost. It is not that he was cut off from all hope of life but he was cut off from the Kingdom. The primary meaning behind the word "perdition" is loss, of life or destiny in this connection, and the same Greek root word is used in those instances where Jesus refers to his disciples losing life for His sake and of finding a new heavenly life. Literally, Jesus said that none of His disciples were lost to their High Calling save the "son of loss" or "son of destruction", the one who by his action had shown that he must of necessity lose and be cut off from his prospective place in the spiritual kingdom of our Lord.

There is a more definite word in Matt. 26. 24 where Jesus said "*Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It had been good for that man if he had not been born.*" Now as those words stand in the A.V. they involve something of an absurdity, for if Judas had never been born, never known conscious existence, it is clear that nothing could ever have been either good or bad for him. Wilson's "*Diaglott*" suggests an alternative interpretation in his rendering "Good were it for that man if he were not born", i.e. *not born yet*. Better had it been personally for Judas if his birth had been delayed for decades or centuries after the First Advent than for him, born as he was contemporary with Jesus, to have stooped to so vile a deed and earned the censure of every succeeding generation.

Thomas Allen has shown that the Authorised Version has taken an unwarrantable liberty with the Greek grammar in this verse. He says "Beyond all question, the original requires a wholly different rendering. 'Good were it for Him,' i.e. *Christ*, 'if that man,' i.e. *Judas*, 'had not been born'. In the opening of the sentence Christ is designated by the pronoun *autos*, and Judas by the pronoun *ekeinos*." (*Autos* is 'him', 'himself'; *ekeinos* is 'that' Ed.) "What our version does, in violation

of grammar, is to turn round, and, in the last clause of the same sentence, to invert this order, applying *autos* to Judas and *ekeinos* to Christ". It is true enough that the literal Greek should read "*The Son of Man indeed goes as it has been written of him; alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is delivered up. Good it were for him if that man had not been born.*". Remembering that *ouai*, often translated "woe" in the A.V., is an interjection of sorrow meaning "Alas", we can imagine our Lord uttering this word as an expression of grief at the defection of His trusted follower.

The writer of this treatise feels the most probable explanation of the words to be that Jesus was quoting from the Book of Enoch, where this expression occurs relative to the position of sinners standing before the Messiah at His coming in glory. This book, although not in the canonical Hebrew Scriptures, was well known in our Lord's day and there are quite a number of evident allusions to it in His sayings recorded in the Gospels. In this instance He may well have been thinking of the Last Judgment described in 1 Enoch 37. 1-6 which runs in part "When the assembly of the righteous shall appear, and sinners shall be judged for their sins, and when the Righteous One shall appear . . . where then will be the dwelling of the sinners, and where the resting-place of those who have denied the Lord of Spirits? *It had been good for them if they had not been born.*" Now if in fact Jesus was using this expression from the Book of Enoch to describe the position of Judas, the disciples, familiar with that same Book as they certainly were, would immediately take His meaning. Judas, who had expected to be among the "saints" associated with Jesus in judging the world in the day of His Second Advent, the Messianic Kingdom, would instead have to take his place with the unrighteous who are to be the subjects of judgment in that Kingdom. Since Jesus elsewhere makes it clear that He expected that judgment to be a time of trial, with repentance and conversion on the part of at least some, as witness His references to the opportunities for life to be extended to all men under that Kingdom, the verse in question need not be held to place Judas in any more unfavourable position than any other members of Adam's race who come before the Great White Throne to face the eternal issues of righteousness and evil, life and death, in that day.

But this question of the ultimate fate of

Judas must be determined, not by the somewhat tortuous exposition of somewhat ambiguous texts, but by reference to first principles. It is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture that Jesus gave Himself a Ransom for All, that every member of Adam's race may experience the reversal of the Adamic sentence and enjoy a full and fair opportunity under Millennial conditions, with the Devil restrained, to come a full knowledge of the truth of God in Christ and on that basis make his own deliberate choice for Christ or Satan, good or evil. The denial of that opportunity even to one only of men is a denial of an essential feature of the Divine Plan for every man. No matter how heinous the sin of Judas, he must

stand before the Great White Throne with all others and hear the terms upon which he can, if he will, achieve reconciliation with God.

It may be—we know not—but it may be, in that day, that there will be a man, rather quiet, rather humbled, bearing visible evidence of a great chastening, whose voice may be more than usually low as he speaks of the life that was his upon earth before. It may be that such a man—we cannot say—will be brought before the Father of all as one who has walked the Highway of Holiness and hears, with full heart, the tender accents of One whom he so ignorantly and treacherously betrayed saying "Father, forgive him; he knew not what he did".

### REMINISCENCES OF MOODY

At one of his meetings in New York, Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, quoted this sentiment in beginning his address: "The Bible is a lamp to direct us; a bit to restrain us, a sword to defend us; water to wash us; fire to inflame us; salt to season us; milk to nourish us; rain to refresh us; treasures to enrich us; and a key to unlock for us heaven's gate." All this it is, he said, and much more. The man who came to a meeting to get an anointing that would last a lifetime was compared to the man who ate a breakfast to last a lifetime. Daily, hourly feeding on the Word is necessary, if the soul would grow.

\* \* \*

From cover to cover Moody believed the Bible. A man brought a difficult passage to him with this question:

"How do you explain that, Mr. Moody?"

"I don't explain it."

"Well, how do you interpret it?"

"I don't interpret it."

"How do you understand it?"

"I don't understand it."

"Well, what do you do with it?"

"I don't do anything with it."

"You don't believe it, do you?"

"Certainly, I believe it. There are lots of things I believe that I don't understand. There are a good many things in astronomy, a good

many things about my own system that I don't understand, yet I believe them. I am glad there are heights in that Book which I haven't been able to climb. I am glad there are depths I haven't been able to fathom. It is the best proof that the Book came from God."

"But you don't believe in the Old Testament just as you do in the New Testament?"

"Yes I do. We have one Bible, not two. The very things in the Old Testament that men cavil at the most to-day are the things the Son of Man set His seal to when He was down here, and it isn't good policy for a servant to be above his master. The Master believed these things."

\* \* \*

Before Moody came to London, one fearful questioner had suggested that he print his creed before coming. "My creed is in print", Moody replied. "It is found in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah."

\* \* \*

A Christian, said Moody, is at his best when he just lets his light shine. He is never so effective as when doing just that. He is like a lighthouse. Lighthouses don't ring bells and fire cannon to draw attention to themselves. They just shine.

How suitable are Mary's words to all of the Lord's people: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it!" How important that all should learn the lesson that it is not merely the hearing of the Gospel which brings blessing to the heart, but obedience to the glad tidings! Of course, it is necessary that we should believe the Master before we could be ready to obey

Him; yet the expression, "Whatsoever He shall say unto you, *do it!*" includes a faith in the Lord on the part of all those who are obedient. The Christian cannot do better than adopt these words as one of the mottoes of his life—Whatsoever my Lord saith unto me, I will do it.



## THE QUESTION BOX



*Q. At the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 there was "much disputing". Had the apostles and elders so soon fallen from the high ideals of John 17?*

A. By no means. The usage of the word "dispute" has changed little during the four hundred years since the A.V. was prepared. We associate the term to-day with wrangling and acrimony. The Greek word "*suzeteo*" used in Acts 15 has no such significance. It implies a mutual or co-operative seeking or discussion together. Our own word "discussion" would be a good equivalent. The same word is used in Acts 28, 29, where the Roman Jews, after hearing Paul's witness, departed and "had great reasoning among themselves". The Council where "the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter" was evidently an assembly of grave and sober men who discussed the problem before them in the spirit of Christ and under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit—and their decision, as shown by history, was blessed accordingly. Would that in all our own discussions on debatable matters we could manifest the same disposition!

\* \* \*

*Q. What is the meaning behind Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20, 17)?*

A. The understanding of some concerning our Lord's resurrection body has given rise to a somewhat superstitious view that He could not or should not be physically touched, hence this word which, they think, was in the nature of a prohibition. Now we know that our Lord, who was raised from the dead in the glory of His Divine spiritual Being must needs assume a body of flesh for the purpose of appearing to and conversing with His disciples, and on this occasion He appeared to Mary in the guise of a gardener. Directly Mary realised that it was indeed the Lord, and loving Him as she did, her first impulse would certainly be to embrace and cling to Him in happiness, as though she would never let Him go. Nothing less could be expected from this warm-hearted, devoted woman after the events of the previous few days. The verb rendered "touch" is Greek "*hapto*", which means to cling closely and tenaciously, espec-

ially of two persons embracing each other. The scene should be easy to reconstruct—Mary in an ecstasy of happiness holding close to her Lord, so wonderfully restored from the dead, and Jesus saying gently to her, "Do not be clinging to Me now, for I have not yet ascended to My Father, but go and tell My disciples . . .," etc. He was not going away just yet; Mary would see Him again, but now He wanted her to haste away and tell the others the glorious news.

\* \* \*

*Q. How does one harmonise Heb. 9, 6, where the High Priest is said to enter into the Most Holy once in every year, with Exod. 25, 22 and Num. 7, 89, where Moses at least is said to have entered into the Most Holy and talked with God?*

Moses entered the Most Holy only once in his life, when the Tabernacle had been completed and erected but before Aaron and his sons had been constituted to minister the sacred things. Moses, as the Mediator of the Covenant between God and Israel, was at that time the only one who could properly approach God on their behalf, and as indicated in Exod. 25, 22 which states that God would meet with Moses in the Most Holy in order to give him His instructions, he went into the Most Holy, alone, and heard the voice of God from between the cherubim giving him instructions about the priesthood. The command regarding the reservation to the High Priest of the right of entry into the Most Holy did not come into effect until after Moses had retired from the Divine presence and had instituted all things as he had been commanded. That reservation applied only to the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies. In addition, Aaron the High Priest and his sons were to enter the Most Holy, when the Tabernacle was being taken down for journeying, to cover the sacred Ark with the Veil, and wrap that in turn in a blue cloth. Then it fell to the sons of Kohath to carry the Ark to the next stopping place in the wanderings. Not until it was safely covered were they permitted to come forward lest their eyes should fall upon the sacred emblem. In this manner God sought to teach the importance of reverence and respect for those things which have to do with His great Plan of redemption.

## THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

### 4. Prediction and Revelation

A series of notes on the principles underlying prophetic interpretation

"Behold, the days come, that . . ." How many stirring accounts of future happenings in the purposes of God commence with such words as these! We read the passages and sense the certainty of coming fulfilment in the prophet's passionate tones. But how did he come to be so certain himself?

These plain, forthright descriptions of things to come are called predictions. The prophet "predicts" the future. His knowledge is not of himself; it must come from God, for God only knows the end from the beginning. The prophet receives it therefore by revelation; God "reveals" His purpose to the man of His choosing and that man is thereby enabled to impart his knowledge to others by word of mouth, or by the medium of writing, or both. Prediction and Revelation therefore are closely allied in the realm of prophecy.

The gift of prediction stands on a higher spiritual level than does that of prevision, which is prophecy in visions and dreams. It is a "seeing" with the mental sight rather than the physical sight, and therefore calls for a greater degree of spirituality; for the things which are thus discerned make no impression upon the natural senses of sight and hearing. Visions and dreams are, in a sense, "mechanical" revelations, in that the Holy Spirit produces an effect upon the physical visual organs, the eyes, and the mind receives that impression and interprets it along the lines of familiar everyday objects. The prophet to whom is given the power of prediction, by means of a spiritual revelation entering into his mind, receives his consciousness of coming events, not in consequence of an intellectual knowledge of this world's affairs and their evident inevitable outcome, as in the case of "prophetic foreknowledge"; not as a result of visible appearances and dreams which appeal to his sense of sight and are understood by him in harmony with an already accepted symbolism; but because of his being in direct communion with God attuned to the Divine Spirit. This was the highest level of spiritual experience to which any man could attain in Old Testament days, so to walk with God that the human mind, working as it were in parallel with the Divine mind, became able to receive knowledge from that Mind. Since God undeniably does see into the future, the mind thus closely attuned with

His is able to share, to some limited degree, in that knowledge.

This thought is borne out by the fact that the majority of such revelations appear to have come to such men at times when they were more than usually in touch with the spiritual world, or by reason of outward circumstances were more than normally susceptible to spiritual influences. This is shown more clearly in the New Testament narratives, which perhaps is to be expected since men of God lived on a higher plane of spiritual experience than previously. Thus Zacharias, a righteous and godly man (Luke 1. 6) received the great revelation of his life standing in the Holy of the Temple burning incense, and the whole multitude of the people were praying outside—the most solemn moment of the service. With his spirit thus lifted up to God, and being possessed of an intense longing for the coming of Messiah, his senses became receptive to things not normally glimpsed by men and he saw the angel of the Lord at the side of the altar, and heard his voice. It was in the power of that vision that later on, at the birth of his child, his mind came into tune with the mind of God and he uttered the notable prophecy recorded in Luke 1. 68-79. Similarly Simeon, who was evidently already accustomed to the reception of Divine revelations (Luke 2. 26) found himself led as it were by an irresistible spiritual force into the Temple (vs. 27) and then, his eyes falling upon the babe in Mary's arms, his mind in turn ranged itself in line with the Divine mind and he spoke of things yet to come.

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

of the city gate, and in the crush of citizens eager to share in the unexpected relief he was trampled to death. There could have been no human circumstance which might have indicated that man's imminent fate to Elisha; his untimely death a day later was clearly an accident. In a manner to be accounted for only by the laws which govern prophecy, the details of a circumstance still twenty-four hours in the future were impressed upon Elisha's mind and he was able to repeat them. In a similar fashion Agabus, a Christian prophet, foretold the great famine which Josephus confirms as having occurred some ten years later in the reign of Claudius (Acts 11. 28). Agabus also foretold the coming arrest of Paul (Acts 21. 11). Philip's four daughters were prophetesses (Acts 11. 9), and others among the believers shared the same gift, the "gift of prophecy".

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

That was at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. One is led to wonder if at such times of national stress there is a sharpening of the prophetic consciousness, a closer approach to union with unseen spiritual influences, leading to such outbursts of prediction. It is noteworthy that in Scripture narratives the prophets are most active and their prophecies most vivid at such times, and this situation

appears to be repeated in subsequent history as shown by the narrative of Josephus just quoted. A later instance which reinforces this conclusion can be cited in connection with another time of stress, at an event which affected our own country three centuries ago, to wit, the Great Fire of London in 1666. For a number of years prior to the disaster a widespread conviction existed in certain religious circles that London was shortly to be destroyed on account of the sinfulness of its people. Thomas Reeve, a noted London minister, in 1657 published "*God's Plea for Nineveh*" in which he foretold both the Great Plague of 1665 and the Fire of the following year. He remained in London during the Plague and drew great congregations to his fervent preaching of repentance. Solomon Eccles, a noted Quaker who later in his life organised the Society of Friends in the West Indies, stalked through London during the Plague with a brazier of burning coals on his head, prophesying the coming Fire with considerable exactitude of detail. Walter Costello, in a treatise printed in 1658, said "*London, go on still in thy presumptuous wickedness. Put the evil day far from thee, and repent not. Do so, London. But if the fire make not ashes of thy city, and thy bones also, conclude me a liar for ever. Oh, London, London, sinful as Sodom and Gomorrah, the decree has gone out, repent, or burn . . .*" Humphrey Smith, a Quaker, in his "*Vision which I saw concerning London*" printed in 1660, six years before the event, described the coming Fire, and runs in part ". . . and as for the city, herself and her suburbs, all that belonged to her, a fire was kindled therein; but she knew not how, even in all her goodly places, and the kindling of it was in the foundation of all her buildings, and there was none could quench it. And the burning thereof was exceeding great, and it burned inward in a hidden manner which cannot be described. All the tall buildings fell, and it consumed all the lofty things therein, and the fire searched out all the hidden places and burned most of the secret places. And as I passed through her streets I beheld her state to be very miserable . . . And the fire continued, for, though all the lofty part was brought down, yet there was much old stuff, and parts of broken down desolate walls, which the fire continued burning against . . . And the vision thereof remained with me as a thing that was showed me of the Lord." Pepys, the famous diarist, who lived at the time, alludes to this expectation in his entry for October 20th,



1666, after the event had justified the predictions.

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

The scope of this treatise does not permit the citing of further similar instances. Perhaps sufficient has been said to show that at times of stress men are found whose minds, closely attuned to spiritual things, are made receptive to the imparting of Divine knowledge regarding "things that must shortly come to pass" and that the foretelling of imminent events is not confined to occasions belonging to Biblical days and to men who are Biblical characters, but has happened and continues to happen from time to time as the history of man unfolds.

In recent years there has been a considerable amount of philosophical discussion on the nature of Time and theories have been advanced purporting to demonstrate that Time as men know it is a function only of the order of things in which we have our existence; that there can be, so to speak, more than one kind of Time and that in certain circumstances that much-beloved creature of the philosophers, the hypothetical "observer", can be projected into another "Time-stream" and receive a visual or mental impression of events which have not yet materialised in human Time but will do so at a later date. The exhaustive works of J. W. Dunne during the period between the two World Wars have treated this subject in considerable detail but the arguments advanced are too abstruse for the majority of people to follow. There are however a great many well-authenticated

modern research projects which appear to establish the fact of some sort of perception of matters removed from the present in point of time, although the laws governing these phenomena are definitely not yet understood. And there may be some other explanation of this apparent ability to foresee future events which does not involve the mind "travelling in time" in the manner so beloved of science fiction writers. Nevertheless, all the evidence goes to show that the reality of prophecy is not so fantastic a thing as men usually think.

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

(To be continued)

*His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. Jer. 20. 9.*

Whoever would be in accord with God must confess Him and must confess Jesus, His representative, whom He sent into the world. He is to be confessed in the life, in the conduct, in the words, of His followers. They are to have

His Spirit and to "show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light". Whoever makes a profession of being a disciple, and then ignores the Master's teachings, misrepresents Him, slanders Him, denies Him, and will not share in the glorious presentation of the Bride at the end.

## INTERESTING TEXTS CONSIDERED

*"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Cor. 4. 7).*

The "treasure" which is here spoken of is the ministry of the Gospel (vs. 1) which is committed to each one of the Lord's followers in harmony with His own parting admonition "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16. 15). We are bidden remember that it is God's Gospel we proclaim, not our own, and the power that inspires us to go forth with it, and sustains us whilst we proclaim it, is the power of the Holy Spirit, not something having its source in our own physical or mental strength. It would have been so easy for God to have committed His work to the wise and noble and influential of this world; He could easily have wrought some miracle in their characters, thus transforming them into efficient servants and missionaries. He did not. He chose instead the weak and the poor and ignoble of this world, those who may or may not have possessed earthly advantages but were at any rate rich in faith and love and devotion toward God, requiring no miracles working on their behalf to ensure *that*. So it was that it pleased God, in His wisdom, by the simplicity of preaching to refute the wisdom of the world and save those that believe. That is why we have this inestimable treasure of the ministry in the earthen vessels of our weak and imperfect human frames. The fact reminds us that the power we have is that of God and that His grace can be made perfect in our weakness.

\* \* \*

*"Again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." (Matt. 19. 24).*

To Western minds unacquainted with Eastern allusions this is a most discouraging statement, especially if the reader happens to be possessed of a liberal share of this world's goods. It is said that in Palestinian walled towns there was usually a small door beside the main entrance gate through which a man could enter after the main gate had been closed at nightfall. A camel, however, could only enter after it had been divested of its lading and must then get down to its knees and squeeze through. This door, because of its smallness, was popularly called the

"needle's eye".

Jesus passed this remark following the regretful refusal of the rich young ruler who wanted to become a disciple but found that he loved his possessions more. The whole point is, not that a rich man cannot hope to enter the Kingdom just because he happens to be a rich man, but that he cannot take his riches with him. As St. Paul remarked in his practical, common-sense way "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can take nothing out" (1 Tim. 6. 7; that last "nothing" is emphatic in the Greek; it means "not even anything"). Jesus' words were intended to stress the fact that unless a man looses his grasp of his earthly riches, uses them in life to the glory of God, lays up treasure in heaven instead of on earth, he will find the "Narrow Way" too narrow to accommodate both himself *and* his riches, and fail to gain entry in consequence.

\* \* \*

*"Ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves". (Amos 5. 26).*

The S.R.V. has it (vs. 25-27) "Did you bring to me the sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images which you made for yourselves; therefore will I take you into exile beyond Damascus". The Hebrew "*sakkuth*" is the Babylonian "*sakkut*", the name for their god Ninuras, the planet Mars. Likewise, "*kaiwan*" or "*chiun*" is the Babylonian "*kajamana*", their god Nergal or the planet Saturn. (In the A.V. the word "*sakkuth*" is translated "tabernacles" from its likeness to "*sukkoth*"; and "*melech*", king, is rendered "Moloch"). The new version, compared with the old Babylonian terms, shows that Israel had adopted the star-worship of the Babylonians and accepted the gods of Babylon, hence the strong condemnation Amos passed upon them.

The Way of the Cross is a little interlude in the purposes of God—between the spontaneous song of the Sons of God when Earth's foundations were laid, and the thrilling Hallelujah Chorus when the earthly Orchestra will join with the Heaven to sing His Praise.

## BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

### EXODUS

#### Part 13 Bread from Heaven Exod. 16, 4-36.

The quails and the manna came simultaneously. It is probable that by the time Israel was encamped in the wilderness of Sin, some six weeks from the commencement of their journey, the stores of food brought with them from Egypt had been exhausted. They had their flocks and herds but these represented their means of livelihood and could not be slaughtered indiscriminately for immediate sustenance. The whole question of future food supplies must by now have become a burning one. Perhaps only Moses knew how long a period was to elapse before the host would reach the Promised Land with its rivers of milk and honey. To what extent he took his problem to the Lord or alternatively relied upon his knowledge of resources in Sinai unknown to Israel does not appear. In the narrative the emergency is made the occasion of Divine intervention. God would rain "bread from heaven" upon them sufficient for their sustenance through all their journeyings. The resultant happening, probably the most celebrated and well-known of the many wonderful events of the Exodus, is also one of the most difficult to explain or understand without admitting the intervention of Heaven. No explanation of the giving of the manna can altogether dispense with that.

First of all, though, came the quails. There was nothing supernatural about them. The quails of Exodus are called by the same name in Arabic to-day and are still very plentiful in the entire Mediterranean area. A small bird, of the partridge family but somewhat smaller than the English partridge, it flies in large flocks usually near the ground and is easily captured. Egyptian monuments show them being caught, dried and salted for food without further cooking. Many ancient writers refer to them and the ease with which they can be taken. In this particular instance the Exodus account simply relates how the quails came up and covered the camp when evening fell. At a later stage in the wandering, at Kibroth-hattaavah, a similar visitation is narrated in greater detail from which it appears that the birds were flying two cubits—about three feet—above ground level. This is quite in accord with the known habits of the bird and made it possible for the Israelites to gather ample supplies easily. Although these are the only two occasions mentioned in

the narratives it is highly probable that quails formed a fairly frequent item of diet; the first encounter of Israel with them in the Wilderness of Sin came at a time when doubts as to the provision of food were being uttered on every side and an unusually extensive visitation of these birds constituted part of the Divine answer. To this day flocks of quails fly across the twenty-mile wide Red Sea from Africa into Sinai in exactly the same fashion as is recorded in the Book of Exodus.

The other factor in Heaven's provision for Israel was manna. This is not so easily explained. A great deal more is said about it than about the quails and the fact that it was a God-given benefit from heaven is stressed. The supply, once commenced in the wilderness of Sin, continued—except on the Sabbath—throughout forty years' wanderings until the fourth day after Israel had crossed Jordan and entered the Promised Land.

Several suggestions as to the true nature of the manna have been put forward by scholars. The favourite hypothesis to-day is that the substance the travellers found on the ground every morning was the same as that which has been gathered in Sinai for many centuries since and is still to be found to-day, although by no means in such quantities as is demanded by the Exodus account. Called *man-ha* by the ancient Egyptians (hence the Hebrew word "manna") it is mentioned by many ancient writers and was apparently an article of trade between Sinai and Egypt throughout the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries and probably before the fifteenth also. About thirty years ago Prof. Bodenheimer of the Hebrew University at Jerusalem investigated it on the sites of its occurrence and issued a carefully documented report. He established that manna is a honey-like substance produced from the sap of the tamarisk tree by two insects having the formidable names *trabutina mannipara* and *majococcus serpentinus minor*, in much the same way as bees produce honey. The Professor photographed insects in the actual process of producing manna in beads ranging from pinhead size to that of large peas. At first the beads are transparent and then turn milky-white. They fall to the ground and in the ordinary way are quickly carried off by ants, unless gathered up almost immediately.

They quickly dissolve in the heat of the sun. The quantity found at the present day is very scanty but this is due to the scarcity of tamarisks in Sinai, which has become almost treeless during the past two thousand years.

Manna as described in Exodus corresponds very well with the substance investigated by Prof. Bodenheimer. Thus chap. 16 says that it was found in the morning when the dew evaporated, that it was small and round, white like hoar frost, and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. Apparently it was possible to gather an omer—three pints—per head without difficulty and the taste of it was “like wafers made with honey”. (The word “wafer” here means a flat baked cake of wheat or other grain). On the other hand it is difficult to see how such a honey-like substance could be ground and baked in the form of cakes. Some investigators have suggested therefore that the manna of Exodus was of a dual nature; that in addition to the tamarisk product there were heavy wind-borne deposits of the edible lichens which do grow in some parts of the world and when ripe are often carried by the wind great distances, and deposited in thick layers on the ground. The edible lichens of the Arctic, known as “Ice-land moss” or “reindeer moss” are the best known, but during the nineteenth century a wind-borne variety known to botanists as “*Parmelia Esculenta*,” widespread in Southern Russia, Persia and Asia, attracted some attention on several occasions by falling and covering large areas to a depth of several inches. Gathered and used as food it proved capable of grinding and baking in similar fashion to bread. As support for this view it has been pointed out that the manna of Exodus is said to have been “ground in mills” and “beaten in mortars” and this is not easily applicable to the tamarisk manna. It might well be therefore that the constitution of the manna was two-fold, both being natural products and capable when cooked together of possessing the taste recorded in the account.

Objectors to the literal truth of the manna story have asserted that it must have been a practical impossibility for Israel to have gathered sufficient from the ground to supply three million people daily. A little thought disposes of this point. According to Exodus each man needed three pints a day. If the manna lay on the ground to an average depth of only a quarter of an inch and only half the surface was occupied by manna then a space three feet by two feet would yield the stipulated three pints. An area of less than two

square miles would supply the needs of the host. This is less than the area of the camp which must have been at least twenty or thirty square miles.

So much for the natural background to the story. An element which is outside the ordinary course of Nature has now to be considered. No manna fell on the Sabbath. On the sixth day of the week men were bidden to gather sufficient for two days. Whilst the production of manna in sufficient quantity from the vast forests of tamarisks which covered much of Sinai in Moses' day is a perfectly credible natural possibility, the cessation of that production regularly every seventh day, is not. Similarly, there were times during Israel's journeying when they were not within miles of trees—camping in stony plains or deserts where the natural tamarisk manna could not be produced. The most striking aspect of this consideration lies in the fact that the first occasion of the manna was here in the Wilderness of Sin where there were no tamarisks or trees of any kind, no local natural source of food at all. Whatever it was that descended from the skies to the surface of that burning plain it must have been wind-borne from afar if it had its origin on earth at all. Perhaps that was why the children of Israel were convinced throughout their subsequent history that the manna that sustained their fathers during that terrible trek through the wilderness had in fact come from heaven itself. God had “*given them of the corn of heaven; man did eat angel's food*” sang the Psalmist many centuries later (Psa. 78. 24-25). Whatever the true nature of this heaven-sent provision for Israel's needs, there is no doubt that if the story is true then the normal processes of Nature were controlled and manipulated in a very special and exceptional fashion by the powers of Heaven to bring about so marvellous a happening.

There is a very general impression that the manna was the only food Israel had during their wandering in Sinai but this is not demonstrated by the narrative and neither is it in accord with common-sense. For a great part of the forty years they would have used the flesh of their flocks and herds for meat. Much of the natural annual increase of their animals must have gone that way. Date palms were numerous and dates would have occupied a prominent place in their bill of fare as it did to all Middle Eastern peoples. Sinai at the time was well forested and boasted fruit trees of several kinds, a few of which survive to this day. Milk from their herds, wild honey

from the land and quite a few other items were available whilst they travelled in any of the fertile areas; only when they crossed desert places did they really run short of food. The only serious lack they had was of bread—a nomadic people constantly on the move is not able to plant and harvest grain of any kind. It seems from the account that the real function of the manna was to substitute for this missing grain and it is noteworthy that it is always referred to as “bread” and “corn” from heaven. It might well be, therefore, that the truth about the manna is that it was, mainly at any rate, a widespread and altogether unusually continuous deposit of the edible lichens described, carried on the wind from the fertile highlands of Arabia on the east—fertile in those days although barren to-day—combined with the tamarisk honey substance when they were in forested areas. In 1841 and again in 1846 districts to the south-west of the Caspian Sea experienced a rain of such lichens, carried by the wind more than three hundred miles from the eastern side of the Sea. Noticing that sheep ate the stuff with apparent relish, the peasants gathered it in the form of grains the size of hailstones, ground and baked it into bread and found it an acceptable substitute for their usual cereal foods. What happened on that occasion might easily have been that which happened to Israel in the desert. The Power that controlled the winds to make the Red Sea crossing a possibility could equally well control those same winds so that no manna arrived over Sinai on the sabbath day, and so

every requirement of the narrative is satisfied.

For the present, then, the situation was saved. Camped as they were in a burning desert which could provide no food, God had shown them that Nature has illimitable resources and that by His overruling providence those resources could be at their service. The flocks of quails, the hordes of busily working tamarisk insects, the masses of wind-carried lichen, were as nothing to all that was in Nature's treasuries. The lesson was there to learn, if Israel would learn it. God is ready to divert and modify the normal working of natural forces in order to meet an emergency, and asks only that men should believe that, and look to Him for help when their own unaided grasp of the powers of Nature is insufficient to meet their need. That is what lies behind every miracle, God controlling Nature to bring about a desired end.

The tragedy of Israel was that after the wonder of the moment was past, the underlying principle was forgotten and men lost faith at the very next crisis.

At the moment, however, Israel was on the crest of the wave. They had food for the present and Moses had given the word to march. The seemingly endless desert was coming to an end. On the southern horizon, as they picked their way over the flinty ground of the Wilderness of Sin, rose mountains, the lofty red granite peaks of Central Sinai, advance guardians of the sacred mountain, Mount Sinai itself. The host took courage and pressed on.

*(To be continued)*

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## BORN AGAIN

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*“Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” (John 3. 3).*

At first sight these seem strange words, and that is what the Jewish leader, Nicodemus, thought, to whom they were first addressed. But he has not been the only one to be puzzled by Jesus' curious expression, and many who have claimed to be Christians have not fully realised what is meant by being “born again”. Yet leaders in the Early Church, like Peter and Paul, based much of their teaching upon this conversation which Christ had with the “master in Israel”.

Other religions point men to a Creator and in this the Hebrew faith of Abraham was foremost. Its basic teachings were crystallised in the Law given through Moses. Further enlightenment came by Israel's prophets. The

moral and spiritual commandments which God's ancient people were given did much to sanctify their lives and direct their religious worship toward God. So it has been with many people during the last two thousand years. To them Jesus has been a great moral and social reformer, and inasmuch as His precepts have been observed they have produced better men and women. He did much more than interpret Israel's religion into the life and needs of his own day. He set forth in clear and direct language a way of salvation from sin which was new and distinct from any other of which men had ever heard. Yet it was not so different from Old Testament teaching that those who were familiar with it should have found it hard to understand Jesus. Unfortunately, their spiritual life had

become stagnant and useless. The religious teachers of Jesus' day were more concerned with ritual and observance of their meaningless regulations to care about the important aspects of their faith. Hence the question from the lips of the leader of the people "How can these things be?"

Before anyone can undergo this experience of being "reborn", it is necessary to recognise that men of themselves are incapable of obtaining a release from evil. They have sought remedies by social and moral education, they have endeavoured to explain away sin by theory, they have suggested by scientific ideas that mankind is getting better and better and therefore less sinful. But these suggestions lead men further from God, and result in death, because the only solution to human problems is to be found in the way God has appointed.

And that way is found in the teachings of the New Testament, which begin with the words of Jesus. This rebirth, as Jesus went on to show Nicodemus, is not birth in the natural or physical sense. It is a new life, spiritual life, which begins in the human heart. The seed is the Word of God, and as it germinates and develops it follows the same pattern as the life of Jesus. The new life, however, cannot grow alongside sin. They who wish to follow Jesus as His disciple must renounce sin, repent and realise that the only way to be saved from sin is through Jesus and his death on the cross. Only then can our old way of life come to an end and we are, in a sense, resurrected into a new life in Christ.

The flagrant sinner is not the only one who is in need of "rebirth". There are many good-living folk, who may or may not claim to be Christians, who do not make a full and whole hearted confession of sin and a need to follow Christ in every aspect of life. They may be self sufficient, self righteous people. They may have a vague idea that when they die, if they've been good enough they'll go to heaven along with all other good people instead of going to that other place about which they don't like to think too much. Conditions for "being born again" are not likely to be popular since they conflict with natural pride. Old habits of thought, speech and manner of life will have to be more than reformed, for a fresh start is needed. Life in the home, in our place of work, and most important of all, in our place of worship, will assume an entirely new outlook. The driving force of life is no longer our own faulty ability, but as Paul wrote in Galatians 2. 20 "*I am crucified*

*with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me*". Paul meant by "crucified with Christ" that his old life as Saul of Tarsus had ended for ever. He died as an ordinary man when he saw Christ on the Damascus road, and although there was no physical change, intellectual and spiritual transformation began at once. So with all who accept Jesus as their Saviour and become new men and women in Christ; they become dynamic personalities, full of the vitality of love which was so apparent in Jesus.

The outward appearance to other people may not seem such a dramatic change as occurred in Paul the apostle. He had wilfully committed the most violent and terrible sins against the Christian church. Then, completely reversing his former life, he became the greatest champion of Christ. Yet the "turning about" which Paul experienced was due to the radical change in his allegiance from Satan to Christ and this must be so for every believer. Ultimately the spiritual and intellectual revolution within the heart will bear a rich fruitage in the life.

Being born again is not some difficult academic problem. It is only hard because human nature is stubborn and selfish, preferring outward pride and respectability rather than being broken and humbled, least of all at the foot of the cross of Christ. To the human heart the cross is nothing more than an obstacle to progress or something too debased to trifle with, yet to those who accept Jesus as their Saviour it is that which brings new light and joy into the life. It brings light because it releases men from their burden of sin, and joy follows as new purpose and hope is discovered. What is sin? That is a wide and important question and not answerable in a few lines. It is anything which is not in harmony with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is anything that will not submit to the will of God and which hinders the new life in Christ from proper development. The uncertainties and doubts of the human mind must be swept away by the realities of Christ's love for mankind. Not just a general love, but a great, far reaching and sympathetic love for every individual sinner. May this new life begin in the lives of all who seek Jesus, and continue until the day dawn when it shall have found its fulness in resurrection glory and reach its ripened fruitage.





Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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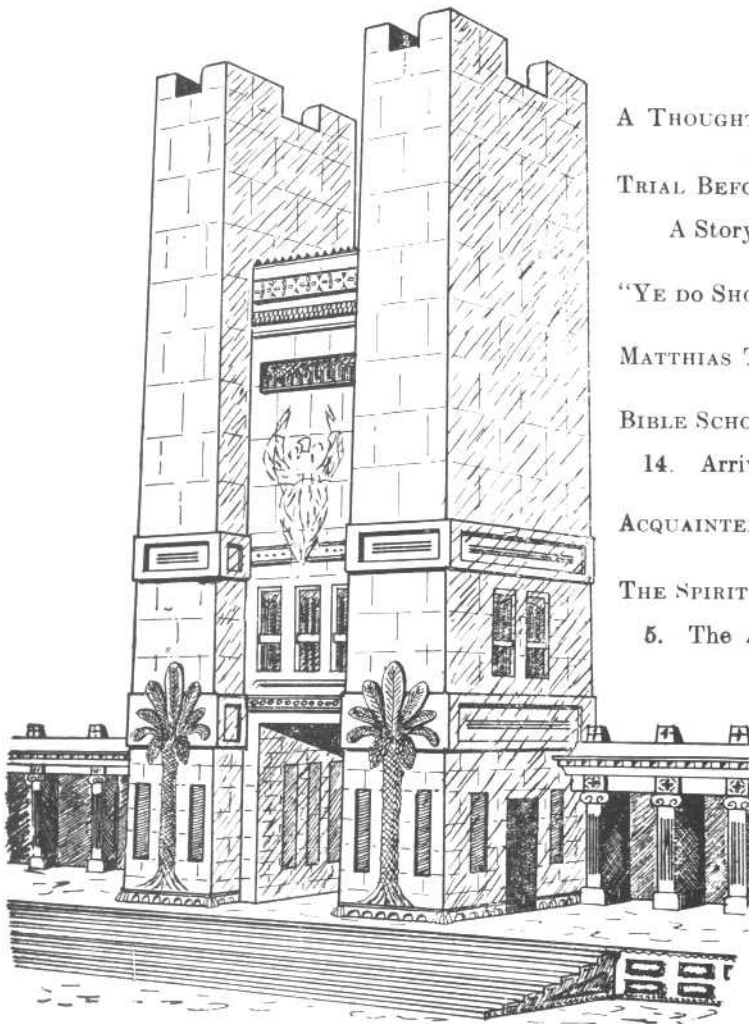
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### A Thought for the Month

It is a commonplace for men in the public eye to talk about the danger of mass starvation consequent upon the rapidly expanding population of the world, and it is well known that even now by far the majority of the earth's inhabitants do not get enough to eat. In consequence we get learned discourses about the necessity of establishing "farms" at the bottom of the seas around our coasts in order to tap a new and rich source of food supply; some hardy souls are at this moment living in a submarine construction two hundred feet below the surface to discover the possibilities inherent in this new and exciting way of life. Someone else, however, has just found out that the vast and increasing quantities of household detergents now being poured into the sea from the drainage systems of civilised lands is killing all sea life to an appreciable distance out from land, so that the one process appears likely to cancel out the other.

Prof. Jose de Castro, Chairman of the United Nations Food Organisation, showed more than ten years ago that this idea of the earth's inability to grow food for its expanding population is based upon misapprehension of the facts. He established that high birth-rates go with hunger conditions and that the more well-fed a community the slower its rates of increase. The answer to present population problems, he said, lies in the better use of available land so that all have enough to eat. Only one-eighth of the possible farming land in the world is at present under cultivation for food, and if this area was merely doubled there would be food to spare for everyone.

The pressing need, then, if Prof. Castro is right, is for investigation, not into bizarre experiments under the seas or endeavours to synthesise foodstuffs from inert chemicals, but to make better use of Nature's bounty in

the land we have got. The physical life of man is sustained by means of solar energy through the medium of growing plants. Plants absorb sunlight in conjunction with carbon dioxide and water vapour from the air and produce food for men and animals. Only an infinitesimal fraction of the energy in sunlight is normally used in this process. But it has been calculated that if means could be found to utilise as little as one per cent of the solar energy falling upon one acre of ground for six months, something like four tons of carbohydrates would be produced. At this rate one man could live off the produce from a patch of ground forty feet square.

Perhaps so satisfactory a solution to the problem will not be realised in man's day. His inventive genius, marvellous as it is, may not be quick enough to keep abreast of the rising population. In a century from now, say the experts, there will be between two and three times as many on earth as at present. But the glowing pen-pictures of the Millennium painted by the Hebrew prophets are so often set against a background of earth's fertility and abundance—"the desert shall blossom as the rose"—that one might well conclude here is another instance of man's extremity proving God's opportunity. In that coming day of Christ's reign there shall be food for all, for "the earth shall yield her increase".

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#### Memorial

The true anniversary of our Lord's death falls this year on Thursday, April 15 after 6.0 p.m. and this is the appropriate time for the Memorial service.

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#### Gone from us

Bro. H. Surry (Forest Gate)

*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"*

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## TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

No. 16 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

The seventy robed figures watched impassively as the mail-clad soldiery marched their prisoner down the steps into the arena, and with a clash of arms left him there, tramping stolidly up again to the rear wall of the building, where they stood, indifferent spectators of the drama which was about to be enacted. Opposite to them there rose the successive tiers of seats forming a great semi-circle, filled now with the members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious court of Jewry. On the one side sat the Pharisees, on the other the Sadducees, members of the two great parties into which Judaism was divided. The Pharisees stood for the old fundamentalist faith and the traditional separation of Israel from the rest of the world; they accepted the rule of Rome only under protest and would willingly rise in rebellion if there was any good chance of success. The Sadducees were the modernists, just as rigid in their observance of the Mosaic Law but interpreting the ancient Scriptures on a rationalistic basis with rejection of the miraculous and the supernatural. They stood for co-operation with Rome and the maintenance of the established order. In the centre sat Ananias the reigning High Priest, himself a Sadducee, his dark, lowering countenance expressive of the avarice and malevolence for which he was notorious. Now he glared at the prisoner who had dared to challenge the system he upheld and from which he extracted so rich a store of illicit profit. He looked round as if seeking an accuser and motioned impatiently for the proceedings to begin.

There was an uneasy silence, broken at last by the accused man, Paul. He knew that the Sanhedrin had no formal charge ready to bring against him. They had been ordered by Lysias, the Roman commander, to assemble and sift this thing to the bottom. Lysias wanted to know what offence against Jewish religious law, if any, had been committed by this Roman citizen whom Fate had most unceremoniously thrust into his hands. The riot of the previous day had told him nothing; if he let the man go he might find himself in trouble, and if he continued to detain him he might find he had done the wrong thing and still find himself in trouble. He stood on the raised vestibule at the back with his men and mentally invoked the wrath of all the gods of

Rome upon these pestiferous Jews.

"Men and brethren" he heard Paul say with urbane courtesy "*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day . . .*" "*Smite the blasphemer on the mouth*" interrupted Ananias from his seat halfway up the benches. Paul swung round to face the direction from which the voice had come. At the distance at which he stood, with his known defective sight, he probably could not discern individuals clearly, only a rather vague assembly of white-clad figures, and he could well have been unable to know which of his judges had spoken. But he was indignant at the injustice of the remark. "*God shall smite thee, thou whited wall*" he retorted, "*for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?*"

A ripple of anger went round the crowded assembly. "*Revilest thou God's High Priest?*" someone called out, and Paul was immediately apologetic. "*I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest*" he explained. He knew, none better, that it was also against the Law to abuse the leaders of the nation and even though Ananias was a notorious evil-doer, and despite the fact that he held his high office not by right of descent from the Levitical family of Aaron but by appointment of the Romans, Paul knew that it was proper to observe the reverence due to the exalted position of High Priest of Israel. So he apologised and admitted his knowledge of the Law. The expression in ch. 23. 1 "*earnestly beholding the council*" where "earnestly" has the meaning of looking with strained attention or great concentration seems to support the conclusion that Paul was having difficulty in perceiving the identity of his interlocutors.

There was another pause. Somewhat mollified at the Apostle's ready apology, the Sanhedrin still seemed unable to commence the proceedings with a definite charge. Lysias began to get impatient. If the Sanhedrin, of all authorities in Israel, did not know where to begin he might as well turn Paul into the street and wash his hands of the whole affair.

The Apostle resolved the impasse and in so doing not only precipitated an immediate outcry but also started a two thousand years' old argument as to whether his tactics were justified. Looking round the circle he per-

ceived that the assembly was composed in roughly equal parts of Pharisees and Sadducees. He had sat in enough assemblies of the Sanhedrin himself in earlier years to know all the signs and indications. And he seems to have decided there and then that if no one was ready with a formal charge of profaning the Temple—which false allegation was the cause of the riot on the previous day—then he would make a clear statement of his personal theological position and have the issue determined on that basis. In making this decision Paul was conscious that much of what he would say would be endorsed by the Pharisee party because in fact there was little in the theological position of the Christian faith with which they would differ. The Pharisees believed in the coming of a Messianic Kingdom when both the just and the unjust would be raised from the dead to receive according to their works; they looked for Messiah to come in glory to exalt His faithful ones with Him and overthrow all the powers of evil. They expected Messiah to expel the Romans and raise faithful Israel to a leading position in the world to be God's ministers to the ends of the earth. Many of them could only see Messiah coming as a military conqueror in power and great glory, but a not inconsiderable number did perceive something of the prophecies relating to His coming first in humiliation and suffering and death. According to Acts 6. 7 a considerable number of the priests had accepted the faith and these were almost certainly mostly Pharisees. Paul must have felt very sincerely that he was much more likely to have a sympathetic hearing this day from the Pharisees than from the Sadducees in this Sanhedrin. He broke the silence. "*Men and brethren*" he cried, "*I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question*".

There has been severe criticism of Paul through the centuries on account of this statement. It has been argued that Paul, as a Christian, could no longer lawfully call himself a Pharisee and that he was seeking by a subterfuge to create dissension between the two parties on the Sanhedrin. It has also been said that his claim that the question at issue was his doctrine of the resurrection was also untrue; that the Jewish leaders' complaint against him was his teaching of the equality of Jew and Gentile in the sight of God. Commentators have shaken hoary heads and preachers have delivered sorrowful homilies over this regrettable lapse on the part of the

great Apostle. But a more careful consideration of the circumstances could lead to a different conclusion.

Paul found himself, quite unexpectedly, standing before the supreme religious authority of his nation and faced with a unique opportunity of testifying to them the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. It was evident to him, as it was to the watching Roman commander, that the High Priest and his supporters had no formal charge to make and no idea of what crime to accuse him. They had been compelled by Lysias to convene this session at short notice; it is obvious from the account that they were unready and uncertain how to proceed. It is a fact that Paul's enemies were the Sadducees, and the Pharisee contingent was only present because of compulsion and in any case were much more moderate than their opponents. To suggest that Paul's Christianity involved the disavowal of his standing as a Pharisee betokens a misapprehension of the position. Paul could only repudiate his old status by denying the theological and moral basis of Pharisaism, and this he could not do without equally denying his Christianity. The fact that many of the Pharisees of our Lord's day and of Paul's day were hypocrites and enemies of the ethics of Christ makes no more difference to that fact than the hypocrisy and worldliness of many professing Christians does to the use of the name Christian by sincere believers. Paul was therefore perfectly justified in claiming that he was still a Pharisee as he stood before the Sanhedrin.

It is highly probable that he was interrupted in mid-sentence. In saying that it was of the hope and resurrection of the dead that he was being called in question he seems very clearly to be leading up to the central feature of Pauline theology, the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, died for all men and by his death ensured all men a full and adequate opportunity both to hear Christ preached, and to accept him, and so become reconciled to God and enter into eternal life, before the Divine purpose with humanity is brought to its climax. This is what in later days has been called Paul's universalism. He does not claim that all men must eventually be saved but he does assert that all men must have an opportunity. And above all things he does insist that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, must share in the resurrection from the dead and receive the benefits of the Messianic era, when Christ will reign until He hath put all enemies, including the last enemy of all,

death, under His feet. The Divine purpose in the resurrection of the dead was a recurring theme in Paul's discourses and it looks very much as though, before the Sanhedrin, he was going to develop this theme and shew the Pharisaic party at least that the faith he proclaimed was that which they had endorsed and defended for so many generations, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfilment of their professed expectations.

He did not get so far. His mention of the resurrection from the dead immediately provoked discussion in the meeting. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or in anything else of an apparently supernatural nature. There is no need to think, as is so often thought, that at this moment the assembly developed into a riot. There was dissension. We are told, "*and the multitude was divided*". Probably there arose a babble of voices as individuals or little groups of the two factions began arguing among themselves. As the discussion grew more heated, the central figure, standing alone below them, was forgotten. Finally some of the Pharisee persuasion managed to "catch the Speaker's eye" and were able to make their generally agreed view made known. It was to the effect that they saw no cause for an accusation of any kind against Paul; that they must allow for the possibility of his having received a Divine revelation and in such case must take care lest they be found to be fighting against God. Such an arrant taunt to the Sadducees, who would not admit the possibility of supernatural revelations, and the crass defection of the Pharisees from the plot to get rid of Paul, which ranged probably half the Sanhedrin on his side, provoked the fury of the Sadducees and this time "*there arose a great dissension*". This quite evidently was a near riot, the venerable members behaving in a most undignified fashion toward each other, with not improbably the impetuous rush of a few in the direction of the prisoner with a view to settling the matter there and then. Claudius Lysias, at any rate, "*fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them*", considered things had gone far enough. At a curt word of command the stalwart legionaries ran down the stairs and plunged into what was apparently quickly degenerating into a "free for all" and emerged with their usual efficiency, escorting Paul safely back into the garrison of Antonia. The unfortunate commander was no nearer the solution of his problem than before.

That night, safe in the castle but still a

prisoner, the Apostle saw a vision—it might have been a dream; it matters not;—he saw his Lord standing beside his bed. "*Be of good cheer, Paul*" he heard Him say "*for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome*." This was the third of the four occasions on which Paul testifies that he saw the resurrected Christ. In what form he saw Him we know not; only that each appearance came at a time of unusually intense mental and spiritual stress, and each time he received an intimation of his future course which was later realised in fact. This vision, or dream, or whatever kind of revelation it was, must have been a source of comfort and peace of mind to the Apostle. It was his dearest wish to preach Christ in Rome before he died; now he had the assurance that by some means not yet apparent he would indeed do so.

The unfortunate Lysias was to have no peace of mind, however. During the following afternoon one of his centurions came to see him, leading a Jewish youth. The youth, he explained, had come into the barracks with a request to see Paul, a request which was apparently granted without demur, and Paul had now asked that he be brought to Lysias with a message for his private ear. At mention of Paul's name Lysias might well have murmured resignedly "Oh no, not again!" but so far as can be discerned from the narrative he seems to have been a very even-tempered kind of man, for he readily took the lad aside out of earshot, and asked him what he had to say. Ch. 23. 19 has a very human and very real touch, the kind of thing that could only be noticed if the narrative is a truthful record of an actual happening, when it says that "*the chief captain took him by the hand and went with him aside privately*". Some commentators suggest that Lysias, sympathetic with the lad's nervousness at being in the presence of so important a representative of Roman power, took his hand as a gesture to put him at ease. Nothing of the sort. Claudius Lysias had attained his present position of command by avoiding such mistakes as bring a soldier's life to a premature close. One such mistake was being left alone with a stranger when that stranger had a knife concealed on his person. This lad looked innocent enough, but a wise man always provided for such eventualities by taking hold of the stranger's right hand with his own left hand whilst they talked. Thus the stranger only had his left hand available whilst the other, Lysias in this case, could be

ready with his right if necessary. (The third chapter of Judges records a case where the system failed, to the disadvantage of Eglon, king of Moab. His visitor, with the knife, was Ehud the Benjamite, intent on delivering Israel from Eglon's oppression, and *Ehud was left-handed!*) The youth turned out to be Paul's nephew—neither he nor his mother, Paul's sister, are mentioned again and it is not known whether they were or were not Christians, or even permanent residents in Jerusalem, although the latter is more likely than the former—and he had come to bring news of a plot against Paul's life which he wanted now to recount to Lysias.

It seems some forty Jews had taken a solemn oath not to eat and drink until they had killed Paul. The plot was for the High Priest to request that Lysias bring the prisoner before the Sanhedrin once more in order to clarify some point or other of his defence. This, incidentally, makes it appear as though Paul had actually been able to say a lot more to the Sanhedrin than is recorded in Acts 23. Whilst thus engaged the conspirators would crowd around and assassinate him. A riot could be staged at the crucial moment, and when it was all over and the Romans had cleared the scene it would be found that most regrettably their prisoner had met with a fatal accident.

The commander's features hardened as he listened. He was beginning to realise the depth of hatred which pursued Paul. This matter was altogether more serious than he had supposed. He must have reflected too, that if the plot had succeeded he himself would have been in trouble for losing a prisoner, and might even have been accused by his superiors of collaboration with the Jews. Bribery was by no means a thing unknown. It did not take Lysias very long to come to a decision. This prisoner was too hot to hold; it was high time the whole matter was referred to higher hands. He dismissed Paul's nephew with an injunction—for the young man's own sake as much as anything—not to tell anyone that he had revealed the plot. He then called to his side two of his centurions and instructed them to collect a force of two hundred light infantry, two hundred spearmen, and seventy mounted cavalry, to set out at nine o'clock that evening and take Paul to the Governor of Judea, Antonius Felix, at Cæsarea sixty miles away. While his men hurried away to implement his orders, he himself repaired to his own apartments to write a letter.

This letter from the military commander of the Jerusalem garrison to the Roman Governor of Judea at his official residence in Cæsarea is a model of conciseness and efficiency. It is evident that somehow or other St. Luke obtained a copy or saw the original; how he had access to official documents is not revealed, but he certainly shews throughout the Book of Acts a genius for ferretting out original information which would have placed him in the forefront of Press reporters today. He seems to have reproduced the letter in full.

*"Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, greeting.*

*This man was taken of the Jews and should have been killed of them; then came I with an armed force and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their Sanhedrin; and I perceived him to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of imprisonment. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent him immediately to thee, and commanded his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him.*

*Farewell".*

It is impossible not to admire the resolution and decisiveness with which this probably hard-bitten soldier went about his business. Everything in the story depicts Claudius Lysias as a level-headed, fair-minded, quick-thinking man who feared no one and would be brow-beaten by no one. One is led to contrast his behaviour on this occasion with the weak, vacillating Pontius Pilate thirty years earlier when faced with a very similar situation. Lysias must have been fully aware that the powerful Sadducean priesthood might very easily misrepresent his own conduct in the matter to the Governor in outwitting them, but he despised the risk. To this stalwart upholder of the *Pax Romana*, right was right and Roman law was Roman law. Convinced himself of Paul's innocence he could legally have set him free at once, but he was tolerably certain that would only result in Paul's death at the hands of Ananias' hired thugs, and Paul was a Roman citizen, so that it was Lysias' bounden duty to protect him. So he decided to send him to Cæsarea.

There is a typical "old soldier" touch in the letter where Lysias tells his superior that he went to Paul's rescue in the riot "having



understood that he was a Roman" (i.e. Roman citizen). Actually, of course, he was not apprised of that fact until after Paul had been taken and bound for scourging. It would be highly undesirable for that particular part of the story ever to come to the ears of Felix; in all probability Lysias had got to know Paul well enough to feel confident of his silence on that matter and so could not resist the opportunity of putting up the best case he could for himself.

A vivid side-light on the ferocity with which the militant Jews prosecuted their ends, even under Roman rule, is shown by the fact that a force of four hundred and seventy men was considered necessary to get Paul safely out of Jerusalem, even at dead of night. One needs to read the pages of Josephus or some of the Roman writers to realise the difficulty of maintaining law and order in what was universally admitted to be the most turbulent and difficult-to-govern State in the Empire.

So, under cover of the friendly darkness, when all good people were in their homes and asleep, the Apostle left Jerusalem for the last

time, riding in the middle of a formidable armed force. They took the Roman military road, traces of which still remain, to the garrison town of Antipatris, halfway between Jerusalem and the sea. That was a journey of thirty five miles; it must have been six o'clock the following morning when they arrived. At this point, the danger of interference being past, the foot soldiers left them and Paul was taken by the seventy mounted men the remaining twenty five miles to the Governor's residence in Cæsarea.

Felix read his subordinate's letter, enquired as to Paul's particular provincial status, promised him a full hearing when his accusers had arrived, and instructed that in the meantime he be given lodgings in the prætorium. The Governor was apparently going to treat Paul as innocent for the moment so that he was at any rate saved from incarceration in a dungeon. Now, at last, he had time to reflect on the events of the past few days, and was doubtless allowed the company of Luke and other friends.

(To be continued)

## **"YE DO SHOW THE LORDS DEATH"**

*A Memorial  
exhortation*

In the ordering of the Lord's providence the due time to remember in a special manner the death of our Lord draws near. This special act of remembrance we perform in compliance with our Lord's direction. The story has been told so many times that every phase of truth associated therewith cannot but be well understood by all who see that our Lord was the true Passover Lamb on the higher plane of God's purpose.

But the story will always bear repetition at this season, in order to stimulate to greater intensity our appreciation of that sacrifice, and what it did for us, and to prompt us with greater earnestness and sincerity to renew our own covenant with our God, to die with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Every year that goes brings us a step nearer "the year of My redeemed", when the greatest and grandest deliverance in all the annals of time will be brought to pass. Each passing year should invest the act of remembrance with greater solemnity and beauty, enabling each participant to carry away a deeper sense of reverence and gratitude than from any preceding occasion. Another year's crucial experiences and refinements should have prepared our hearts to receive the

emblems of our slain Lamb with deeper appreciation and satisfaction than hitherto. The leadings of Divine providence should have created a keener appetite for the "true bread of God"—a sharper hungering and thirsting for the privileges spread out on the Lord's table, and though we may eat and drink our daily portions to meet each day's spiritual needs throughout the year, the very special and sacred meaning attached by our Lord to the simple annual service of Remembrance should cause us more ardently to approach the Christian's festal board.

Carrying our minds back to that last eventful night when our Lord gathered the little company around the Paschal board, we find them following first the ancient order of procedure, established away back in the days of Moses, and revised and augmented as time went by. They had met privately in a room prepared for them, on the anniversary of the actual night during which their fathers had also gone behind closed blood-sprinkled doors to eat the flesh of a slain lamb, and to wait, fully robed and shod, for the Angel of God to pass through the land. Nothing that Jesus said or did in the early part of the night's proceedings changed the order or sequence or the

meaning of the great event they were keeping in memory. They ate the Passover together exactly as their fathers had done down the centuries. Authorities tell us that the Jews in Jesus' day partook of the flesh of a lamb and unleavened bread to remind them of the hasty meal prepared and eaten in Egypt, of a blend of herbs and vegetables consisting of coriander and endive, lettuce and horehound, thistle leaves and succory, to remind them of the bitterness of the bondage their fathers endured, and crushed fruit and nuts brought to table in shape of a brick, to impress on their minds the arduous labours of the mud-pits and the brick-kilns. They drank together the expressed juice of the vine, from a cup which from times long distant had been called "the Cup of the Covenant".

If this assortment of fruits, herbs, bread and flesh had become the established fare at the Paschal board, no valid reason exists for doubting that these were the ingredients that had been prepared by the owner of the room and set out in order by the two disciples (Mark 14. 13), Peter and John (Luke 22. 8) in readiness for the arrival later of Jesus and the rest of the band.

As they thus ate and drank and sang their way through the ancient feast they called to remembrance the slaying of the lamb, the sprinkling of the doorposts, the extraordinary postures of the participants, the angel's midnight flight, the morning's early commotion as prince and peasant rushed to Pharaoh, the royal audience accorded to Moses, and the imperative order to "be gone". They would remember that Israel's first-born sons had been "spared" as the angel, with flashing sword, "passed over" their huts or tents. They would not fail to be reminded that God had spared those first-borns for Himself, and that He hallowed them to Himself and His purposes in the dead of that eventful night. Then with the early flush of dawn the hosts of the Lord began their march of liberty and to life with God. The old, old story was enshrined in every drop and particle on the Paschal board, and every year, each generation drew forth the same meaning and purpose. It was a memorial—a looking back—a remembrance of the great things which God had done.

The usual procedure ended, Jesus took a piece of the remaining bread, and raising over it a special prayer, passed it to his disciples, saying "Take this and eat—this represents my body". He took the cup, in which yet remained a quantity of the juice of the grape, and

again giving thanks to God, passed it with the words "*Drink ye all of it. This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Matt. 26. 27-28). This was new procedure, and had an entirely new meaning. Yet it was superimposed on the old. It was still intended to be "the Passover". It was still intended to presage deliverance. It was like going back to the night in Egypt to start it all over again, but on a higher plane. It still required a Lamb to be slain, it still required the sprinkling of the blood (1 Pet. 1. 2); it still had special application to the first-borns among the families of Israel. It was still intended to be the prelude to the breaking of bonds, and to the start of a journey towards the land of promise and of life with God. For the first-borns it still meant salvation from the destroying angel's sword. For the remainder of the house of Israel it meant emancipation from a great and terrible taskmaster so that they could enter anew into covenant relationship with God.

The ultimate purpose of the Covenants was to constitute Israel a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, that through them the outcast families of the earth may be regathered to God and blessed with eternal life. That great objective was and still is God's great purpose. But it needed a better Lamb than Israel's paschal lamb. It needed a better firstborn to be brought forth on a higher plane, and to a higher ministry. Jesus came to earth to be that Paschal Lamb. Jesus went back to Heaven the firstborn among many brethren who are the Church of the First-born, "whose names are written in heaven". In that quiet, upper room, a great change began. The old order, observed by Jesus to the very letter, came to its end. The new order began. Jesus' act and claim to put Himself in place of the Paschal Lamb, and His invitation to His followers to eat the bread in lieu of eating Him, carried the Paschal idea and the Paschal work to a higher plane. His death that very day provided the slain Lamb for Israel's "Redemption" feast. His surrendered life provided the Redemption blood. From that upper room on that eventful night influences went forth which yet will change the world. Already they have changed the lives of those disciples, and of others who believed on Jesus through their word. And they will do much more as they constrain Israel and the nations into the way of God.

But here and now it is not this wider field of blessing and blessedness we seek to contemplate, but that one central fact on which

the whole redemptive plan reposed. It required the death of our beloved Lord. There was no other way to effect release. Jesus, the Lamb of God, must die. No one in heaven or earth could meet the great need. All depended upon Him—upon Him alone! Jesus knew this. He knew the seriousness of all He said and did. He faced the greatest issue of all time. But no cost to Him was too great to ensure the success of the Father's plan. His death would make redemption sure, so He went to His death with open eyes and understanding heart. He offered Himself without spot or stain, a sacrifice of noblest worth. He poured out His soul to death.

For one night in the yearly round it is the Christian's privilege and delight to show forth the Lord's death, to think and speak of His voluntary surrender to the will of God, and commemorate the greatest sacrifice of all time. Each child of God knows and understands that every gracious privilege he or she enjoys flows from that sacrifice. Reconciliation and redemption, hope and expectation all spring from that unique surrender. The resounding hosannas of a world restored trace back to that unblemished offering. (Rev. 5. 12-13). That is the one event in the whole range of time which is inevitable and indispensable. It is the one thing needed—the one thing all-essential to make God's "yea" YEA! God's promises, though immutable, were all made with this in view. He was accounted "slain" from the dawn of time.

It is no light thing which we do. It stands related to eternal things. Once for all the holy

Lamb of God died. It can never occur again. In showing the Lord's death we make contact with the "imperatives" and "absolutes" of God's universal plan. We need to be humble and sincere in our approach to the table of the Lord. We need to purge out the least trace of the leaven of sin. We need to be hungry and athirst for Him, as the panting hart over the water brook. No matter how much the Cup may symbolise to each and all, apart from Him there could be no "bread", there could be no cup.

Let every one search the chambers of their hearts, and see to it that no earthly stain or earth-born cloud shall make them unworthy of approach to these hallowed and hallowing symbols of their beloved Lord's momentous sufferings, remembering as they eat the bread and sip the wine that they do show the Lord's death till He be come as the great Deliverer of all who are in chains.

Let them remember that that which they do shall be done by countless thousands when the story of His deathless love shall be made known to all, and that it is honour beyond compare to have a place among them in these dark days, to know their Lord and God, and walk in the footsteps of His worthy Son. Our opportunity to do this thing is nearly run. The outlook shows us that the Church's race is almost at an end. The last days should be the best, and to each and all, this commemoration should be the most solemn and encouraging of all. May the blessing of God be with each soul, as we turn our eyes and hearts to Him who died for us that we might live with Him.

*"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."*—Matt. 12. 37.

The Lord takes our words as an index of our heart condition. But since we are imperfect, it is not possible for us to be faultless in word and deed. Yet we are diligently and faithfully to seek to attain the perfect mastery of our words. We should be especially on guard in respect to evil speaking. Every tendency toward slander is to be checked. Whoever of us is reviled is not to revile again. These tendencies belong to the old nature. To be pleasing to the Master, we are to keep our hearts free from every form of evil. If this be done, the heart is rightly instructed of the Lord. Then we will know that we must make good whatever is wrong.

*"Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually."*—2 Kings, 4. 9.

Elisha himself was, in his life and spirit, the proof of his message. It is what we are, and not what we say, which does the most for God. We leave behind us, in every house we enter, some traces of God, of ourselves, or of the enemy. Some Christians cannot enter a house without leaving behind a wonderful consciousness of God's nearness; but some leave behind traces of their own personality—talent, will, energy. Others leave a strange, terrible unrest behind them; they have served the enemy in sowing strife, bitterness, evil speaking.

Let us never forget that our message is gauged by what men see in the messenger.



## MATTHIAS THE APOSTLE

An enquiry

To what extent was Matthias generally accepted as the twelfth Apostle in succession to Judas, after the latter's betrayal of Jesus? The outstanding position of St. Paul in later times has led to a very general feeling that he was the twelfth Apostle although there is no statement to that effect in the New Testament. He was certainly an Apostle, but conceivably of a different order, like Barnabas (Acts 14. 14) who is also called an Apostle. In any case St. Paul was virtually unknown to the Apostles—save Peter—or the Judean and Galilean churches for at least ten years after the Resurrection and it is unlikely that these believers would readily have accorded him the status of one of the Twelve unless and until they had become thoroughly familiar with him. The account in Acts 1. 15-26, relating how Matthias came to be selected as the successor to Judas immediately after the Ascension states plainly that he was accepted by the assembled church as such after prayer and the seeking of the Lord's will.

The question is sometimes raised as to the precise meaning of the phrase in Acts 2. 14 "*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said . . .*" Does this imply that Peter was included in the eleven or that he stood up with eleven others? If the latter, it is clear that Matthias was present and shared in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit with its miraculous gifts. This, in turn, if correct, would seem to imply Divine acceptance of Matthias as one of the Twelve.

The answer to the question lies in the usage of the preposition "*sun*" (with). Parallel instances in the New Testament seem conclusive that the meaning here is that Peter stood up with *eleven others*; there were twelve in all.

As illustration, note the following examples, Acts. 1. 14 "These all (apostles) continued . . . in prayer *with* the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and *with* his brethren."

Acts 1. 21-22 "Wherefore of these men . . . must one be ordained to be a witness *with* us of his resurrection."

Acts 3. 4 "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him *with* John."

Acts 3. 8 "And he, leaping up . . . entered *with* them into the temple."

Had the writer of Acts intended to convey that Peter was included in a total number of

eleven he would have used a different preposition meaning "*among*" as he did in fact use in numerous instances of which the following are examples.

Acts 1. 17 "He (Judas) was numbered *among* us."

Acts 4. 34 "Neither was there any *among* that lacked."

Acts 5. 12 "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought *among* the people."

It is true that Matthias is never mentioned again in the New Testament. His later life and career are completely unrecorded. In this he is not alone. Neither are those of the apostles Andrew, Thomas, Bartholemew, James of Alpheus and Simon the Zealot. Absence of further reference is evidently no indication of Divine non-recognition. It is more probable that Matthias continued to be recognised as one of the Twelve in Judean and Galilean circles of the Early Church and spent his life, as did others, in faithful pastoral and missionary labours among the home Churches, whilst Paul and Barnabas, Apostles to the Gentiles, wrought mightily in mission fields far away from the original birthplace of the Church.

The word Apostle means one sent forth, or one despatched as an ambassador. The Twelve Apostles were so named by Jesus because they specially represented him and went forth to preach his message. After his Ascension it was felt that the members of the Twelve should all have been witnesses of his resurrection, a logical enough conclusion if they were to continue as his representatives and ambassadors. Matthias was evidently one of the many believers who had seen the Lord after his resurrection, and also had accompanied with him during his lifetime from the beginning of his ministry (Acts 1. 21-22). Paul could claim by reason of his experience on the Damascus road to be a witness to the Lord's resurrection but not to have accompanied with him during his life on earth. The Apostleship of Paul was exercised in a different sphere and it is possible that after all it was Matthias who completed the number of the Twelve, at least in the eyes of Jerusalem Christians. In any case the Twelve separated soon after Pentecost and were scattered over the Eastern world; they never functioned as an entity again.

## BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

**EXODUS**

Part 14: Arrival at Sinai Exod. 17.1-18.27

The final stage of the journey to Mount Sinai was entered upon when Israel left the Wilderness of Sin. They now had some seventy miles to go, seventy miles of a gruelling climb over mountains and through narrow defiles, a difficult and dangerous march that taxed their powers of endurance to the uttermost. Only one major incident marked this last effort, the battle with the native Amalekites of Rephidim, and its sequel in the reunion of Moses with his wife and father-in-law. Exodus passes over the long march itself with only a few words and it is to Num. 33. 12-15 that we are indebted for the names of the intermediate places at which the people halted before reaching Rephidim.

The first encampment was at Dophkah. This name has not survived and no means exists whereby the site can be identified. The name itself means "the stairs of the rocks" and this seems to imply some kind of arduous mountainous ascent of sufficient local note to have been given a name. This clue at least indicates that having arrived at the southern boundary of the Wilderness of Sin, Moses had elected to turn inland and attempt what amounts to a short cut across the mountains instead of continuing along the flat sea coast and coming round to Sinai in a wide circle, which would have been much easier going and ensured a better supply of water and local food. It has been pointed out that "Dophkah" could very well be an adaptation of the Egyptian name Ta Mafka, a mountain on the edge of the copper mining territory and situated very much on the apparent line of route if Israel did indeed plunge into the mountains at this point. This makes it even harder to explain why Moses chose to go this way despite its greater difficulty, for an Egyptian military garrison was maintained at the mines. It can only be concluded that here again Israel was deliberately being led the hard way rather than the easy one further to develop their stamina and endurance.

So they entered the mountains, climbing steadily up the deep gorge known to-day as Wady Shellal, each steep rise being surmounted only to reveal another and yet more lofty one to be attempted. A modern traveller has described the district thus. "Huge precipices and peaks of every form, in bands and masses of grey, red, brown, green, chalk-

white and raven black, rose on every side. It seemed as if legions of evil spirits had united their strength and hostility to life in piling up the hard, naked, desolate, barren cliffs, pinnacles, peaks and perpendicular walls . . . Mighty walls of rock on both sides appeared to block up the way with masses hewn by Titans and heaped up one on the other. Red and black stones, broken as small as if by the hand of man, lay in great heaps or strewn the path, which led imperceptibly upwards, through passes disclosing fresh landscapes at the sight of which the pulses throbbed and a shudder ran through the frame. Countless pinnacles and peaks, cliffs and precipices, of every colour, white and grey, sulphurous yellow, blood red and ominous black, rose anew in wild confusion and to vast heights. The landscapes were of such almost unequalled desolation and wildness that even the Romans in after ages were appalled by their savage horrors." "Through such scenes" says another writer, "the host had advanced, surrounded and pressed together by gloomy defiles, the hanging rocks overhead apparently ready to topple down on them; stumbling over loose stones and wearily climbing up rocky paths; the herds of camels and cattle, and the flocks of sheep, blocking up the narrow gorges, and hindering the march of the men, women and children. The road which now opened before them must have looked like the valley of death. They would have been more than human if they had been able to endure, without murmur, experiences so different from those which they had fancied liberty would bring them."

Somewhere in the heart of this terrible country the host of Israel rested in camp for a day or two. This was the halt at Dophkah, probably some seventeen miles from their last camp in the Wilderness of Sin. Nothing is said about events at this halt; perhaps the people were so exhausted by their fearful trek that they had no strength left even to murmur. At any rate, their next few days were spent in the same grim surroundings, making their way up the gorges now called Sidreh and Magmarah, until they stood on the very summit of the mountainous country. After that it was down the gorge of Mokatteb until with unutterable relief and joy the leaders in the forefront descried far below them the green trees and sparkling rivers of

the valley of Feiran.

This part of the country, Magmarah and Mokatteb, is the scene of the renowned Sinai inscriptions. The rocks in these two gorges are covered with a wealth of incised letters, words and symbols, dating from the earliest Egyptian period to Greek and Roman times. All kinds of interpretations have been placed upon these ancient records and in the latter part of the nineteenth century there were insistent claims that the inscriptions had been made by the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. This theory is very generally discounted to-day and it is generally thought that the proximity of these valleys to the copper mines, which were in operation over a period of at least fifteen hundred years, is the reason for this district possessing such a wealth of inscriptions.

Now the host was down in the green valley, the longest and most fertile in all Sinai, winding its course for many miles all the way to Mount Sinai itself. Here, after the rigours and hardships of the immediate past, they came to Alush and there encamped. Alush cannot now be identified but is probably at the point where Israel emerged finally from the mountains into the level valley. From this place another eighteen miles brought them to Rephidim, where Exodus 17 resumes the narrative.

At Rephidim the valley opens out into a wide plain which extends to Mount Sinai seventeen miles farther on. Here Israel encamped and immediately ran into trouble. The water supply failed. Lower down the valley there had evidently been a sufficient supply from the many streams coming from the mountains, but now that they were nearer to the ultimate sources, the river in the valley was not so copious and evidently proved insufficient for the needs of so great a host. As usual, the people murmured and came to Moses with their complaint. Instructed by the Lord, Moses struck the rock of the mountain-side with his staff, and water flowed out sufficient to meet the needs of the people.

Stated as baldly as that—and the Scripture narrative in Exod. 17. 6 is bald—the occurrence appears to be completely supernatural, a miracle of the first order, and has been doubted and scoffed at accordingly. In fact, however, it is a well known practice in Sinai for the Bedouin to obtain water in this fashion. At any place where stratified or shale-like rocks, such as limestone or sandstone, exist, subterranean water accumulates, and a blow

with a heavy instrument sufficient to break off or dislodge a piece of rock strata, delivered at the right spot by a Bedouin trained in knowing where to strike, will produce a gush of water which endures until the internal cavities which have thus been tapped are exhausted. The most reasonable view of this particular incident is that Moses set the example in showing how water might be procured by this means; this being accepted as the direction of God, the men of Israel would set to work on their own account to tap the rocks around them and so the crisis passed.

A more serious threat was at hand, however. *"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim."* The Amalekites, with the Midianites, were the resident population of Sinai. Nomadic in their habits, they moved about the Peninsula with their flocks and herds as was dictated by the availability of pasture and water. They evidently viewed the movements of this people lately migrated out of Egypt with suspicion; whilst these had kept along the sea-coast they left them alone, but now they were in the Feiran valley making for the best part of Sinai the Amalekites feared for the adequacy of their food supplies. So they attacked.

A new character figures in the narrative at this time. Joshua, the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim, was selected by Moses to command the defending forces. His was no enviable task. This was the first occasion of actual warfare in which the Israelites had been involved. As slaves in Egypt they obviously were not permitted the possession of arms nor to learn the arts of war. Their utter unpreparedness in this direction is indicated by the state of abject terror to which they were reduced when Pharaoh's cavalry pursued them at the Red Sea. But already there had come a change. Whether Joshua had already been chosen and had been training a selected body of men before the arrival at Rephidim is not known. Sufficient that under his leadership and in the belief that God was on their side they eventually triumphed and repulsed the Amalekites so decisively that there was no more trouble from that quarter for a long time to come.

Such clues as the Old Testament afford indicate that Joshua was about forty years of age at this time, a resolute, stalwart warrior well fitted to lead the Israelites against their enemies. Forty years later he was to take over the supreme leadership at the death of Moses, and it was under his direction and inspiration that Israel subjugated the native



inhabitants and established itself in the land. He guided their destinies for about thirty years after that and died at the age of a hundred and ten years. A typical product of his' times, he was fiercely loyal to his God, passionately devoted to the welfare of his people, and relentlessly ruthless in his treatment of the enemies he conquered. His ethics were not Christian ethics and despite an aura of romance which has gathered around his name his life is not one which can be held up as an example to-day. But he was a man for the times and in his fierce resolution to allow Israel no alliance with the depraved idolators of Canaan he showed a statesman-like wisdom which it had been good for Israel in after days if they had remembered and followed.

With the defeat of the Amalekites the way to Mount Sinai lay wide open before Israel. Before leaving Rephidim, however, the domestic circumstances of Moses came to the front. When Moses returned to Egypt from exile for the purpose of organising the Exodus he had left his wife Zipporah with her father in Midian, on the eastern side of Sinai and something like thirty miles from the spot Israel had now reached. The Amalekite menace was removed and so chap. 18 describes how Jethro, prince of the Sinaitic Midianites, brought his daughter and her children to Moses at Rephidim. From now on Moses' family life was restored and his two sons took their place in Israel, although it has to be admitted that neither they nor their direct descendants played any important part in national affairs afterwards. The story of Jethro's satisfaction with the way things had turned out for his son-in-law's nation is interesting as showing how the knowledge and worship of God was diffused among these Arab tribes outside the circle of the sons of Jacob. Jethro was a descendant of Abraham through Keturah and seems to have preserved the Abrahamic faith in his own tribe. "Now I know" he said "*that Jehovah is greater than all gods*" and in so saying he offered formal sacrifice to God in token of his thanksgiving for the safety and preservation of Israel. The reference in chap. 18. 12 to Aaron and the elders "eating bread" with Jethro "before God" implies a formal ceremonial feast which sealed a blood brotherhood between the nation of Israel and the tribe of Jethro, the Kenites. Henceforward through all their generations they were to be as brethren and pledged not to take up arms against each other. (Later in Israel's history other tribes of Midianites were involved in

conflict, but not the people of Jethro). Conforming to this, the Kenites travelled with Israel into the Promised Land and lived a nomadic life among them for the next eight hundred years. The last recorded Kenite was Jaazaniah in the days of the prophet Jeremiah.

But that lay in the far distant future. Jethro now, having accomplished his mission, took his leave and returned to his own people. (Not until the days of his son and successor Reuel did the amalgamation with Israel take place). Before going, he gave Moses some patriarchal advice on the virtues of delegating responsibility. He observed that Moses was being worn down by the arduous duties of administration and control devolving upon him. He stressed the importance of an organization by which petty matters would be settled by junior rulers and only the most important ones come before Moses himself. "*This thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone*" he urged. It is of interest to note that the system recommended by this obscure Midianite sheik remained the basic principle of Israelite government for centuries afterwards. And one could wish that the qualifying standards for rulership he laid down were adopted to-day; the result would assuredly be for the good of modern society; "*able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness.*" Who shall deny that this venerable son of the desert was not as near to God as those Hebrew patriarchs of faith whose names are so much better known?

For the last time the messengers ran through the vast camp and the customary bustle of activity followed. The final lap of the journey to Sinai got under way, a relatively easy progress through an ever widening valley for fifteen miles or so, at its end the vista of a spacious flat plain, stretching for another eight miles in a vast crescent one to two miles wide. As the sides of the valley widened out and they could see the distant view more clearly, their eyes descried an enormous precipitous mass of jagged peaks and lofty escarpments, towering above the surrounding mountains and seeming to stab into the heavens and be lost in the clouds. There at last, as they entered into the level plain with its low growing shrubs and green vegetation, they came face to face with the goal of their journey, the holy mountain, sacred to all Semitic tribes and all the descendants of Abraham, the Mount Sinai.

(To be continued)



## ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF

An Easter  
meditation

Often when the suffering and death of Jesus is being considered, the theological aspect receives undue emphasis with consequent neglect of the practical view-point. Christian schools of thought tend unfortunately to centre their exposition around the cold legal doctrines concerning Christ's ministry rather than the "perfecting experiences" through which our Master passed. The reactions of affliction and trial upon His character were such that His sacrifice not only expunged the death sentence on mankind but prepared Him for the work of re-education and reconciliation of a future age. Meditation upon this side of the subject will enable us more clearly to see why we should follow closely in His steps, that we also might become sympathetic priests who will in due time assist the sin-stricken world back to health and life.

Had the religious and political Jewish leaders at the First Advent been familiar with all the prophecies relating to the Deliverer of Israel, they would have perceived, and instructed the people in, the knowledge that the Messiah for whom they looked was not to be born into a princely environment of luxury and ease, nor was he to be a mighty general, schooled in the arts of war. They would have realised that their Messiah was to be a humble, peaceful healer, brought into the world amid the poorest circumstances, reared in a peasant home, ministering to the needs of contrite souls. Comparatively few of these simple folk would have understood the *more intellectual side of His doctrine*, but they did know that Israel had been riven by the conflicts of great empires for many generations and now in their midst had appeared One who healed as many as lay within His contact. Jesus of Nazareth, the wonderful physician, trod the rough roads of Palestine, telling forth a message of good-will; preaching of love toward God and fellow man. It was a mission which was seldom undertaken without expense to personal comfort, and often He continued His labours while weary and foot-sore. He stood out even above previous holy men who possessed the gifts of healing and prophecy, and yet for all the good that He did and said for over three years among God's chosen people, His own people, they slew Him as a traitor.

Rich and poor, pious and publican, young and old, had felt the effects of His work of curing the sick and making whole those who had hitherto not known the joys of vigorous life. Cripples who had begged out their miserable existence at the temple gate for decades were bidden to rise and walk; poor sightless eyes yet without vision of God's universe were able to gaze into the face of the Master; deaf ears heard the voice of Him who spake as yet no man had spoken and speechless tongues were loosed to praise the Creator. Whether stricken by bodily disease or afflicted in mind, their distress was remedied, not by some freakish "cure-all" which lasted an hour or day, but set the captive at liberty to enjoy the freedom of health in physique and brain which the Life-giver had intended. Where He had obtained the super-human power they knew not, nor did they see in Him the One who had come from God to turn away ungodliness from Jacob and bind the broken hearts. They did not recognise the fulfilment of the words of God's holy prophets and realise that of this One it had been said "*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him*", and they understood not that this was the "Man of Sorrows" who was despised and rejected of men. Blindness of eye was great, loss of spiritual vision was manifestly greater in them.

Sin had taken a severe toll of human life during the long ages, and in spite of man's relentless effort to combat disease and pain, the struggle was mostly in vain. Therefore it may seem strange to the casual observer that Jesus of Nazareth, one imbued with a living message and blessed with such curative power should be so wrongfully treated and put to death. There is more however in the story of the Saviour's ministry than merely a wasted life and needless death,—very much more.

"*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone*" were the words of the Master, sublimely expressing one of the principles of Creation. Thus, the loss of Jesus' life will bring resurrection to all mankind, including peace and health—and most of all promise of reconciliation to God, without which everlasting life would be impossible to man. Harmony with the Creator is an essential part of the happiness of humanity, and it

is this work which is that of Jesus and His Church, for the age of Restitution. It is their blessed task to restore that condition which prevailed in Eden, of which it was written "so God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1. 27).

Within the scope of God's redemptive purpose there lay even further beauties, for He planned that those who gave sufficient evidence of their love for Himself should be changed into the likeness of their Lord. What a depth of goodness is here revealed in the Creator, that He should gather a family from among the sons of men, and that these brethren of Jesus should be associated in the work of restoration. And yet, Divine wisdom is again manifest, for who better could understand the weakness and hopelessness of sinful man than the Redeemer and those who have shared His thorny pathway while yet in the flesh? Who could more closely sympathise than those who have experienced the barrier between themselves and their Maker?

Sometimes the way with Jesus is difficult and sorrows seem multiplied on every side. It is just at those times when we should lay aside our work awhile, leave the rush and bustle of the day's pressing duties, and enter into communion with One who trod this way before us. The great tomes of theological learning will not give us the comfort in such circumstances as will the simple gospel story of one who endured unto death amid the most heart-breaking experiences.

Recall the picture of the Master as he provided bread for a hungry audience after discoursing to them all day; see Him as He tenderly spoke to the Samaritan woman concerning the Word of Life! The centurion's servant was made whole by the Prince of Peace; the widow's son was raised from the dead. Was He ever too weary or too bitter to minister to even one poor soul? Were any too foreign or too humble or too young for His healing touch? Did He ever lose His temper with that stiff-necked generation of scoffers? No, indeed, His life was a sublime example of the wonderful precepts which He had enunciated on the mountain side in the early part of His ministry. (Matt. 5. 1-12). His words and actions never became hasty even under the intense persecution of His latter days upon the earth. The nearer He came to death, the greater manifest was His love for His brethren and for the world.

But what is all this to us and what does it mean to our hearts and lives? If the word of the Lord is deeply rooted in our minds and

if the "first love" for our beloved Lord has been retained through the trial and stress of life's experiences, then slowly but surely the impression of His likeness is being made upon our characters. Beyond all intellectual knowledge, above the gifts of speech or pen, beside every Christian activity, must come this process of sanctification and development within the heart, of a fruitage of love which shall bring life to the nations and joy to all mankind. It is the inward reaction to the buffeting and straining in life's battles that makes or mars Christian character. Troubles arise within the very church, to which the godly soul must respond submissively to the Father's will and with affection for our brethren. Intellects differ widely and cause the development of opposing view-points about certain doctrines; personalities having been formed within contrasting environments, clash easily and cause friction among God's people. What is the result upon the church? Do such experiences draw us closer together by the very fact that we have to learn to be patient and care for each other's limitations and weaknesses or does the reverse happen? Do the differences of opinion produce the fruit of the Spirit within us, drawing us nearer to our God and to each other? What opportunities are ours to practise the qualities needed to attain the standard of association with the great High Priest? The privilege of thus serving each other now is that we might be fitted for the future work of serving together. But patience is not developed in a community where everything runs smoothly, where all think the same way upon all points of Christian teaching. Nor is love engendered when those who irritate each other part company, for that abolishes many opportunities to express the joy of "in honour preferring one another".

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples" was the identification which Jesus gave to His followers, "if ye have love one for another." Looking into the future of His church He saw this distinguishing feature from the world, and recognised that while it toiled amid a scornful world, their unity, their constraining love would shine forth as a wonderful witness. Has this been the experience of His Bride through the ages? Does this illustrate the path of the Narrow Way through the Gospel Era? We leave each one to answer that question, now, but it is sufficient that in looking back over the centuries we take note of the failings of others and endeavour not to stumble as they have done. The

world is quick to criticise weaknesses in Christian communities, especially when internal strife is evident, and it is of no avail displaying leaflets and tracts, and becoming noisy about "world events" unless there is a *living witness* within our fellowship shining clearly and purely.

Thus shall we be prepared to go forth into the world here and now ministering such blessings and assistance as lie within our scope. If we have wrought good works among our brethren we shall be in a better condition to help our fellow man in the daily routine. It is easy to talk about brotherly love and shut half of God's children outside our walls in cold isolation. It is even easier to explain how we shall "bless all families of the earth", and then fail to bless the few of those families which we contact every day now. It may not be our privilege to labour among men in any healing or social capacity, but every child of God has the opportunity during some part of his life to manifest those qualities which will enable him to share the Kingdom work. As we jostle in the bus queue or shopping market, we are in one of the environments in which God has placed us to show forth His glory. God is training men and women now to be tender, kind-hearted and patient with the human race. The qualities of mercy and wisdom will surely be required of those who have lived amid iniquity and unrighteousness for decades, as they restore to life and re-educate earth's millions. Who better will be trained for such a work than those who have manifested God's love while they have been under the burden of human imperfection and subjected to persecution? Do we rejoice in affliction and revile not again when troubled on every side? Do our workmates, our colleagues, those with whom we have to do, day by day, see the gentle, compassionate side of our nature or the impassioned, ill-tempered brutal aspect, which if allowed to spring up can easily spoil God's workmanship.

"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh" wrote the great Apostle Paul to the Romans—"No man" includes the fellow

passengers in the train in which we travel, the man behind the store counter or the brother and sister in the home; most of all, our brother and sister in Christ. The way *we* act and speak is that which is covered by "after the flesh", for after we have given our all to God, we look through new eyes of love and behold *everything* from the standpoint of a "New Creature". *Everything* now is seen as Jesus would see it, and as a priest of God would see it. Any other attitude toward our associates in life's experience will lead us away from our calling.

So as another year of the Christian walk is ending, and we gather again in communion with our risen Lord, let us have in mind the grand outcome of sharing the bitter experience of "His cup". It is our privilege to come to the Master's table year by year and speak one to another concerning the suffering which He bore for us, and meditate upon the joys we have in following His steps. May we remember we are part of one large family, one large loaf composed of many grains of wheat. But unless the loaf is broken, unless the grapes are crushed, the labour is vain. May the year before us give us fresh vitality to assist our brethren in the bonds of Christian love, that we may "*bear one another's burdens and thus fulfil the law of Christ*".

Suffering with Christ will deepen our union with our Lord and Head (Phil. 4, 10) and it will also give a firmer basis of fellowship with our brethren. Sharing His cross will also bring the happy experience of sovereignty with Him. What joys will be ours then, we can only meditate upon now. What was lost in Adam will be regained in that glad day. We shall have the privilege of spreading leaves of healing among the nations and teaching them the way of peace, health and life-everlasting. What little we suffer now will be more than outweighed by one glance at our beloved Lord's face, but we shall more than see Him. If we co-labour with Him now, if we commune with Him, share His sorrows and joys now, we shall share His life, when we are beyond.

The overshadowing and oversight of a surrendered human life by the Almighty God is one of the most amazing things in all Creation. It is the latest phase of Creation—for therein the Omnipotent Architect of the Universe is engaged upon the absolute masterpiece of all His varied work.

Just as a church is the shell which houses a congregation of worshippers and has no lasting value in itself, so also must the whole fabric of our earthly fellowship and service ever remain but an avenue by means of which we can feed and build up each other with the realities of Divine Truth.



## THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

### 5. The Avenues of Time

*A series of notes on the principles underlying prophetic interpretation*

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

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

Daniel started on the basis of a prediction sixty years earlier by the prophet Jeremiah to the effect that after seventy years' captivity in Babylon the Jewish people would be restored to their own land. Nearly two centuries previously Isaiah had given the name of the conqueror—Cyrus—who would

order that resoration. Before Daniel died he witnessed the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus and the fulfilment of the prophecy by his restoring the nation to its land and ordering the rebuilding of the Temple. But in the meantime Daniel had received and recorded revelations imparted to him by a celestial visitant, the messenger of the Most High, announcing himself to Daniel under a proper name, Gabriel. This coming of a heavenly messenger to Daniel is one instance of the lifting of the curtain which divides us from the spiritual world, even though it affords but a shadow image of that world. We are permitted to glimpse just a little of those activities that are going on "beyond the veil". "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth" says Gabriel to Daniel "and I am come to show thee". There is an indication here of activity and organisation in the world of the spirit which shows it to be a very real world. Here is an individual, a citizen of that world, deputed to carry out a commission involving his transfer temporarily to our world and his manifestation to us in a form perceptible to human senses, that the message may be given.

That message comprised three distinct and separate foreviews of things to come. One was plainly stated to extend from Daniel's own day to the coming of Messiah for the purpose of suffering and death—the time we call the First Advent. The other two covered a much longer span of time; between them they extend beyond the ending of this present world-Age and into the Messianic Kingdom. The exactitude of the first prophecy is a matter of wonder to all who read, but no longer a question of dispute. Taking as a starting point an event which was not to occur for some eighty years after the death of Daniel,—the Decree of Artaxerxes king of Persia authorising the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem—the coming of the Messiah was to be sixty-nine "sevens". This was a cryptic way of indicating four hundred and eighty-three years. Precisely that number of years from the Decree, viz., in A.D. 29, Jesus of Nazareth began His ministry. The Messiah had come! Gabriel predicted that associated with that Messianic appearance would be events the details of which must have shaken Daniel and his fellow-patriots to the core.

Foreign powers would destroy Jerusalem and its Temple again, bring to an end the old ritual of sacrifice and worship, and desolate the land. The pages of Josephus give sufficient testimony to the terrible manner in which that prediction was fulfilled within forty years of the coming of Christ, in the Jewish War against Vespasian and Titus resulting in the depopulation of Judea and the Dispersion of Israel amongst all nations.

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

It is here that we are brought face to face with one of the most intriguing statements in the whole of the Scriptures; one that seems to have received less than its due share of notice from scholars and commentators. "I will shew thee" says Gabriel "*that which is noted in the scripture of truth*" (i.e., in the "true writings", this being the literal meaning of the expression). It takes a moment or two to realise that these "true writings" which Gabriel proposed to reveal to Daniel, and did reveal in what we now have as the 11th and 12th chapters of the latter's prophecy, *are not recorded in any "true writings" which now exist upon earth!* These two chapters with their detailed account of world history from Daniel's time to the consummation of the Kingdom, stand unique in literature. There is nothing like them in the Bible or anywhere else. Whatever may be the nature of those "true writings" from which the angel Gabriel drew his authority to speak, they are not of this world or this order of things!

Then what can they be? Are there indeed books in Heaven? Did the angel bring with him a celestial scroll, from which as he unrolled he could read to the prophet concerning

things to come? Is there a literal "Book of Life" reposing in some kind of heavenly library, containing all the records which are to be made known when the Last Day shall come? Will the angels turn over literal pages to find the judgments recorded, when all men stand before the great Throne, and "the judgment was set, and the books were opened"?

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

We naturally ask ourselves what determines the nature and sequence of those coming events. Were they arbitrarily devised and ordained by God in the dim long ago before as yet any of them began, before man had been created or the earth brought into being? Or can we conceive of God, in the immensity of His power and wisdom, being able to take a comprehensive view of the world as it now is, all its creatures with all the thoughts and intents of all their minds, discerning in His infinite knowledge just how every one of those creatures will react to each of the influences that will be brought to bear upon him during life. Does He thus perceive the

end from the beginning, not because He has arbitrarily willed the minutiae and detail of that end, but because He can foresee what is going to be the effect of every thought and word and action of every man at this particular moment, and then the further effects of those effects, and so on into infinity, so that from the state of the world and the men in it at this present time, He can as it were calculate the precise outcome at the "end of the world"?

The daily Press, and other sources of general knowledge, have made most people familiar with the development and use of mechanical computers. These modern marvels of electronic engineering are by no means so "intelligent" or "able to think", nor will they ever be, as the popular Press would have us believe. They are at best extremely complex calculating machines. But a computer can solve in a few seconds abstruse mathematical problems which would either take a professional mathematician years to calculate or by normal methods would not be capable of calculation at all. A computer cannot do this of itself; it can only render an answer to a question when the necessary data relating to the question is fed into it. All that it does is to calculate the effect arising from a large number of causes, and to do this with lightning rapidity. And if a man-made machine can do that, is it not obvious that the Divine Mind can in a similar but infinitely greater fashion take in all the possible influences bearing upon men, all the facts and figures which go to make up man's world and the minds of all men, as they are now, and from that foresee what is going to be the outcome? Man's power of choice, his exercise of free-will, is not fettered or limited in any way by the fact that God can foresee how he will exercise that power.

Let Isaiah, who knew the majesty and power of God more intimately, perhaps, than any other of the prophets, give his testimony as to what he perceived of this aspect of God's character.

*"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, AND FROM ANCIENT TIMES THE THINGS THAT ARE NOT YET DONE."* (Isa. 46. 10).

*"Bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth and shew us what shall happen. Let them shew the former things (things before us—coming things) what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the*

*things that are to come hereafter, that we may know THAT YE ARE GODS. Yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed and behold it together"* (i.e., perceive that man can tell the end from the beginning; Isa. 41. 21-23). The point so noticeable when pondering over these Scriptures is that the certainty of the prophecy is due, not so much to God's exercise of fore-ordination, but to God's knowledge of things to come. It is as though He sees what is not yet apparent to men, and tells them what He sees. Moreover, it would seem as if this power to foresee future happenings is one that can be shared by others in the spiritual realm. "Shew us things that are to come hereafter, *that we may know that YE are Gods!*"—*elohim*, the term used to denote the celestial powers.—It is evident, though, that this clear perception of the future is not normally possessed by the angelic host, for we are told that the mysteries of coming things are matters "which the angels *DESIRE* to look into" (1 Pet. 1. 12). Gabriel certainly had knowledge of coming things when he spoke to Daniel; so did the angels who appeared to Ezekiel and Zechariah. Above all, our Lord, manifested to John on the island of Patmos, declared that He was about to show him "things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1. 1). One wonders if our Lord at that time had a clearer knowledge of the events and time of His own Second Advent than He possessed sixty years earlier when, in the days of His flesh, He said "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *NEITHER THE SON, but the Father*" (Mark 13. 32). It may then be literally true that God does "see" down the "stream of time" and, without deliberately ordaining or commanding specific events and happenings, does perceive what those happenings are going to be.

If this be indeed the case, we may rest assured that men like Daniel and Ezekiel are the very ones to whom the visions of remote futurity would be given; men whose hearts were earnestly set on the fulfilment of all God's gracious plans, men whose minds were closely attuned to God in their endeavour to see what He could see, and to hear what He would say to them. Hence Paul, caught up into the "third heaven" (2 Cor. 12. 2) was able to hear and see things which could never be repeated or imparted in their detail to his fellows, because so different from anything with which we are familiar upon earth.

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



conditions of far distant days differ so widely from those of to-day that a great many statements and allusions must of necessity be quite unintelligible unless re-expressed in terms familiar by reason of everyday use. Suppose an angel from heaven had appeared, for instance, to Sir Francis Drake in A.D. 1588 to tell him of the great war of 1939-45. It would be supremely difficult for the Elizabethan Admiral to understand the angel's description of naval warfare with its dive-bombers, submarines and super-Dreadnoughts. The angel would have to recast his description along the lines of wooden sailing-ships, bows and arrows, primitive ball-firing cannon, and cutlasses. His reference to American participation would leave Sir Francis puzzled, for North America, although vaguely known to Europeans, had not then been colonised and its only inhabitants were Red Indians. Holland and Belgium would have to be referred to by their mediæval name of Flanders, and Russia as Muscovy. The whole story would need recasting in the atmosphere and within the limits of knowledge of the sixteenth century. And the angel would be hard put to it to convince the sceptical sailor that men would be flying in winged ships five miles above the earth and, so doing, converse easily with their fellows on the ground a hundred miles away.

So when the angel spoke to Daniel, and Jesus spoke to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, their language had to be accommodated to the knowledge of the times. Gabriel spoke of kings, warring one with another down to the end of the Age. In the reality those "kings" may be local powers, petty kingdoms; they may represent empires, presided over by mighty military conquerors; they may depict whole races of mankind exercising a period of world supremacy and then declining and giving place in turn to others. But to Daniel they were kings. The angel spoke of Michael standing up; we know that he referred to Christ, who is to take control at the time of the resurrection, in the dawn of the Millennial Age. But Daniel knew nothing of Christ; like other Jews of his day, he looked on "Michael the archangel" as the traditional spiritual prince and champion of his people, and hence quite naturally Gabriel used the name of the archangel to represent that One Whose name, Jesus, Daniel had never heard.

So Jesus, viewing the events of to-day from two thousand years ago, could not describe those things to his disciples without enshrin-

ing them in words and terms familiar to His hearers. Men do not live on house-tops to-day, neither do women grind at corn-mills except perhaps in isolated country districts. But He could not have said "Let not the factory worker return to his bench, nor the train-driver to his engine-shed" for such words would convey nothing to the disciples. We must interpret the words Jesus did use in the realisation of this fact.

Each individual example of prophecy, therefore, has to be considered and interpreted on its own merits, the sanctified judgment of the student being brought to bear upon its nature, whether literal or symbolic, in everyday plain language or in metaphor or poetry. Was it intended only for the people of the generation to which it was first spoken or was its meaning veiled that it might reveal its message in a much later day? Does its range cover the few short years only of its own epoch or does it extend forward into far futurity, thus affording guidance for the Christian of the generation in which the prophecy is to have its fulfilment? To what extent does it illuminate the eternal purpose of God and the ceaseless operation of the Divine Mind working in history and the world of men? It is only when we can ask these questions and set their answers in proper relation that we shall be able correctly to interpret the prophecies, "*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*".

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

THE END





Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### A Thought for the Month

The four hundredth anniversary of the birth of a notable man fell due last year. In A.D. 1564 Galileo was born in Italy. Twenty-four years later, A.D. 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada, he earned public notice, as a lecturer at Pisa University. As a scientist and astronomer he contributed much to the store of human knowledge; his greatest achievement was his demonstration of the evidence that the earth revolves around the sun. The accepted Ptolemaic system claimed that the earth was the centre of creation, stationary in space, the sun circling round it every day. Copernicus, a little before Galileo, was first to discover the truth but Galileo provided the astronomical evidence. And this brought him into conflict with the Church, providing a classic example of the manner in which vested interests in religion, and men's failure to relate the essential truth of Christianity to increasing human knowledge, has in every age hindered the widening understanding of Truth. Truth, said Jesus on one occasion, is that which makes men free. There was to be no freedom for Galileo. While a professor of mathematics at Padua University his views became widely known and in 1616 he was summoned before the Inquisition for heresy. His pronouncements were said to contradict established theology. "*The new theory of the solar system is philosophically unsound*" was the decree of his judges. Sixteen years later, on his knees before Pope Urban VIII, Galileo was compelled to deny the fact of the earth's rotation round the sun by declaring "*with sincere heart and unfeigned faith I abjure, curse and detest the aforesaid errors and heresies*". In view of his recantation he was let off lightly—three years' imprisonment, during which he was to repeat once a week the seven penitential psalms of David. It is said—the historical accuracy of

this is somewhat doubtful—that as the old man got to his feet after his recantation he was heard to mutter under his breath "*All the same, it does move!*"

It is not right to scorn or ridicule the ignorance of those ecclesiastical dignitaries as though their attitude was unique. The same spirit has been manifest in every age and every generation. At much the same time as Galileo an Arab geographer was pilloried by the spiritual hierarchy of the Moslem world for asserting that in ancient times a great sea stretched across Asia from the Caspian to the Gobi desert on the ground that this was not supported by the Koran; to-day it is a known fact that he was right. In our own day it is a frequent occurrence for objection to be raised to some new development of thought or discovery of fact on the ground that it is contrary to Holy Scripture. So recently as the late 19th century the Flat Earth Society claimed that belief in the spherical shape of the earth denied Bible cosmogony and was therefore a fallacy. Many out-of-date ideas remain purely because they are erroneously thought to be fundamental to the veracity of the Word of God.

The Bible has nothing to fear from scientific discovery or any possible extension of human knowledge. Written as it is against the background of human understanding and attainment at the time of its writing, it has of necessity to reflect the scientific knowledge of that time, just as it must reflect man's moral and social level, but behind this facade lie the eternal principles enshrined for all ages and generations. No matter to what new revelations current science and discovery may lead us the Bible will stand inviolate, the "*Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*".

## **OBADIAH THE MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT**

### **I. Denunciation of Edom**

*An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah*

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

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

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

*brother.*" It was all the more reprehensible, therefore, that when the Babylonians were ravaging Judea the Edomites should have gone out of their way to assist them in their work of destruction. The children of Israel regarded this action as a base betrayal of the—admittedly rather flimsy—blood relationship between them, and Obadiah's passionate denunciation, predicting the irretrievable ruin of Edom at the hands of God, is the outcome.

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

in Egypt, the Judges and the Kings, and were in possession when Obadiah uttered his prophecy of coming judgment.

The prophecy of Obadiah was fulfilled. Not many more years were to pass before another people, the Nabatheans, were to drive the Edomites out of the last recesses into which Nebuchadnezzar had pursued them soon after the fall of Jerusalem, to occupy the whole land themselves until they in turn were overrun by Arab hordes from the desert. The dispossessed Edomites migrated to the desert regions south of Judea and were gradually absorbed in the Jewish nation. It is said that the last true Edomites perished in the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

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

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

What is the meaning of the Book of Obadiah to Christians in this Age, and particularly to those living in the end of the Age? The primary object of the prophecy was to declare Divine judgment on Edom for its betrayal of its brother nation, Israel. The prophecy was fulfilled, so far as that object was concerned, during the century following the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. By the year 135 B.C., when John Hyrcanus, priest-king of the temporarily independent Jewish state, compelled the remaining Edomites to become proselytes to Judaism and crushed their last claims to separate nationhood, the last words

of Obadiah had been literally fulfilled to the letter. Those who had escaped from Babylonian captivity ruled again from Mount Zion, and ruled what was left of the Mount of Esau. It is true that the kingdom was not the Lord's in the sense that we expect it to be when He has taken to Himself His great power to reign, but within the limited scope of the prophecy it was true enough. Judea was free from the foreign yoke, the Temple worship went on unmolested, and every true Jew looked with heightened expectation for the coming of Messiah. It requires only a moderate knowledge of the history of the years between Nehemiah and John the Baptist to realise that Obadiah's prophecy enjoyed an outward fulfilment during that period.

What then of its preservation into Christian times? Every word of God is given for admonition and instruction, that the man of God may be thoroughly instructed unto every good work. There is surely something more in this dramatic denunciation than a mere recapitulation of the doom which came upon an ungodly people, a doom which we can read about in secular history books anyway. There must be some instruction appropriate to those who live in this latter day of Divine judgment, whose conditions match so closely those of Israel in the days of Obadiah.

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

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



these apostate, worldly-minded ones, are the spiritual Edomites against whom the secondary fulfilment of this prophecy is directed.

During the greater part of this Age the true disciples of Christ have been in a condition which could properly be called a "Babylonian captivity". The powers of this world have persecuted, oppressed and martyred, or have ignored, slighted and humiliated, the Christians in their midst as they have from time to time seen fit. During all that time, except for the early centuries when Paganism was in the saddle, there has always been a so-called Christian power which was allied with the world against the true Church. They are the Edomites upon whom the spiritual counterparts of Obadiah's judgments have descended and will yet descend.

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

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

These two classes, true Christians and

nominal Christians, have existed side by side throughout the Age, just as the wheat and the tares in the parable of Matt. 13 grew together until the harvest. Typical characteristics distinguish the respective individuals. "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*" The Christianity of a true Christian is usually fairly obvious to his neighbours and companions. It is certainly obvious to his fellow-believers. The worldliness of a nominal Christian is more or less equally obvious—at least to one whose own life is devoted to Christ. Because the darkness hateth the light, because it is reproved by it, because its deeds are evil, nominal Christians usually display a thinly-concealed resentment, or on occasion open enmity, against true Christians. That resentment often leads such to take sides with the powers of this world against the disciples of Christ when conditions are such that conflict of some sort is inevitable. In that attitude they become spiritual Edomites.

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

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

That does not mean eternal damnation for

the judged. More than one sect to-day proclaims a message of no hope for all who do not accept the peculiar tenets of the particular sect. That is quite in line with the spirit of the old creeds. *"This is the Catholick faith, which unless a man believe, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly"* says one of them. That is not God's design. The vindication of true Christian discipleship at the end of this Age (*"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their father"*, Matt. 13. 43) is to be followed by the Millennial reign of Christ in which all who have never heard of Him or have never had His claims properly presented or have ignored Him or, like the Edomites, have fought against Him, will be subjected to the full force of the persuasive power of Divine love, and only then, as Dr. Paterson Smyth says in his *"Gospel of the Hereafter"* will God, after having put his arms around the sinner and looked into his eyes with His own eyes of unutterable love, and

been rejected, will He turn sorrowfully away and leave the sinner to the consequences of his sin.

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

(To be continued)

## CHRISTIAN SINCERITY

In every aspect and phase of our Christian life and our activity in the service of Jesus Christ there is nothing of greater moment than *absolute sincerity* and the ability to judge our own motives aright. Some of the greatest and noblest of men have ruined their life's work just because in the enthusiasm of success they have allowed their own motives to go more and more unquestioned until the influence of self-desire and the policy of expediency has usurped the place once held by selflessness and true sincerity. One whose early life is spent in unselfish service for others and whose native zeal is used to bring happiness and inspiration to his fellows, may in later life become a veritable barrier to progress, without at any time so much as suspecting that any inward change has taken place.

Particularly is this true in respect to our standing as believers in Christ Jesus. The very intensity of one's personal conviction of the teaching of Scripture inspires a zealous desire to "preach the Word instant in season and out of season", and to carry the flaming torch of Truth into every place where it has not as yet penetrated. In the power of that zeal and confidence great things have ever been done. It is in later years, when the wonder of the Faith, and the joys of its service, have become more familiar to us and begin to be regarded as the normal setting of life, that the temptation to adopt worldly methods for the furtherance of our work comes in. Fully justifying our attitude to ourselves, and fully

desirous of doing our Master acceptable service, we become less tolerant to others, more arrogant in insistence upon our own way, and progressively we become blinded to that great secret enunciated by Jesus, *"I came . . . not to do mine own will . . ."*

Ah yes—here is a secret thing indeed. We who are as servants waiting for their Lord need to be very watchful, very, very prayerful, that when "He cometh" He shall find us ready in every respect—not only armed with that knowledge which is fitting in those who *"know what their Lord doeth"* but also in that attitude of mind and heart which belongs to an "Israelite indeed". If it can be said of us, not only at the beginning but at the end of our Christian life, that there is in our hearts absolute unselfishness, kindness, true brotherliness, we shall indeed be *"meet for the inheritance of the saints in light"*. The children of Israel came short because they put their trust in the Egyptians, who were *"men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit"* and we too, if we become blinded to that spiritual guidance which comes from God alone, will fail in the same manner. Clear-sighted sincerity and tolerant unselfishness will keep us ever true sons of the One who is worshipped only in spirit and in truth.

Often those who bear the heaviest crosses do the least talking—I am doing the groaning and my brother the bearing.

## PAUL BEFORE FELIX

No. 16 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

The Roman looked down from his seat of judgment with a barely concealed sneer as the High Priest moved arrogantly across the hall and took his place in the position reserved for complainants, a group of fellow priests surrounding him, and in the forefront a smoothly shaven Greek, Tertullus, a professional advocate who had been engaged to present their case in the fashion customary at a Roman trial. Opposite to them stood the accused, Paul, guarded by two stalwart Roman legionaries, for this was a civil trial and he was appearing before the representative of Cæsar, to be judged according to the laws of Rome.

A nod from Antonius Felix and the trial opened. Tertullus stepped forward, went through the customary formalities of respect to Cæsar and acknowledged the authority of Felix by a subservient inclination of the head. He paused a moment, as though for dramatic effect, and with an expression of self-deprecating subservience addressed the watching Roman. "*Seeing that by thee*" he began, "*we enjoy great quietness and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness*".

An expression of grim humour flickered across the eyes of the usually impassive Roman guards. There was not a man in the hall, Roman or Jew, who was not fully aware of the flagrant insincerity of Tertullus' fulsome words, for Antonius Felix was one of the worst governors Judea ever had. By birth a slave, he had been able in company with his brother Pallas to worm himself into the court of Claudius Cæsar, and while Pallas remained as the Emperor's Court favourite Felix had embarked on a career of provincial administration by which he had handsomely enriched himself. Two years as governor of Samaria had been followed by six years in his present position in Judea, which he ruled, says one historian, "with the authority of a king and the disposition of a slave." Relying on the power of his brother at the Imperial Court, he committed every type of crime without restraint. On the one hand he sent his soldiers against the bandits who infested the country and on the other accepted bribes from them to condone their excesses. The High Priest,

Jonathan, one of the few upright and God-fearing High Priests of that troubled period, who had reproved and reasoned with Felix on account of his conduct, was treacherously murdered at his instigation. Felix himself, already married twice, had seduced Drusilla, the young sister of King Agrippa, from her husband and married her. Corruption in high places and flagrant disregard for justice, manifested by this unworthy representative of Empire, was reflected in every kind of violence in the land. Josephus says that it was at this time God turned away from his people because of their wickedness and left them to the fate which befell them ten years later, when Titus destroyed their cities and scattered the nation. Small wonder if the listening soldiers smiled ironically and the Jewish priests writhed inwardly as Felix accepted the undeserved compliments with a complacent smile. Ananias himself, who had seized the High Priesthood illegally after the death of Jonathan, must have remembered for a moment how his predecessor had been murdered by this man now sitting on the seat of judgment, and realised how insecure he himself might be. But his hatred of Paul overshadowed all other considerations and he turned his attention again to what Tertullus had to say.

"*Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee*" the suave voice went on "*I pray thee that thou wouldst hear us of thy clemency a few words*". It is possible that at this point Tertullus detected a trace of impatience in the Governor's attitude and decided that the courtesies had been sufficiently observed. He plunged forthwith into the accusation. The charge was threefold, to wit, that the prisoner was, first, an inciter to sedition amongst the Jews, second, a ring-leader of the Nazarene sect, third, a profaner of the Temple. He disowned responsibility for the matter being obtruded upon Felix' august attention; they would have dealt with the offender themselves had not the *chiliarch*—commander—Lysias "*with great violence*" taken Paul out of their hands and sent him to Felix, but now the matter had thus become the subject of an official investigation, well, Felix could examine the prisoner himself and realise the truth of all that Tertullus had been saying.



The next step in the Roman judicial code was the production of witnesses and the hearing of their statements. Felix waited. The ensuing pause must have constituted something of an anti-climax to Tertullus' noble effort on behalf of his employers. Most regrettably, there were no witnesses. Ananias and his fellow priests had not been present at the time of the riot in the Temple. The Asiatic Jews who caused all the trouble and were the only ones who could offer any evidence had long since gone home and by now were well on their way to Ephesus or Lystra or Iconium and had probably lost all interest in the matter. The only possible witness now available was the Jerusalem garrison commander Claudius Lysias, and he was not likely to be helpful to their side of the case. So after a moment of silence a babble of priestly voices rang out, assuring the governor that all Tertullus had said was true and the prisoner could be condemned and sentenced without further ado.

Felix regarded them with sardonic disdain. He knew these Jews—he ought to, having governed them long enough. He had no illusions and probably saw through them at once. He looked now at the prisoner and made a peremptory sign with his hand. Paul had permission to speak.

Of course Paul also knew the character of the governor but quite evidently had no intention of trying to placate him by flattery nor shew resentment at being arraigned before him. He treated him simply and solely as the rightful representative of law and order and the man authorised to hear the case and pronounce the verdict. His opening statement is a masterpiece of respectful courtesy without servility. *"Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself"*. It is very likely that his evident respect for Felix' position, coupled with the total absence of either fear or flattery, evoked the governor's interest as no other attitude would have done. He was not used to men who neither cringed before him nor sought to propitiate him. The length of Paul's recorded defence compared with the brevity of Tertullus' accusation indicates that Felix must have given serious attention to the Apostle's words, any trace of possible former impatience gone. The impatience now would have been among Ananias and his fellows.

In quiet and logical fashion Paul met the three accusations with a calm and unequivocal denial. He refuted the charge of sedition

by reminding Felix that from his own knowledge of Jewish custom he would know that Pentecost was only twelve days in the past; Paul had arrived in the country just in time to attend the feast and one could not preach much sedition in twelve days. As to the question of profaning the Temple, he flatly denied it and declared that they could not point to any possible action on his part which could be so construed. The third accusation, that he was a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes, needed no defence, for that was no crime in the eyes of Rome. Christianity was, at that time, just as legal a religion as Judaism. Tertullus, for all his professional acumen, had slipped up when he included this particular charge at a Roman trial. *"But"* said Paul, *"this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers . . . and have hope . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust"*. Here is Paul back on his main theme, the purpose of God in relation to the destiny of man; but this time he was preaching, not to the Jews who had already rejected the testimony, but to one man, the guilt-laden judge who occupied the bench above him. So he desisted from further explanation of his mission and explained the circumstances of his coming to Judea, how he came to bring alms to his fellow Jews and to undergo purification rites in the Temple and concluded by claiming, what the governor was probably already thinking inwardly, that the people who raised the original riot should have been present to accuse him if they had anything against him.

Felix made up his mind. He must have already given weight to his subordinate's estimation of the prisoner's innocence and saw no reason to differ from Lysias' conclusions. And there was probably another factor also. Luke says that when Felix heard these things, *"having more perfect knowledge of that Way"* he ended the proceedings. *"The Way"* was the expression used in those early days for the incipient Christian community everywhere. *"Brethren of the Way"* they called themselves and were so known by others. Somehow, in some manner, Felix had acquired a knowledge of the distinctive features of the faith that Paul was now proclaiming before him. He saw, more clearly than Ananias had given him credit, the real reason for their hostility to the prisoner, and he was not prepared to hand Paul over to his enemies. At the same time he saw no reason why he should offend the Jewish priestly

hierarchy unnecessarily. He closed the proceedings by saying that he would defer his decision until Lysias should have occasion to visit Cæsarea and until then the prisoner would be kept in custody. Baulked again of their prey, Ananias and his fellows had to return to Jerusalem, sullenly furious at their lack of success and doubtless reflecting on the improbability of Felix doing much more about the matter. In that they were right, for Paul was not brought to trial again during Felix' term of office.

For the next two years Paul was held in a kind of preventive custody which shielded him from physical danger but gave him full liberty of intercourse with his friends. It is tolerably certain that Luke remained with him and in fact there is every probability that it was during this time Luke gathered the materials for his Gospel, which was yet to be written. So far as is known this was his only visit to Judea; he would have ample opportunity to visit the scenes of Jesus' earthly life and to talk with those who had seen and known Him. The intimate details of our Lord's birth, so carefully recorded, could only have been gathered in personal conversation with His mother Mary, and it is very probable that the Gospel according to St. Luke was actually written during this two years of Paul's imprisonment.

This chapter in the Apostle's life was not to be closed without shewing up in sharp relief the tragedy of a man who caught the vision of eternity but could not bring himself to break from his own base vices in order to embrace it. Luke tells how Felix and his wife Drusilla had frequent conversations with Paul "*concerning the faith in Christ*". There must have been some remnant of primitive nobility in this man, corrupted as he was by riches and power and self-indulgence, which responded to the shining faith of his prisoner and he wanted to know more about it. But he could not face the implications. As Paul "*reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled and answered, 'Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season I will call for thee'*". He thought of his own misdeeds, the grasping cupidity which had made him rich by extortion and theft, of his hands stained with the blood of innocent men. He looked upon the woman at his side whom he had stolen from her lawful husband, and he shrank from the implications of the Apostle's measured words. He half believed in the truth of Paul's declaration that every man must one day render an

account of the deeds done in the body and he perhaps understood in measure the logic of Paul's insistence that God is working for the ultimate good of all creation but that every man himself has a part to play; but he thought of his immediate tastes and desires and he could not forego them. He trembled when he reflected on the possibility of judgment to come and there may have awakened in his dark nature some feeble desire for the peace and happiness that righteousness and temperance can bring, but again the pull of the present dragged him back and he turned away from the shining vision. And as he returned to the darkness his habitual cupidity reasserted itself and he began to cherish the hope that Paul or Paul's friends might offer a money bribe for the Apostle's release. So he kept up the conversations but all the time was receding farther away from the gleam of light he had but barely seen. And there was no money forthcoming. Paul would have scorned such a method of securing his release, and both the official and personal life of Felix went on as before.

But judgment came, as Paul had declared, and sooner perhaps than either of them expected. "*After two years*" says Luke briefly "*Porcius Festus came into Felix' room*". He offers no explanation, but history tells all. Felix, at last, had gone too far. There was always jealousy and strife between the Jews and the Greeks of Cæsarea and riots were not uncommon. Toward the end of that two years a more than usually serious riot developed and Felix used this as an excuse for throwing his troops in, on the side of the Greeks, with tacit permission to plunder the houses of the wealthier Jews. He himself, of course, stood to receive a considerable portion of the loot. In despair at this latest example of the governor's rapacity, a deputation of leading Jerusalem Jews set sail for Rome to protest to the Emperor. Claudius, under whom Felix had originally risen to power, had been dead for some years and Nero was Emperor. Felix was peremptorily recalled to Rome to stand trial and Porcius Festus sent to Judea as his successor. Not many months before Paul himself set out for Rome, Felix with his wife, Drusilla, and their young son, left Judea in disgrace to face the Emperor's anger. It seems that he escaped with his life but was stripped of all office and made to disgorge his ill-gotten gains. After that nothing is known about the couple and they evidently died in obscurity.

In what was perhaps a last unavailing attempt to placate the Jews, Felix, on his

departure, "willing to shew the Jews a pleasure" for perhaps the first time in his life, "left Paul bound". Thus it was that a man of very different stamp, upright, just, and a firm administrator of Roman justice, Porcius

Festus, landing at Cæsarea to take up his duties as Governor of Judea, found a prisoner waiting for him and a civil trial on his hands.

(To be continued)

## CAST UNTO THE POTTER

An examination of  
a difficult text

*"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for us to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in" (Matt. 27. 3-7).*

This part of the story of our Lord's betrayal involves a reference to Old Testament prophecy and an apparent contradiction. The word for "temple" in this passage is "naos", the inner sanctuary, and the sense of the expression is that Judas hurled the money toward the Holy of Holies and rushed out of the Court. In this incident a lack of reverence and appreciation of the things of God is manifest in his character. The priests, true to their tradition, carefully gathered up the money, but with their scrupulous fidelity to the letter of the Law forbore to put it in the Temple treasury, "for", said they, "it is the price of blood". Taking counsel together, they decided to use it for the purchase of a piece of ground to be used as a cemetery for uncircumcised foreigners who for one reason or another had to be buried at the public expense. It is not to be expected that this purchase took place that same day; the attention of priests and people was absorbed in the seven days' feast then beginning. It may have been weeks afterward that this transaction was completed, being recorded here by Matthew to furnish the sequel to the story.

Peter, in Acts 1. 18, gives a different version, saying that it was Judas himself who "purchased a field with the reward of iniquity". The word here rendered "purchased" means "to acquire". Probably what Peter meant to convey was that, since the money was rightfully the property of Judas, he could be said to have acquired the field which was pur-

chased by its means; but it profited him nothing, for by that time he was dead. Matthew's account reads as though Judas hanged himself immediately after leaving the priests, and this is consistent with his crazed state of mind as revealed by the story. The place of his death is nowhere indicated except by the reference in Acts 1. 18, and it may be reasonably assumed that the place he selected was that same potter's field which was afterwards purchased by the priests as an unhallowed, unsanctified place, and therefore suitable for their purpose.

It is in connection with this incident that Matthew says (Matt. 27. 9): *"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying: 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me'".* None of the recorded sayings of Jeremiah contain any such prophecy. The book of Zechariah, chap. 11, does record a passage very similar to the words of Matthew, and yet with essential differences, and it is generally conceded that this is the passage to which Matthew refers. It is thought that a very early transcriber, perhaps the one who first copied Matthew's original gospel, made the mistake in names when copying the manuscript.

It is clear that Matthew is quoting from memory. The passage in Zechariah reads (Zech. 11. 12-13): *"And I said unto them, 'If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear'. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, 'Cast it unto the potter, a goodly price that I was prised at of them'. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter in the house of the Lord".*

This needs consideration. Judas cast his money on the floor of the Temple, and this money was afterwards used to purchase the "potter's field" somewhere outside Jerusalem. Zechariah's prophecy pictures the shepherd of Israel receiving his wages, thirty pieces of silver, and, considering this amount an insult,



flinging it "to the potter in the House of the Lord". The discrepancy is sufficient to warrant further examination.

These two verses are part of a long passage in Zech. 11 describing the ingratitude of the people to whom God was a shepherd. The time came at last when the shepherd refused to lead them any longer; *"that that dieth, let it die"*. And Zechariah took his staff named "Beauty", and cut it asunder in token of the breaking of the covenant with Israel. Now at this point he asks for his wages. *"If ye think good, give me my price, and if not, forbear"*; and the people gave him for his price—thirty pieces of silver! This was a studied insult. For the enduring watch care of the Shepherd of Israel they offered the price of a slave! Therefore, the Lord intervenes from heaven, taking this insult as unto Himself, *"Cast it unto the potter—this magnificent price at which I was assessed by them"*. This is the literal meaning of the phrase; the Lord speaking ironically of the sum given by Israel to their shepherd. *"And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord"*.

The expression "cast it to the potter" is a difficult one. The house of the Lord did not accommodate potters; and there is no apparent reason for casting the money to such a personage even if he existed. In an effort to explain the passage it has been suggested that the reference is to the Temple treasure chest, which may well have been of earthenware or pottery; and alternatively that the reference may have been a rubbish heap in the vicinity of the Temple which would be well strewn with broken pottery. Neither suggestion is convincing. The most reasonable explanation is that advanced by an old commentator, who says that this expression "cast it to the potter" was a customary expression of contempt for that which was worthless, much as we would say in our day that a man has "gone to the dogs", meaning that he has become a worthless fellow. In such case the expression becomes full of meaning. Israel had shown their

contempt for the ministrations of their shepherd by offering him the traditional price of a slave; the Lord, in turn, orders Zechariah to show his contempt for this "magnificent price" by "casting it to the potter", and Zechariah heightens the force of the symbol by saying that he cast the money "to the potter" on the floor of the very house of God which Israel had so lightly esteemed.

Here is the point of contact between prophecy and history; for Judas also cast thirty pieces of silver on the floor of the house of the Lord. From this basis we may be able to trace the process of reasoning in Matthew's mind which led him to connect the vision of Zechariah with the events he recorded.

Israel at the First Advent, like their forbears in Zechariah's day, had rejected the Good Shepherd, and contemptuously valued him, at the hands of their priests and of Judas, at thirty pieces of silver. That not only meant that they regarded Him as of no more consequence than a slave; it also meant that they were prepared to take the responsibility of the death of Christ, for that thirty pieces of silver represented the compensation demanded by the law for the killing of a slave. All of this was duly noted in the Courts of Heaven. Then, by the agency of Judas' remorse, that "magnificent price" was cast back at that people, flung on the Temple floor, a lasting witness against them that they had rejected the Prince of Life.

It was this similarity which led Matthew to claim the fulfilment of the prophecy in the events of that night. What was done with the money afterwards in the matter of the purchase of the "potter's field" had nothing to do with the words of Zechariah. So far as God was concerned the matter was at an end when Judas flung the money back at the guilty priests. Within a few more hours the veil of the Temple had been rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the nation which had rejected the only way of salvation found its city and its Temple left unto it desolate.

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Prayer is not a Divine "aspirin" tablet to relieve every little ache and pain, neither is it to be used to get God to do what you want done. No! Our prayers must be in harmony with the will of God.

\* \* \*

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Strange words—but what heartening words! Redolent of strife and conflict, of severe trials to come, they imply nevertheless that this is only to be expected; this is all part of the programme for final victory.

## "TURN YE TO ME . . ."

A Meditation

*"... I have put My word in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art My people."*

So speaks our Heavenly Father through Isaiah, at the conclusion of what has been said to be the longest promise in His Word. Read chap. 51, vss. 12 to 16. So the Almighty Creator, Lord of heaven and earth, desires still, today, *"A people for a purpose"* (1 Pet. 2, 9, *Diaglott*), and that purpose nothing less than the heralding of His King and the establishment of His Kingdom, in its two fold phase—"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." So, *"today, if ye will hear His Voice, harden not your hearts . . ."* (Heb. 3, 7, 15).

Only as we "abide in His dear Son" can we hope and expect to be used of Him in the fulfilment of this, and His many great and precious purposes which He intends to fulfil through the Christ, Head and Body. To Him, their beloved Lord and Head, their Shepherd, Saviour, Brother, Friend, their Prophet, Priest and King, the Church, which is His Body, says: *"He is altogether lovely; this is my Beloved, and this is my Friend. Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Thy love is better than wine."* (Cant. 5, 16).

*"Thy Love is better than wine!"* If wine be, as it is, the symbol of doctrine, how true the sentiment here expressed! How often have His dear people, in the past, through too great an insistence on this, that, or the other doctrine, failed to express the love to Him, and to His people in Him, which is the all-important manifestation of their abiding in Him, and one-ness with Him, and is, quite literally, as a man of God has said, the greatest thing in the world. Says our Beloved, *"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another."* *"I pray . . . for them . . . that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."* (Jno. 13, 34-35; 17, 20-21).

"One thing is needful," said the Master. (Luke 10, 42). Still He says the same today. What is that "one thing needful?" Simply, the necessity of keeping close to Him. Firm, rock-like belief in the rock truth of Peter's great confession: *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matt. 16, 16). This is the Stone the builders have rejected, now

made the Head of the corner, and an honour to all who believe and obey Him. (Psa. 118, 22, Matt. 21, 42, 1 Pet. 2, 6-7).

Unity is strength! "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God"—first, united to Him who is their Lord and Head; secondly, united in Him to each other. Both are essential, that every member may be fitly joined together, and compacted by "that which every joint supplieth" (Eph. 4, 15, 16). *"Come, let us to the Lord our God with contrite hearts return"*—through His dear Son, *"Our God is gracious, nor will leave the desolate to mourn . . ."*

*"I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations . . ."* (Isa. 42, 6, 7). Spoken first of His dear Son, our beloved Lord? Of course (context—verse 1, on). But spoken also, in His Son, of His people—see Acts, chap. 13, vss. 46 and 47. Note particularly the "us", in vs. 47!

*"... That I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art My people!"* Mourning ones crave comfort, blind ones grope for day. *"Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people . . ."* Shall we be, by His exceeding grace, vessels of mercy, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, fitted and prepared by His Divine workmanship to carry the word of comfort and cheer to others, sons and daughters of comfort in Zion, and channels of the Holy Spirit, as well as of the truth? Oh, come on, all ye faithful! Rise up, O men of God—have done with lesser things. Jesus goes before us—Zion beams with light. Glorify Him in your bodies. Show forth His praises, Who hath called us out of darkness, into His marvellous light. The love He gives us He will ask again—in love to Him, and to our fellow men.

It was Nehemiah the zealous patriot, who coined the immortal phrase *"the joy of the Lord is your strength"* (Neh. 8, 10). He was calling his people then, as a certain famous statesman of our own day called our fellow-countrymen not so long since, to "blood and toil, tears and sweat", but he added something that no statesman of this world, however farsighted and vigorous, can give, *"the joy of the Lord—your strength"*.

## BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

### EXODUS

#### Part 15 The Making of the Covenant

The most celebrated mountain in Old Testament history is Mount Sinai, where God gave the Ten Commandments. This much is elementary knowledge to every Jew and every Christian. To this spot came the sons of Jacob, a relatively unorganised and undisciplined confederation of all the tribes, owning kinship in a common ancestor. Here they heard the voice of God speaking to them, and here they solemnly undertook to enter into a Covenant which constituted them a people destined for a special purpose, to be His representatives in the world and to declare His salvation to the ends of the earth. They left this mountain a nation, pledged to conduct their national affairs in accordance with the revealed will of God, and in the light of this inspiration the younger generation among them entered the Promised Land forty years later and established the Land of Israel—a political entity which, after a gap of nearly two thousand years, has in our generation become re-established under the name it first adopted three and a half millenniums ago. The story of Israel, its chequered career as a nation, the influence it has had upon the development of world religion, the preparation it made for the coming of Christianity, all had its beginning at this spot. What sort of a place is Mount Sinai?

Imagine a land, a wild land of mountain peaks and rocky crags intersected by narrow and tortuous ravines, stretching in every direction as far as the eye can see, a land which for all its primitive savagery conveys to the beholder an impression of superlative grandeur, a land where the sun beats down on red and yellow and brown and black rocks by day and the frost and ice sparkles in clear cold moonlight by night. In the midst of such a land a great mountain mass, some three miles long by a mile wide, lifts up its lofty summits to a height of seven thousand feet, separated from its neighbour mountains by deep, narrow ravines and looking out from its northern end over a wide, curving valley where men can camp and cattle find pasture. This is Mount Sinai, where Moses spake with God, and saw God, and lived, where Israel heard the voice of God commanding them His laws, and where they entered into a solemn Covenant with Him to be His people.

There is a certain amount of doubt—at least, difference of opinion among experts—as to

whether the stirring scenes recounted in Exodus were enacted at the northern or the southern end of this great mountain mass. The southern end possesses the highest peak of the entire mountain, and this peak is known as *Jebel Musa*, the Mountain of Moses. At the foot of *Jebel Musa* lies a valley some two miles long by a quarter mile wide, *Wady Sebaiyeh*. Some scholars think that this is the place where Israel camped during these stirring times. The topographical details in the Exodus account, though, are rather better suited to the northern end of the mountain, three miles away. The peaks here are not so high but the valley they overlook is much larger—a crescent shaped plain six miles long and half a mile to a mile wide, with the mountain at the very midpoint of the crescent. This valley is well watered by numerous streams coming down from the heights and eminently adapted for the protracted sojourn of a large number of men and beasts such as was involved in the Exodus. The mountain comes down to the plain at this point in a practically sheer precipice of terrifying height, a vertical wall which amply justifies the Exodus description of Sinai as a "mount that might be touched". The precise place at which the host camped is not of importance; there can be no doubt that this great mountainous mass is the Sinai of the account and that the people camped in the plain close up to the side of the mountain and that Moses did climb its forbidding heights and meet with God at its summit.

The full account of the transactions between the Deity, and Moses, and the people of Israel, occupies the remainder of Exodus from chapters 19 to 40. Those transactions involved two major processes, the making of the Covenant, which included the giving of the Ten Commandments, and the institution and construction of the Sanctuary for Divine worship and sacrifice known as the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. With the accomplishment of these objects, the Book of Exodus comes to an end, leaving Israel still encamped at Sinai, the journey to the Promised Land temporarily halted.

The main outlines of the story are very familiar. The voice of God was heard in the Ten Commandments to the accompaniment of thunders and lightnings, from the top of the mountain. Moses spent forty days alone with



God, and returned bearing with him the Law written on two tablets of stone, which tablets he dashed to pieces upon finding the people worshipping the golden calf. There is, of course, much more in the story when it is examined closely. Moses ascended the mountain to talk with God no less than seven times in all, and the period occupied in accomplishing everything that was done upon these seven occasions was a little over three months.

Israel remained in that valley for seven months more. Ten months after their arrival they struck camp, dismantled the Tabernacle, which had stood for only a month, took their last look at the holy mountain and set out on the journey that was to end forty years later with the crossing of Jordan and entry into Canaan.

It seems rather remarkable that the host of Israel, none of whom except Moses had ever set eyes on Mount Sinai before, should be so convinced that this was the place where God's presence dwelt. The mountain was already holy to the tribes of the country; something of its fame may well have penetrated to the Hebrews in Egypt or it might be that Moses had thoroughly indoctrinated them beforehand with the assurance that here they would meet with God. At any rate it is clear that the entire people was prepared to accept all that Moses brought them from the mountain-top as being the very words of God. Their belief might very well have been strengthened by the visible phenomena surrounding the summit. Cloud, storm, thunder, lightning, fire; all are pictured as covering the top of the mountain virtually all the time Moses was going up and down on their behalf. The visible spectacle must have been intensely awe-inspiring, for the memory lingered with Israel for ever afterwards and formed the theme of much of their later poetry and prophetic vision. Very probably the "guiding angel" that had led them hitherto, the "pillar of cloud by day and a flaming fire by night" was settled at the top of the mountain; the sight, from the plain below, of dark thunderclouds and flashing lightning away up amidst those mysterious peaks would go far to convince the still superstitious Israelites that God was certainly up there waiting for Moses.

It was probably almost as soon as the camp was established that Moses went up the mountain for the first time. The people watched him disappear into the dark ravine which gives access to the ascent. If in fact the giving of the Law did take place at the

northern end where the almost vertical precipice of Ras Sufsafah plunges thousands of feet down to the plain he could have accomplished the climb in a few hours. Chapter 19 preserves the story of the first encounter. It tells us quite simply that Moses went up, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain, giving him an instruction and a message to take back to Israel. "*Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians . . . now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people . . . and a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation*". (ch. 19. 4-6).

Did Moses really hear a Voice, sounding upon the mountain atmosphere at the frequencies appropriate to normal speech? Was the Deity Himself, the First Cause and Creator of all things, personally present on that mountain top to meet with His minister? The assertion of some that Moses merely thought out these things for himself and professed to the people that God had talked with him up there is not worth serious consideration. Whatever it was that happened, it was from a source outside this world. The things that were heard and seen during that time at Sinai were heard and seen by three million people and the memory of them remained as a living impression in the national consciousness into far distant generations. The whole literature and outlook of Israel for fifteen hundred years was coloured by those events. There were too many witnesses for this thing to have been a fraud. If the Christian world believes in the literal truth of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead on the testimony of the few—five hundred—who are recorded as having seen Him after His resurrection then it should logically equally accept the testimony of this six thousand times as many who heard the voice of God and entreated that He speak to them no more except through their leader Moses.

The Voice may not necessarily have sounded literally on the mountain air. Modern surgeons during brain operations have applied a stimulus to certain points on the brain and reproduced the sensations of sound and sight to the patient. The essential thing to accept is that by Divine power Moses heard a voice and distinguished the words—and hastened to obey. His brain received the sensory impression but how he received it is known only to God.

This first message was the offer of a Covenant. The proposal came from God but it



was not obligatory. The people could accept or reject. If they accepted, they would become a dedicated people specially marked out in the world of men to demonstrate the principles of Divine Law and be ambassadors of the Divine purpose. Every Israelite knew that long ages ago God had promised their ancestor Abraham that by means of his seed, his descendants, all families of the earth would be blessed. Somewhere within the scope of that promise there resided the assurance of restoration from the damage that had been done in Eden, when sin entered the world. Now they, descendants of Abraham, were being invited to take their places as the "seed" and have some part in the fulfilment of the promise. Little wonder that when Moses came down to the valley and laid the proposal before the elders and the people, the whole assembly cried out in unison "*All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.*" (ch. 19. 8).

That acclamation was Israel's formal acceptance of the invitation. Moses climbed the mountain for the second time to return that answer to God and await the next instruction.

That next move was to be the enunciation of the basic Laws of the Covenant—known to us as the Ten Commandments—in the hearing of all the people. Only after this had been done would God go into matters of detail and the Covenant be formally ratified, thus becoming binding on every son of Israel. Moses therefore was told to go back again to the people and prepare them for the solemn enunciation. During the next two days they must devote themselves in the spirit of reverence to contemplation of the momentous decision they were about to make. They must be physically clean to denote ceremonial purity. At dawn on the third day they must be ready, but none might approach the mountain near enough to touch it because of its sanctity, and Moses was to "*set bounds round about*" to forbid their doing so. This definitely meant that he was to erect a fence or wall to keep both men and cattle away from the mount. It is one of the remarkable facts associated with this narrative that such an injunction was physically possible. Unlike ordinary mountains which slope up from the plain so that the actual beginning of the mountain is difficult or impossible to determine, the vertical precipice of Sinai rises sheer from the flat valley so that it is literally possible to stand on the valley floor and touch the face of the mountain. It is this fact more than any other which enables the modern traveller to take up his position at that spot to-day and

realise that he stands where Moses and the Israelites stood those many years ago.

*"For the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai . . . and it came to pass on the third day in the morning that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that were in the camp trembled . . . and Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice."* (ch. 19. 16-20).

That must have been one of the most awe-inspiring sights this world has ever witnessed. The vast concourse of people stood there in the plain, drawn up in array facing the huge precipice with their eyes fixed on the lofty peaks above. With beating hearts they saw and heard the fire and the smoke, the thunder and the lightning, the subterranean rumblings and quaking of the ground beneath them; small wonder that many have said this must have been merely a volcanic eruption witnessed by people who had never seen such a thing before—but said erroneously, for Sinai is not volcanic and no mountain in the district is or ever has been a volcano. The voice of the trumpet may have been a natural phenomena like the rest, an effect of the wind rushing down the narrow ravines and gullies; it might have been as real as the Voice which undoubtedly did sound that day from the midst of that fiery glory in the ears of all those watching multitudes.

Now Moses was called to the summit for the third time. The people must have waited several hours for his return whilst the evidence of the Divine presence continued before their eyes. When at length he did appear it was to reiterate the Divine command that neither man nor beast was to break through the barriers to touch the mount under pain of death. One wonders why the prohibition. It was not only that the majesty of the Eternal possessed the mountain; it was also to commence teaching the lesson that not only Israel, but all the world, was now to learn, that man in his imperfection and with his sinful propensities cannot endure the searching gaze of God; he cannot stand in the Divine Presence, and live. But the Covenant into which they were about to enter was a first lesson and a first move in the Divinely

ordained progress of man to that point where, imperfection and sin removed, he can stand in that sublime Presence and assume his destined place in Divine creation. Israel was a long way from that ideal; that momentous day at Sinai was the commencement of a process which has not attained its object even yet.

So, at last, the Voice of God came, sonorous and clear from the Mount, declaring the Ten Commandments. *"I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me . . . Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . ."* And when the recital was complete, and the Voice had died away, and the trumpets were silent, the people besought Moses that God would speak with them in such fashion no more, but only through him, for the experience was one they could not again endure.

There is a general impression that the Ten Commandments of Exod. 20 are obligatory upon Christians but this is not so. The Laws given at Sinai were an integral part of the Covenant there made by the hand of Moses between the Lord on the one hand and one nation, the nation of Israel, upon the other. That covenant was to endure only until Christ, the true seed of Abraham, should come and it would then lapse. That entire arrangement was superseded at the Cross by a superior calling whereby not Israelites only, but men and women of all nations might "profess and call themselves Christians" and be bound together in a new priestly kingdom and a new holy nation, the Christian Church, having a higher and more far-reaching destiny than anything that was offered to those ex-slaves from Egypt gathered before that Arabian

mountain. It is left to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to show that all those happenings and arrangements were but "shadows of better things to come" and must themselves "wax old and vanish away" when the realities to which they pointed should in their turn come on the stage of human history.

That does not mean that the principles enshrined in those laws are abrogated. Christ enjoined upon His followers a higher and more penetrating interpretation which actually goes much farther, and demands much more, than the Ten Commandments did with those to whom they were spoken.

The giving of the Commandments did not of themselves constitute the Covenant. That had to be stated in all its terms, accepted by the people, and solemnly ratified between the Most High and the Mediator of the covenant. Moses had already been up the mountain three times to meet God; before his work was finished he was to go up four more times, once to receive the terms of the Covenant, again after the people's acceptance to receive the Tablets of the Law on which occasion he was to be in the Mount forty days and nights. Then, upon his return to the plain to find the people worshipping the golden calf and his consequent breaking of those tablets, up again to plead with God on their behalf. Finally he went up for the last time to be given a fresh set of Tablets and to receive instructions for the construction and the service of the Tabernacle, the sanctuary which symbolised the presence of God among them, on which occasion he remained in the mount for a second forty days and nights. The nature and significance of all that was involved in these last four ascents must next be considered.

(To be continued)

## IDIOMATIC USES OF "SABBATH" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Besides the ordinary use of the word sabbath (Gr.—*sabbaton*) corresponding to English usage, the word is used at times by some writers of the New Testament in a special idiomatic sense which forbids its literal translation in English Bibles. Failure to recognise these idiomatic uses results in faulty translation. While some of these errors of translation are relatively unimportant, others bear directly upon the time of our Lord's resurrection and merit some attention.

There are two special uses of *sabbaton* which should be carefully noted. The first of these is that construction in which the plural form of a word is used, but the singular is

meant. This usage is common in the New Testament and many examples can be cited. Names of cities are not infrequently in a plural form, although the meaning is, of course, singular. To illustrate, Jerusalem is the singular *Hierousalem*, but also very often the plural *Hierosoluma*. The name Gomorrah also appears in both singular and plural, while Sodom and Athens always have a plural form in the original Greek. Some other words which in English are used only in the singular number (East, West, right hand, left hand, etc.) appear in a plural form in the original. In these cases some versions have recognised this idiom of "plural for the singular", and

have correctly rendered these plural forms by the singular.

This idiom appears also in names of festivals, in such words as marriage and birthday, and in the use of the word sabbath. In many occurrences of these words the plural form found in the Greek text is not a real plural, but merely an idiomatic usage—the plural used with singular meaning. That this is no mere assumption but a conclusion well founded on New Testament usage, will appear from a comparison of certain parallel passages in the Gospels. On the form of *sabbaton* compare Matt. 12. 1 and Mark 2. 23 with Luke 6. 1; Mark 3. 2 with Luke 6. 7; Matt. 12. 12 and Mark 3. 4 with Luke 6. 9 (Rev. Greek text). An examination of these passages discloses (1) that the plural form is used even though one particular sabbath is referred to, and (2) that here the usage of Matthew and Mark differs from that of Luke, who uses the ordinary, singular form of *sabbaton*, while the first two use the plural (idiomatic) form. With due consideration for the idiom, the translation of *sabbaton* in all these passages will agree, being in the singular number.

The other special use of *sabbaton* (sabbath) is that in which it means a week, there being no other word for "week" in the Greek Testament. In this usage the word is either in the singular or plural. Examples may be found in these passages: Matt. 28. 1; Mark 16. 2; Luke 18. 12 and 1 Cor. 16. 2. Prominent among these is the phrase, "the first day of the week" (*mia toon sabbatoon*), used by all four Evangelists in their accounts of the Lord's resurrection.

There is a reasonable and authentic explanation of this idiom. Aside from the seventh day, the Sabbath, the Jews did not have names for the days of the week, but used ordinary numbers, e.g., the first, second, third day of the week, etc. The seven day period between the sabbaths came itself to be referred to as sabbath, i.e., a week. This explanation, confirmed by Talmudic usage (see Robinson's Greek Lexicon), is the linguistic basis of the phrase *mia toon sabbatoon*. The correctness of the rendering, "the first day of the week", is made apparent by its agreement with the several contexts in which the Greek phrase occurs.

Note the sequence of events as narrated by St. Luke in the Gospel in 23. 55, 56; 24. 1. First, the women, having watched the placing of Jesus' body in the tomb, return and prepare spices and ointments; second, the following day being the Sabbath, they rest on it "according to the commandment"; third, very early

on the next day, which is the "first day of the week"; the women come to the sepulchre bringing the spices with which they intend to prepare the Lord's body for its permanent burial. With *mia toon sabbatoon* taken as an idiomatic expression for first day of the week, the Evangelist's account is perfectly clear and self-consistent. But what happens to it if we inject into the narrative the rendering "one of the sabbaths"? Then it stands thus: (1) late in the day of the crucifixion the women return and prepare the spices, (2) they rest the following day, the sabbath, and (3) in the early dawn of "one of the sabbaths" the women come to the tomb, bringing the spices. It is obvious that the change in reading makes the narrative confused and self-contradictory. In one verse the women rest on the sabbath "according to the precept", but in the next verse they came to the tomb early on one of the sabbaths, prepared to go to work! This confusion is unnecessary and results from failure to grasp the idiomatic use of *sabbaton* in the phrase used by the Evangelists.

A good example of the idiomatic use of *sabbaton* in a sense of "week" is found in Luke 18. 12, where the Pharisee is reported as saying, "I fast twice in the week (*dis tou sabbatou*). This rendering makes good sense and is in harmony with what we know about the Jewish custom of fasting in those times. A standard authority, Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* (article "Fasts"), says, "weekly fasts were observed on the second and fifth days of the week; fasts were not observed on the Sabbaths" (compare Luke 18. 12; Mark 2. 23 and Luke 14. 1).

It remains to be noticed how a mistranslation of *sabbaton* in Mark 16. 9 is sometimes set forth as a proof that our Lord was raised from the dead on a Sabbath morning—not on the first day of the week as generally believed. A literal translation of the Greek original would read: "on the first (day) of a sabbath", a meaningless expression and therefore impossible. Having then to abandon the literal rendering of *prootee sabbatou* there is only one logical course left. We must recognise in this phrase the idiomatic use of *sabbatoon*, just as in the similar *mia toon sabbatoon*, both phrases meaning exactly the same thing—"the first day of the week". These verses (9-20) are quoted by Irenæus, in the Second Century, and the time of the resurrection as stated in verse 9, "early the first day of the week" may well be the earliest tradition of the Church.

(From "Bible Students Inquirer")



## THE MANTLE OF SAMUEL

Reflections for  
to-day

He was the last of the Judges and one of the greatest law-givers and administrators God raised up for Israel. He came to the nation at a time of crisis and the nation took him to its heart. He served his people well and faithfully but at the end they rejected him in favour of a king who oppressed and betrayed them. During Samuel's span of power he brought his people back to God and lifted them to the heights of faith; before he died he saw them in grievous apostasy and once more under the heel of their enemies. In his life he ruled the nation but at the end he was gathered to his fathers in obscurity. Yet he lit a torch that was never put out; he spent his last years teaching a handful of youngsters who continued in the spirit of his life after that life was spent. He passed on the torch; and in after years the work of Samuel blossomed and bloomed afresh.

We do well to heed the story of this man's life. We too hold a Torch, a torch of Truth which it is our duty to hold aloft while we live, and when our failing hands can carry it no longer, to pass it on to younger and eager hands outstretched to receive it. This Truth we hold as a stewardship is not ours alone; it was passed to us from those of old time as a heritage to be guarded and amplified and passed on to our successors. The work of God goes on, generation after generation, and nothing that we have is ours selfishly to enjoy and cast to the ground when the time comes that we can possess it no longer.

There is a strong parallel in our own time to the early days of Samuel. Once again the lamp has burned low in the Temple of God, and Eli has gone to sleep. Once again the people are sorely in need of instruction and guidance. Once again the word of the Lord has come to some who have been ready to give up worldly interests and aims in order to serve God in His Temple and await His word, and once again such have gone forth into the world with the message of salvation and have done a work such as the world had not seen for many generations. Temporarily, it may be, but none the less definitely, the enemies of righteousness have been checked and the Truth made known to the people.

But Samuel in his turn has become old and the glories of past days are slipping away. Who is to take the torch? Upon whom is the

mantle of Samuel to descend, and continue the proclamation of this glorious Truth in the world of men? For there is still a message to proclaim. Those who are disappointed or, maybe, perplexed, because the ending of the Age and the establishment of the Kingdom have not come at so early a date as they may have expected must not lose faith. The Plan of God is still being wrought out on time. The fact that we are not able correctly to discern the time makes no difference to that. And in times of uncertainty we do well to study the lives of those ancient stalwarts who, with more limited knowledge, must have found the purposes of God an even greater enigma than we do ourselves, and yet triumphed in faith and completed their course with joy.

Samuel was a leader and a prophet, a man of action and vision, utterly and completely consecrated and surrendered to the service of God. That was the secret of his success and that is the secret we have to know if we also would remain steadfast to the end. He went about his work with the serene confidence of a man who habitually walked with God and knew without a shadow of a doubt that the work he was doing was God's work. That confidence was the driving force behind the work he did.

There are many examples in the Old Testament of such men who gained "a good report through faith". Daniel, Isaiah, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, were all men of action, vigorous, positive action, but they were all visionaries. While their hands were set to the plough their eyes were fixed on the heavens, and there they saw visions of God. It is a noteworthy fact that so many of these men pledged their lives to God in their early youth and were almost immediately called to serve Him. That should be a pointer to us not to despise the aspirations of our younger brethren after effective service for their Lord, but rather to realise the immense potentialities in a young life fully surrendered at so early a stage, and to do all in our power to assist it. There is more than a passing fitness in our Lord's reference to new wine and old wineskins in this connection. It is quite possible that some among the younger generation can receive and assimilate some elements of unfolding Truth peculiar to this generation which most of the older ones could never accept and are

not expected by our understanding, all-wise Lord to accept. In such a case it is clearly the bounden duty of the older ones to view with tolerant understanding the endeavours of those who must perforce tread a somewhat different path because they live in a somewhat different world.

The life of Samuel was a hard life; his victories were not easily won. That he was able at the end to turn his back upon all that his prowess had won him and live contentedly teaching his handful of students in a quiet country retreat says much for his strength of character. But then, Samuel knew something of the end from the beginning. He knew that all his mighty works, wrought in the heyday of his physical maturity, must be as nothing compared to the spiritual legacy he must leave behind him if he was to be truly faithful. And with nearly all of Israel apostate from the faith and most of his life's work already in ruins he knew full well that in the hearts and minds of those few "sons of the prophets" reposed the real hope of the future. So he taught them in the same serenity of mind in which he had once led Israel against the Philistine hosts, and conquered without any weapons save his faith, and his people's faith, in God.

The story of Israel's varied fortunes in their many wars with the Philistines in Samuel's day is an object lesson in itself. It was when Samuel was quite young and still attendant on the High Priest Eli that the great disaster came. Israel lost her greatest glory, the Ark of the Covenant. The word of Samuel had already begun to go out to Israel, but quite evidently as yet there was no real heed being given, and when the fortunes of war began to go against Israel they gave way to superstitious beliefs and took the Ark into battle with them in the hope that God would not suffer the indignity of losing the symbol of His presence into the hands of the unbelievers. But God did; can there be a more telling example of the utter disregard the Most High has for form and ceremony? If Israel no longer had faith in Him, the sacred Ark was no longer a symbol of any value, and its capture by the Philistines a matter of indifference to Him. So the first Philistine war ended in disaster for Israel, the death of Eli, last High Priest of the line of Ithamar, and twenty years of utter hopelessness and dejection on the part of the people of the Lord.

It was during that twenty years that Samuel came into his own. With the death of Eli he stepped into the place of authority, and

although he could not be invested with the dignity of High Priest, he was in practice both sacred and secular ruler of the people.

One wonders why the Ark of the Covenant was not restored to its place after its recovery from the Philistines. According to 1 Sam. 6 and 7 it was in the Philistines' land only seven months but after its recovery it remained in the house of Abinadab of Kirjath-jearim until the reign of King David. It is probable that the Philistines destroyed Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood in the days of Eli, after the capture of the Ark, and with there being no officiating High Priest and Israel as often as not under the heel of alien powers, it seems that the Tabernacle service, together with the Day of Atonement sacrifices, fell into disuse for a considerable number of years. That was the price the people paid for their presumption in taking the Ark of God into battle before them as though it had power to deliver inherent in itself.

The "twenty years" of 1 Sam. 7. 2 cannot be the time the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim for that is altogether too short a period to extend to David's reign. It seems more reasonable that it betokens the period during which the people languished under Divine disfavour and gradually, under Samuel's leadership, awakened to a sense of their apostasy and undone condition. So at the end they returned to the Lord and 1 Sam. 7 is the account of their return. That provoked the second Philistine war. The change in the hearts of the children of Israel was remarkable. The same enemy; the same invasion; the same threat; but this time there was no suggestion of taking the Ark before them into battle. They had learned their lesson. This time they said to Samuel (vs. 8) "*Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines*".

And, of course, God heard. The Philistines were routed without Israel having to lift a finger in their own defence. Samuel offered a burnt offering, and Samuel cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him. That was all. It was on this occasion that Samuel set a great stone and called it "*Eben-ezer*", signifying "*Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*", and gave us thereby a word and a theme that we have used constantly for each other's comfort and encouragement in these later years.

Samuel was now an old man. The time had come for his mantle to fall on other shoulders. The people loved and respected Samuel, but they wanted a king. "*They have not rejected*



thee" said the Most High to his faithful servant "but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." So Samuel anointed the young man Saul, and saw his own authority pass to the man of Israel's choice. He saw the man prove unworthy of the anointing and heard the Divine sentence of rejection. Therefore in the fulness of time he anointed another young man, one after God's own heart, the youth David. He was not destined to see David king. Samuel finished his days with his own life-work completed but God's work in the nation still unfinished. But he passed on his mantle to those young hearts who surrounded his death-bed.

Perhaps that is one great lesson we all have to learn. Though we live a hundred years twice told, we can do no more than finish our

own life's work. The work of God in the world will still remain unfinished and will still be going on. We may, each of us, make our individual contribution toward that work and the contribution we have made, be it great or small, will have made some difference to God's great work. We shall have been co-workers together with Him. But after our little time of activity is ended and we take our place among the "great cloud of witnesses" there will be others to continue the work and play their part in the accomplishment of the Divine Plan. God grant that we individually may be faithful to our calling, and before our own end comes pass the flaming torch to one younger and newer in the race who is waiting to pick it up and follow in the path which we have trod.

### THE PRIDE OF NARCISSUS

Greek mythology tells of a youth named Narcissus, who was so beautiful that all the young men sought his companionship and all the nymphs desired his love; the wild beasts were tame in his presence, and the very flowers and trees swayed and nodded towards him as he approached. In spite of all, he went on his way in cold arrogance, rejecting every overture until he should find one he deemed beautiful as himself. At last, seeing his own reflection in a woodland pool, he stretched out his arms to embrace whom he took to be a fitting mate, but, despite his every endeavour to clasp the handsome youth he saw before him, he could lay hold on nothing substantial. Overcome by grief at his failure, he pined away on the pool's brink and died.

How many Christians lose much by going a solitary way through life with thoughts turned ever inward upon themselves, arrogant in their own righteousness like the Pharisee who went up into the Temple to pray, wilfully blind to the friendship and fellowship their fellows would so willingly proffer, and complaining at the end that life has brought them only disillusionment. "I am among you as one that serveth," said Jesus, and good indeed is it for us when we can altogether forget self in the joy of giving our life's best endeavours for the enrichment of other lives, and receiving our gifts back in abundant measure.

The individual who tries to live without God—and the majority, unhappily, are like that to-day—is less than human.

### THE SHEIKH'S JUDGMENT

Neri is a town in Khurdistan, and Sheikh Saddik of Neri had a reputation for wisdom among his fellow Moslems. One day a perplexed true believer presented himself with a problem. He possessed a fine fowl which unfortunately had taken to preaching Christianity. Three times in his hearing it had exclaimed, "The religion is the religion of Jesus!" The bird was produced, and repeated its message, "*Din din el Seyidna Isa*," or at least what all present unanimously interpreted as being those words. That it was a miracle none doubted; but was it of Allah or Sheitan (God or Satan)? If the latter, the owner could wring the cock's neck, and the incident would be closed. If the former, ought he, a good Mussulman, to turn Christian?

The Sheikh considered the matter, and gave his answer. The miracle was declared to be from Allah; and the cock must in no wise be slain, but preserved as an honoured and sacred fowl. But there were many sects of Christians, and each one claimed that its particular version of Christianity was "the religion of Jesus". The cock had given no evidence as to which was the true one, so, until all Christians should agree together, or until the bird should give a more explicit oracle, no true believer need do anything.

That story is a bitter commentary upon the bigoted intolerance characteristic of too many Christian groups.

We must leave the earth or heaven will never be ours. Our arms are not long enough to reach heaven while we hold on with one hand to earth.



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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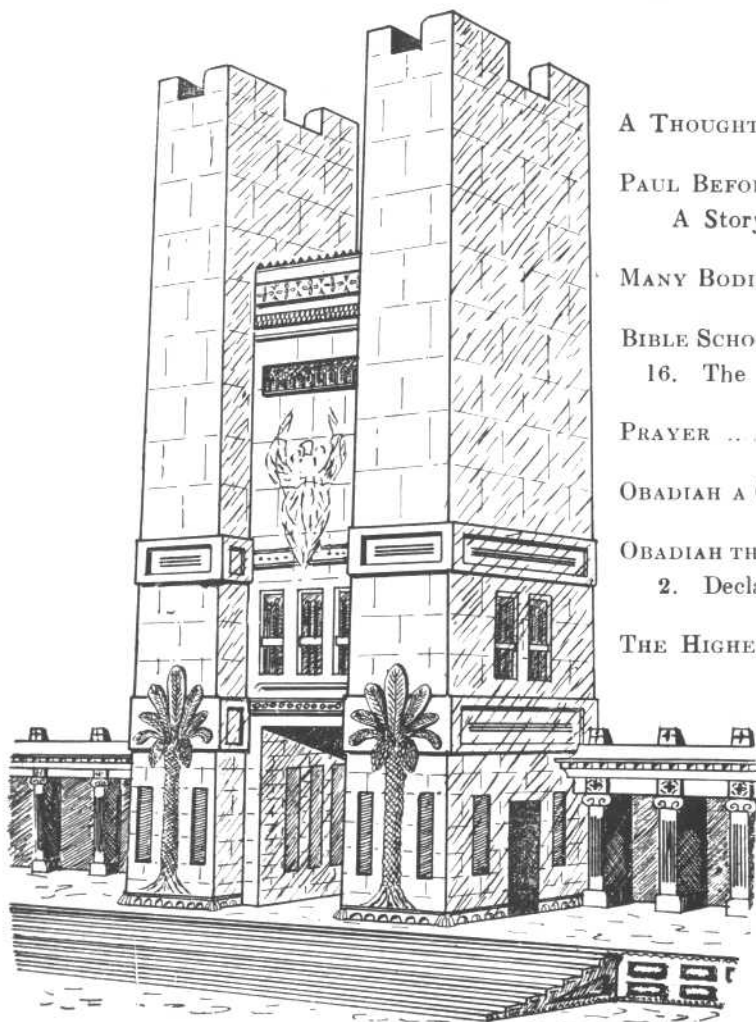
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### A Thought for the Month

*"Bless the Lord, ye his angels, mighty in strength, that execute his word, hearkening to the voice of his word; bless the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye his ministers, that execute his will: bless the Lord, all his works in all the places of his dominion" (Psa. 103. 20-22).*

A remarkable passage, that, affording a fascinating though brief glimpse of activity in a world beyond the reach of human senses. We may call it the spiritual world, the celestial world, or just by the familiar name "Heaven", but by whatever name we know it and in whatever form we visualise it we refer to an order of things, a real sphere of intelligence, a department of Divine creation, in which the Divine Will is carried out without opposition or question. The Church has prayed for centuries "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and in that prayer testified her faith that there is a sphere of creation in which evil finds no place, in which all that is said and done is in full accord with the standards which the Most High has ordained for the orderly conduct of life in His Creation. It would seem that David was possessed of a rare depth of spiritual insight when he described that world as one of ceaseless activity, as he does in this Psalm. Angels, mighty in strength compared with we puny humans, hasting to carry the Divine word; hosts of ministers busy in the execution of His Will; all this denotes a world in which there is much to do and much being done, developments and progress and achievement on a scale perhaps undreamed of on our human scale of thinking. This is a world as real to its citizens as is ours to us, but a world much closer to that ultimate reality which is God. In man's world there is progress, of a sort, but there is also much that is static and to a considerable degree there is retrogression. In that world, nothing is static and there is no retro-

gression. Everything goes forward; ever new fields to conquer and new peaks to scale. The famous astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked in his book "The Nature of the Universe" some fifteen years ago "It strikes me as very curious that the Christians have so little to say about how they propose eternity should be spent... What the Christians offer me is an eternity of frustration". Perhaps the criticism is justified; much of Christian evangelism centres around the process of getting ready for the after-life without any clear idea of the nature, and more importantly, the purpose, of that life. The poetic imagery of the Apocalypse, its harps, trumpets, white robes, golden floor and all, has for far too long been tacitly accepted as a sufficiently accurate description and in this day and age it definitely is not sufficient. No wonder the active mind of a man like Prof. Hoyle recoils at the prospect of an eternity in which there is nothing left to discover or to do. But, of course, it is not going to be like that. The only view of God consistent with all that Twentieth Century knowledge, sacred and secular, has to tell us is one that depicts Him ceaselessly creating, continually planning to enlarge His vast domain and to people it with fresh forms of life all willingly and happily engaged, like those angels and ministers of Psalm 103, in carrying out His Word and executing His Will. The fact that we see not yet men upon earth in that happy state is merely an indication that we are as yet in the babyhood stage; men will eventually attain maturity and be ushered into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

*Anonymous.* We take this the first opportunity of acknowledging with sincere appreciation the receipt during March of an anonymous donation of £5 (Bedford).

## PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

No. 18 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

Paul's defence before Agrippa ranks as one of the highlights of the Book of Acts. In masterly style he presented the case for Christianity as the logical development of Judaism to a man high in authority in Jewry, one qualified by birth, education and experience to understand the force of the argument. Perhaps, if only we knew, he came within an ace of persuading his listener. No one has ever really understood what lay behind Agrippa's cryptic remark "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian".

The new governor of Judea, Porcius Festus, was an upright and resolute man and not one to let the grass grow under his feet. He had been appointed to succeed Felix, following the latter's disgrace and recall to Rome, and he took up his duties with the intention of stamping out the corruption and lawlessness which had flourished under his predecessor. Had he lived longer history might have been different; he died in A.D. 61 only a year after assuming office, and his successors did nothing to arrest the mounting lawlessness which culminated ten years later in the horrors of the Jewish War and the dispersion of the Jews among all nations.

Within a few days of Paul's appeal to Cæsar and the consequent decision of Festus to send his prisoner to Rome, the new governor received a courtesy visit from the highest Jewish dignitary in the land, no less a person than King Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa was a king in name only, his title being a courtesy one given him by Rome in recognition of his descent from the Herodian family, and on account of his father's personal friendship with the Emperor Claudius. He exercised no imperial authority of any kind in Judea. He was, however, designated the Protector of the Temple, and this fact, coupled with his very considerable wealth, gave him considerable standing and power with the priestly hierarchy and the ruling classes generally. His great-grandfather, Herod the Great, the slayer of the Innocents soon after Jesus' birth, had been dead for many years and so had his great-uncle, Herod Antipas, who executed John the Baptist. His own father, Herod Agrippa I, by whose orders James the brother of John had been executed (Acts 12. 2) had died sixteen years earlier in this very town

of Cæsarea, following the celebrated oration on account of which the listeners had hailed him as a god. Now the last of the Herods was to come face to face with the foremost of those who espoused the Cause against which his own forbears had fought in vain.

So this Jewish nobleman, in all the regalia of his meaningless royalty, accompanied by his sister Bernice who shared his pseudo-imperial state, came to pay his respects to the representative of Roman rule and with the intention doubtless of establishing a business understanding for the future. Agrippa is known to have been an astute "man of the world" and whilst on the one hand he was a zealous orthodox Jew upholding the State religion and the Law of Moses he also took good care to keep on the right side of the secular power emanating from Rome. It was by this Agrippa's energy and initiative, incidentally, that the magnificent Temple begun by his great-grandfather Herod the Great forty-six years before the time of Jesus (John 2. 20) was at length completed, having taken three quarters of a century to build; ten years later, as Jesus had predicted, it was totally demolished by the Romans under Titus at the siege of Jerusalem.

The Jewish king had no thought of that calamitous ending of his life's work on the day he entered the old Herodian palace at Cæsarea, now the official residence of the Roman governor, to make the acquaintance of Festus. Neither could he have suspected that at this moment, like his forbears before him, he was to be brought into contact with the challenge of Christ, but that unlike them, he was not to fight against it, but in measure to further its interests. There is not much doubt that Agrippa's considered judgment in the matter at issue was a contributory factor to Paul's acquittal when he stood his trial before Nero two years later.

After, doubtless, several days' discussions on matters of State, of Roman policy and Jewish intransigence, Festus brought up the matter that was troubling him. He had this prisoner on his hands, Paul the Christian, who after two ineffectual trials had appealed to the tribunal of Cæsar and must now be sent to Rome. Festus' problem was that he had no idea of what crime under Roman law Paul



was to be accused. It was quite obvious that Festus, like Felix and the commander Claudius Lysias, believed Paul innocent of any crime, but the insistence of the Jews that he was worthy of death made it necessary to get to the root of the matter. Had it been a matter of transgression against the ordinary civil law Festus would have known where he was, but realising his ignorance of matters Jewish, and finding, as he said rather helplessly to Agrippa, that the accusations related to "*questions of their own religion, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*" he felt at a loss. He rather welcomed the opportunity of getting the advice of so acknowledged an expert as Agrippa.

The king probably beamed expansively. He would be only too happy to assist his new friend. There might have been another factor. He could not but have been well aware of Paul's name and reputation. Secretly, perhaps, he would long since have liked to meet and hear him but the dignity of his position forbade. Here was a golden opportunity. "*I would also hear the man myself*" he remarked. "*Tomorrow*" promised a greatly relieved Festus "*thou shalt hear him*". The ensuing proceedings were probably the most elaborate of any at which the Apostle had been the central figure. Festus did not do anything by halves. When Paul was ushered into the council chamber he found himself facing all the exotic pageantry of an Eastern king. Agrippa sat in royal state with his consort Bernice and their retinue, gorgeously arrayed in a blaze of colour and ornament, in addition to which there was the armed might of Rome, commanders and centurions with their men in gleaming armour, and the civic leaders of the city in their robes of office. Everybody who was anybody in Cæsarea was present, and it is to be hoped that Agrippa was suitably impressed by the organising ability of Festus and his efforts to make this a memorable occasion.

"*And Festus said, King Agrippa and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might*

*have somewhat to write, for it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him*". (ch. 25. 24-27).

This was not a trial, as were the two previous occasions. Having appealed to Cæsar, Paul had taken his case completely out of the hands of provincial officials. This function was an invitation to Paul to state his own position before a leading representative of his own nation who could be relied upon for a true appraisal of the position and advise the Governor accurately. Paul himself understood this and was ready accordingly. Agrippa looked down upon him from his seat and invited him to say what was on his mind. "*Thou art permitted to speak for thyself*" he said urbanely.

"*I think myself happy, King Agrippa*" Paul responded, "*because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all things whereof I am accused of the Jews, especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews*". This was not fulsome flattery. There was probably no living Jew better qualified to weigh up the logic of the arguments whereby Paul would seek to prove that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled in His person and life all that the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures, had foretold concerning the suffering Messiah and His relation to the out-working purpose of God. Agrippa was an educated man and thoroughly conversant with the literature and the history of his nation. He was not a religious fanatic, and he was not biased in favour of the priestly hierarchy of his people. All the evidence goes to show that he took Paul and all he had to say very seriously and judged the entire matter on its merits.

Paul was now well launched on his favourite theme. He knew that the man before him was well able to understand the thesis he had to propound. He commenced on the basis of the age-old hope of Israel, that it might be the Divine instrument for the conversion of the world under the leadership of the Messiah in God's good time. "*And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers*". From this he swung quickly into the connecting link between that promise and its claimed fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*" Gentiles might doubt such a thing, but never Jews. In all the fierce conflicts that Jews had,

first with the Greeks and afterwards with the Romans, during the troubled two centuries before Christ, the fixed belief of every Jew faced with death at enemy hands was that God would raise him from the dead. One of the fundamental doctrines of Judaism was that at the Last Day there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust, and that rewards and punishments would then be distributed. It is true that, in general, Jewish thought equated the just with the Jews and the unjust with the Gentiles, and looked forward to sanguinary vengeance upon all their opponents when the day of the Messiah should dawn, but in this they have not been so very much different from many of their Christian successors. The only real points of difference in Paul's theology were that Jesus of Nazareth was that promised Messiah and that Gentiles as well as Jews had part and lot in the Divine purpose; to neither of these propositions would orthodox Jewry give assent. Agrippa, however, was a man of broad mind and liberal education and he probably saw the force of Paul's argument much more clearly than has usually been supposed.

The Apostle proceeded, describing the circumstances of his conversion to Christ on the Damascus road, his sudden change from being a persecutor of the disciples to an adherent of their cause, his call to preach Christianity to the nations outside Israel and his implementation of that commission, his visions of Christ and messages from heavenly sources, his realisation that the prophetic teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures converged on the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived, and suffered, and died, and was the first to rise from the dead—and at that, Festus, who had been listening with growing incomprehension and amazement to themes which were totally new to him, could contain himself no longer and broke in with a loud exclamation "*Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad*" (ch. 26. 24 R.S.V.). With exquisite courtesy the Apostle turned to him, "*I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner*". Swinging round again to face the Jewish monarch, his voice rang out with that stentorian challenge which was the dramatic climax to this dramatic scene. "*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know*

*that thou believest!*"

Agrippa's historic answer, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*", as rendered in the A.V., has been hailed as an intimation that the king was within an ace of being converted to the faith. On the other hand, many scholars have criticised this rendering of the Greek phrase in Acts and averred that the king really passed a somewhat sarcastic remark to the effect that Paul expected to convert him much too easily. There is a certain difficulty in translating the expression and room for some difference of opinion. It does not seem likely, however, that Agrippa was being sarcastic or treating the matter lightly; the narrative goes on to show that he did in fact take Paul's words very seriously in his subsequent discussion with Festus. The word translated "Almost" has the sense of something little in respect of size, few in respect of number, brief in respect of time, and so on. There is no evidence that the remark was a question; Agrippa did not say, as some have suggested, "Do you expect so easily to make me a Christian?" It is to be feared that popular exegesis of this verse has been somewhat influenced by a refusal to believe that Agrippa was in any way whatever influenced by Paul's appeal, but this is both unjustified and unworthy. It is quite possible that the sense of his reply, expressed in present day idiom, was something like "with a little effort you will persuade me to become a Christian" as though not much more was needed to turn the scale. It is not likely that Agrippa was really on the point of conversion, but it is possible that his thoughtful mind had perceived the logic of Paul's presentation and was more than half inclined to accept the intellectual premises on which it was based. His use of the term "Christian", which was not as yet a widely used term, shows that he already had some knowledge of the progress of the new faith.

The hearing was concluded. Agrippa rose from his seat in sign that he had heard enough. Taking Festus and a few high officials aside, he conferred with them in private. Paul was guilty of no crime against the law; "*this man might have been set at liberty*" was Agrippa's judgment "*if he had not appealed unto Cæsar*". Without much doubt the king helped Festus draft the document which was to go to Rome in explanation of Paul's despatch to the Imperial tribunal; it is quite likely that the opinion of Agrippa as to Paul's innocence was added to the letter and that opinion must have carried weight when

the trial took place. After two long years' inactivity in Caesarea Paul's heart must have beat faster in anticipation of the imminent

attainment of his great ambition—to see Rome.



(To be continued)

## **“MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS AROSE”**

A note on  
Matt. 27. 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 worth while 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. 14, “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 Psa. 139. 2, “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising” while a further instance of its use in our Lord's day is found in 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 to 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. It 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.

\* \* \*

The apocryphal work known as the "Acts of Pilate" or "Gospel of Nicodemus", written neither by Pilate nor Nicodemus, but dating, it is thought, from about the Fourth Century, has a lot to say about this incident. According to this book, two men named Carinus and Lenthius, sons of the aged Simeon who held the babe Jesus in his arms in the Temple, and themselves already dead at the time of the Crucifixion, were recalled from Hades after witnessing Christ's descent into that region, to bear witness to the priests and scribes of the reality of Christ's triumph over death. Their mission ended, they returned to the realms of Death. The only value of the story is the testimony it bears to the acceptance of

Matthew's account of the incident in Church tradition; evidently the early Church accepted the fact that some such thing had happened at the time of the Crucifixion and by the Fourth Century the story had become elaborated and invested with embellishments born of the doctrinal errors which by then had invaded the Church.

\* \* \*

A suggestion of a different nature, aimed at elucidating this admittedly strange text, has been put forward by another student, and is given hereunder.

The terms used strongly suggest that the description is that of a *vision*. This will be clear if the account is compared with that of the "vision on the mount". (Matt. 17, 1-9). In both instances the event is recorded *as seen by the witnesses*. In both cases *nothing more* is witnessed after the occurrence.

Jesus told Peter, James and John not to tell the vision to anyone, the vision (like that of Daniel) to be kept a secret until a later time.

The vision of the awakened saints was not again seen after it had been recorded on the minds of the witnesses.

It is significant that the raising (whether of the saints or the Lord) is *into the holy city*. If the saints walked the streets of Jerusalem, why is that not stated? The term "holy city," "New Jerusalem." Rev. 21, 2.

The word from which "appeared" is translated is *emphanizo* which is *never used to describe an ocular demonstration*.

*Emphanizo* is translated "declare plainly," once, "inform," three times; "manifest," twice; "show," once; "signify," once, and "appear," twice. The passages in which *emphanizo* is used are:—

1. For they that say such things *declare plainly* that they seek a country (Heb. 11, 14).
2. A certain orator, Tertullus, who *informed* the governor against Paul (Acts 24, 1).
3. The Jews *informed* against Paul (Acts 25, 12).
4. The chief priests and elders *informed* me (Acts 25, 15).
5. I will love him and *manifest* myself to him (John 14, 21).
6. Judas said . . . Lord, how is it that thou wilt *manifest* thyself unto us, and not to the world (John 14, 22).
7. So the chief captain let the young man depart and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast *showed* me these things (Acts 23, 22). (The things "shown" were the things told to the chief captain).
8. Now therefore . . . *signify* to the chief



captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow (Acts 23. 15).

9. Now to appear in the presence of God for us (Heb. 9. 24). (To "appear" in this case is to officiate as advocate).

The vision of the rising saints (holy ones) is descriptive of the First Resurrection. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." (Rev. 20. 6).

Notice also the promise to the Church in Philadelphia: "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of

my God, which is New Jerusalem."

The events of our Lord's time on earth have their counterpart or fulfilment when He comes again, and we should look for the fulfilment of those things He taught by parables, sign and vision. Our Lord, when he spake, was often misunderstood because His words were obscure. He purposely spoke in parables to hide His meaning, but He did not speak needlessly, because He said the word which men rejected would judge them in the last day. (John 12. 48).

### AUGUSTINE'S "PROOF" OF HELL

Saint Augustine in his writings ("City of God," Book 21, chap. 4) asserted as proof of the possibility of eternal torment the "known facts", first, that salamanders could live in fire without coming to harm, second, there are mountains in Sicily which burn for ever without wasting away. Both his "facts", of course, were fallacious. It was an old superstition in his day that salamanders—a type of lizard—could live in fire; also the great theologian evidently had no knowledge of the nature of volcanoes. It is an important thing to realise that in any age the understanding of Divine truth is of necessity limited and coloured by the prevailing knowledge of the outer world, the level of current scientific knowledge and social ethics. That is one reason why it should be expected that although the basic principles of the Christian faith were laid down by Christ and His Apostles for all time, their detailed interpretation and significance grows clearer and deeper as generation succeeds generation. Many perfectly sincere Christians in our own day come short of the clear vision they might otherwise enjoy by reason of their clinging to outdated interpretations and theologies having their origin against the mental background of several centuries ago.

Daniel was a man of power, and because he was prayerful he was powerful. His radiant witness made its impression on all around. The threats of men terrified him not, for God was on his side. Neither could he be bribed, for God was his all in all. His humble heart soared above these things and he could speak with calm fearlessness to the kings of Babylon, because of the exceeding glory of Jehovah.

(Alfred Mathieson)

### ACROSS THE RIVER

We know not what the future holds for any one of us, and the rapidly changing events of to-day make it plain that no experience which God's faithful servants of old were called upon to undergo need be ruled out as impossible in these closing years of the power of man. May the stirring account in "Pilgrim's Progress" of the passing over of Valiant-for-Truth be a true story for each one of us who, reading these lines, know that we too are soldiers of the Cross, pledged to a heavenly country and a Kingdom which shall yet be supreme among the nations.

"I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him who can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles who will now be my rewarder." When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river side, into which as he went he said "Death, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor. 15. 55). So he passed over; AND ALL THE TRUMPETS SOUNDED FOR HIM ON THE OTHER SIDE."

### NOTICES

Bro. Alex Muir, formerly of Glasgow and now for many years of U.S.A. is to visit this country during July and August and will be able to undertake a number of appointments. Those wishing to be included in the plans may advise A. O. Hudson, 24 Darwin Road, Welling, Kent.

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Friends at Cardiff announce their annual Convention for September 11-12 next. Details from W. L. Shepherd, 29 Clive Place, Penarth, Glam.

## BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

### EXODUS

#### Part 16 The Book of the Covenant

Israel had been encamped before Mount Sinai for nearly a week. Moses had already ascended the mountain three times and talked with God. The Ten Commandments had been uttered from the mountain top in tones audible to the people gathered on the plain below. Now it was time to proceed to the next stage, the making of the Covenant.

For the fourth time Moses made his way up the mountain, "into the thick darkness where God was" (ch. 20. 21). This time he was to receive the detailed terms of the Covenant; these are recounted in ch. 20. 23 to 23. 33 inclusive. The whole of this part of Exodus comprises minute instructions on what might be termed the civil and ecclesiastical law of Israel, the observance of which was to constitute them the people of God. This long catalogue of regulations, peculiarly fitting to a nation living under the social and economic system that was Israel's destiny, and not necessarily applicable to peoples of other cultures and certainly not to the nations of to-day, was the "Book of the Covenant". It had to be solemnly accepted by Israel before the covenant could become effective.

These laws in general made provision for dealing with twelve classes of crime against God or against man, for the proper use of the land, and observance of the annual religious feasts. They are prefaced by a reiteration of the Second Commandment, prohibiting images of God for purposes of worship (ch. 20. 22-26), passing on to laws regarding slavery (21. 2-6), concubinage (21. 7-11), murder (21. 12-15), physical violence (21. 17-27), idolatry and witchcraft (22. 18-20), usury (22. 21-27), sacrilege (22. 28-31), false witness (23. 1-3), and bribery and corruption (23. 4-9). Following this come regulations for the observance of the weekly sabbaths and the sabbatical years, when the land was to rest (23. 10-13), and the annual feasts (23. 20-23). There is much in them that is repugnant and even unacceptable to modern minds and Christian ethics, but they were not intended for moderns or for Christians. They must have represented a distinct advance in the ethical standards of the people to whom they were applicable and to whom they were addressed. The scope of this treatise does not permit a detailed examination of these laws and regu-

lations; they form a distinct study in themselves, but when considering them it is important to bear in mind that they were intended for Israel in its then social and economic state and are not framed as an exposition of the general principles which should govern the conduct either of other nations or of individual Christians.

At the close of this catalogue of laws the Lord promised (ch. 24. 23-33) that His Angel would go before them and bring them into the Promised Land, casting out the aboriginal inhabitants before them, not all at once, but little by little, as Israel increased in numbers and required more living space. This is a most important passage and its significance has often been overlooked. The promise implied that they would not need to conquer the land by warfare, neither were they required to exterminate the inhabitants in the usual ruthless manner to which all ancient nations were accustomed. God Himself would see to it that the fear of Israel would be upon the native tribes so that they would offer no resistance to the incoming host; once the land was occupied, those tribes would decrease in numbers, generation after generation, "by little and little", until Israel was left in sole possession. A stringent requirement was laid upon Israel, to obtain whilst this process continued; they were to have nothing to do with the idolatrous worship of those alien peoples nor permit any intermarriage with them. Had the outcome been as God thus instructed the story would have been similar to one that has been enacted many times in the world's history, when a superior and more virile people has taken possession of an already inhabited land and imposed upon it their own culture, and through the years the inferior people have slowly but surely died out. The Amorites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites would have been eliminated from the land just as surely as they were in fact, but without the savage and barbarous warfare which the later narratives show did take place. But Israel lost their faith and their nerve when the time came; their fear of the inhabitants of Canaan led them to put their trust in armed combat instead of God, and in face of that determination God could do no other than turn away and leave them to gain

the Promised Land by war rather than as a gift. So we have all the horrors of the invasion under Joshua and the long years of strife and bloodshed which could have been avoided had they believed God and marched straight in. Even then they failed to attain their objective, for many of the "people of the land" were never driven out but remained a thorn in Israel's side and a constant influence leading them into idolatry during the whole of their national existence. To this day strains of the old inhabitants, Amorite, Hittite, Canaanite, appear and reappear among the modern inhabitants of the land of Israel.

Armed with this "Book of the Covenant", containing all the detailed obligations to be laid upon the people, Moses came down the mountain and laid it before the host. As before, with one voice and amid scenes of great enthusiasm, the people solemnly declared "*All the words which the Lord hath said we will do.*" (ch. 24. 3). This was the moment in which Israel accepted the terms of the Covenant and now it had to be formally ratified. Chapter 24 tells the story. First of all Moses "*builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel*" (ch. 24. 4). The altar would have been a stone pile, constructed of rocky boulders selected for their suitable shape, for no tools might be used upon such an altar; it must be of undressed stone unpolluted by the handiwork of man. Around this altar, in a circle something like our British Stonehenge, were erected the twelve "*mazzebeth*"—stone obelisks set upright in the ground and inscribed with the names of the tribes. Similar obelisks are still to be found near the ancient Sinai copper mines; when and by whom they were erected is not known. Made of red sandstone, they are roughly squared to shape some two feet wide by eight inches thick and standing six to twelve feet high. Some have incised inscriptions on them. It is probable that Moses' twelve "pillars" were like these monuments still existing. Having completed this structure, the people were gathered in assembly to observe, whilst "young men" appointed by Moses approached the altar and offered sacrifices—burnt offerings of oxen before the Lord. There was, of course, no organised priesthood in Israel at this time and Moses combined in his own person the joint offices of Leader and Priest.

Now came a ritual which is as old as history, the sharing of shed blood between the Deity and the creature, between God and

man, that the two may be bound together in a blood-brotherhood and a shared life. All the old pagan religions, long before Christianity and long before Judaism, had this same ritual built into their system of worship and there can be no doubt that it goes farther back than the beginnings even of paganism and polytheism. It must stem from some long forgotten revelation of God to man in the early days after Eden, before man's primitive knowledge of God had faded from the mind and given place to the worship of stocks and stones and the powers of Nature. Now at last it was to come into its own again as a sign of this new relationship into which God was about to enter with these His children. In ceremonial fashion Moses sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the altar, thus symbolically offering the devoted life, the essential vitality of the whole people to God for His service. Then he turned and solemnly read the terms of the Covenant in the hearing of the people. His voice could hardly have reached the whole host. Probably the elders and family "headmen" of each tribe were gathered together in his immediate presence to act representatively for their fellows. At the conclusion of the recitation there was a great shout, the third affirmation of consent, "*All that the Lord hath spoken we will do, and be obedient.*" (ch. 24. 7). Three times had the Divine offer been made. Three times had the people assented. Deliberately, with full knowledge of its implications, the people of Israel entered into the obligations of the Law Covenant and took them upon themselves.

On this basis Moses took what remained of the sacrificial blood and sprinkled it upon the people, with the words "*Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words*". Again he could hardly have reached the entire host; probably the same representatives who heard the terms of the Covenant received the sprinkling upon behalf of their fellows. Thus was enacted in symbol God's part in the contract; life, vital force, from above, to come upon this people and sustain them in the work they were to do for God. From henceforth they were not as other men; they had become a separated people, sustained by Divine power in consequence of the bond existing between themselves and God.

This was still not the end. There had yet to be a ceremonial meal at which representatives of the people were as it were to sit at the table of God in God's own dwelling and eat bread with Him. Only then could Israel



be considered truly of the family of God. The narrative in ch. 24. 9-11 is one of the most intriguing in all the Scriptures. As instructed, Moses set out once more to ascend the mountain, accompanied this time by Aaron, his sons Nadab and Abihu as prospective priests of Israel and seventy of the elders of Israel. Apparently they were not to ascend to the summit; at some intermediate point they halted and there beheld a vision of the God of Israel.

The implication of verse 11 "*also they saw God, and did eat and drink*" is that in His presence they sat down and ate bread and drank wine. God was not manifested to them on that occasion in the thundercloud and the storm, with the rending of rocks and quaking of the earth as He had appeared to Moses. This was a quieter and more reassuring manifestation. They saw Him, says the narrator, seated as it were upon a sapphire pavement, blue as the vault of heaven in its brightness. The conclusion is irresistible that the awe-inspiring phenomena which had crowned the mountain for the past few days had ceased, that the sky was a clear azure blue, and it was against the background of that sky, as they looked heavenwards, that they saw the vision of the Almighty. God was pleased with them; He had accepted their offerings and made His Covenant, and in manifesting His presence with them in this meal of bread and wine He formally accepted them as His family, children of God, sons of the Most High.

Thus was the Covenant made, a momentous transaction that constituted Israel forever, in a phrase coined by Mahomet long ages afterwards, "*the People of the Book*". Israel always has been the people of the Book, witnesses to God albeit very faulty witnesses, preserving through all the darkness of ancient times that knowledge of the One God and His outworking purposes which blazed up at last in the sudden radiance of the First Advent when our Lord Jesus Christ came to "*bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel*". The Covenant of Moses ended then, but in the meantime it had rendered yeoman service in the cause of the Kingdom of God.

Although the ceremonial ratification of the Covenant was thus at an end, there was yet to be further conference with God on the Mount. Moses now was to receive at the hands of God a written copy of the Law, engraved on two tablets of stone. To this end, and following the Divine instructions, he bade Aaron and the others remain on the moun-

tainside, apparently at some point between the plain and the summit, until his return, and set off for the top attended only by his henchman Joshua. Chap. 24. 14 records a rather obscure instruction to the seventy elders, the gist of which seems to be that Aaron and Hur were to act on Moses' behalf during his absence if any matter arose among them requiring an authoritarian ruling. The mention of Hur as one apparently enjoying equal status with Aaron in the upper hierarchy of Israel is made without any explanation of the basis on which he attained that status and the only mention of Hur is at the battle of Rephidim, when he assisted Aaron in holding up the leader's hands to invoke the power of God upon the Israelite army's efforts. It takes a little sorting out of the tribal connections to form a proper picture of the position of Hur. He was of the tribe of Judah, grandfather of the craftsman Bezaleel who supervised the construction of the Tabernacle at Sinai, and the great-grandfather of the Caleb who was Joshua's right-hand man at the entry to Canaan. But whilst Aaron was, as far as can be deduced, the titular head of the tribe of Levi at the Exodus, Hur was not in the line of which the later heads of the tribe of Judah came, viz, Nahshon, Salmon and Boaz, Nahshon being alive at the Exodus and Salmon participating in the entry to the land. The most likely explanation is that at Sinai Nahshon was too young to exercise the duties of so important an office, that his father Amminadab—who must have been born a century earlier—was dead, so that for the time being the duties of tribal leadership devolved upon the senior member of the next senior branch of the tribe. This would be the line of Hur (the details of descent are stated mainly in 1 Chron. chap. 2) and since Hur himself must have been about one hundred and twenty years old at the time he is very likely to have been the senior. This would then indicate that rulership was shared between the heads of Levi and Judah, the priestly and kingly tribes, and in fact throughout Israel's national history their legal priests were always of Levi and their legal kings always of Judah. Aaron and Hur were prototypes of all the High Priests who served the Tabernacle and all the Kings who sat on the Throne of the Lord at Jerusalem in after years.

Secure in the feeling that he had left affairs in safe hands, Moses made his way to the summit, leaving Joshua at an intermediate point to await his return, and was speedily



lost to view. "And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount, and the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days . . . and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel . . . and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights."

It was upon this occasion, whilst Moses was alone with the Lord for forty days, that beside being given two tablets of the Law he also received detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle and the ceremonial which was to be obligatory upon its priesthood and upon all Israel. Virtually the remainder of the Book of Exodus is taken up by this meticulous description, chaps. 25-31 cast as an account of the Lord's descriptive instruction for the building design and the ceremonial, and chaps. 35-40 recording the actual carrying out of the instructions and the ultimate erection of the Sanctuary. The purpose of so detailed an account, occupying apparently so disproportionate a portion of the narrative, has sometimes been queried. The true answer is that this Sanctuary, in all its architectural details and all its sacrificial ceremonies, is symbolic of the great truths of God's redemptive Plan. That fact is made plain to us by the writer of the Book of Hebrews. As those white-robed priests went about their duties, as the High Priest enacted his role in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, and as the people played their part, they all were foreshadowing deeper spiritual truths which were not to be understood by men for another fifteen hundred years. Only

when the Advent of Jesus Christ illumined those ancient ceremonies with meaning was the reason for so detailed an account in the Old Testament Scriptures understood.

Consideration of that symbolism, necessarily brief, is best deferred until in the course of the narrative Moses has come down from the mountain for the last time and the people have been set to work on the building of this Sanctuary. At the moment, whilst the people far below in the plain were gazing in awe and some fear at the terrible glory on the Mount, at the cloud-wrapped summit with its devouring fire, its thunders and lightnings, stormy wind and earthquake, Moses was within that cloud, lost to view, alone with God.

No man knows just what transpired during those forty days and nights. It is hardly likely that even Moses, with all his "*eye not dim, nor natural force abated*" (Deut. 34. 7) could have stored that intricate detail in his memory. He must surely have reduced it all to writing. How he came into physical possession of the two Tablets of the Law is unknown; he himself claimed that they were given him by God, that they were written by the finger of God. All that is known is that when Moses finally re-appeared to Israel he was bearing with him the two Tablets and in some form or another the instructions for the Tabernacle. The only comment he had to make on that forty days with God was the succinct statement in chap. 31. 18 "*And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.*"

(To be continued)

## PRAYER

Reprinted from the  
"Herald of Christ's Kingdom"

"With one accord!" The day had brought  
Its vexing cares, its anxious thoughts;  
With labour worn, with doubts perplexed,  
With toils and troubles sorely vexed;  
When evening brought its hour of prayer,  
With sweet accord we gathered there.  
"The door was shut!" "With one accord"  
We kneeled before our risen Lord;  
Some needed strength, some needed peace,  
Some prayed that wrongs and woes might  
cease;  
All felt the need of humble prayer,  
All needed Christ, and Christ was there.  
"Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh  
to you."—Jas. 4. 8.

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and  
shew thee great and mighty things, which  
thou knowest not."—Jer. 33. 3.

"Evening and morning, and at noon, will I  
pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my  
voice."—Psa. 55. 17.

Now, if we are to grow in our prayer life,  
there are five things which are necessary:

The first of these is TIME. Like everything  
else, prayer requires time; daily time, like the  
other essentials, eating and sleeping. It needs  
to be time enough to forget how much time  
it is, even though duties call you away. So it  
must be planned for, sometimes well ahead, so  
no duty is slighted. One must take time. No

one worth while has time for all that comes crowding to his door. Something must be left out, so time must be taken from something else, yet less important. Prayer does need time.

The second thing prayer needs is a PLACE. You can pray anywhere—on a train, walking down the street, measuring gingham, operating a typewriter, cutting out a dress, in kitchen or parlour or shop. But you are not likely to, *unless you've been shut off in some quiet place with the door shut*. Christ said: "Enter into thine inner chamber and shut the door"—the world shut out—but you are shut in with some One unseen. It does not matter where the place is. The corner of a kitchen is as good as the cloistered corner of a cathedral. Indeed, some kitchens I have known are better than some cathedrals. It is the recognised presence of our blessed Lord that makes holy ground, whether kitchen or cathedral. And the real rare blessing of the daily quiet place is not only that you actually pray, though you will; not only that you read the Book, though you will. It is this: There is some One else there. And to sit quiet in His presence, thank Him that He is there, and that He died for you in the love of His heart; maybe to sing Him a soft hymn of praise; this is the real blessedness of that bit of quiet time in the shut-away corner. Prayer needs a place, and prayer hallows the place—any place.

Third—prayer needs a book. THE BOOK. The Book is the basis of prayer. Bible reading is the listening side of prayer. In the Book God speaks to us. In prayer we speak to God. What He says to us radically affects what we say to him. Prayer needs three organs of the head—an ear, a tongue and an eye. The ear to hear what God says, the tongue to repeat His promises as our petitions, and the eye to look out expectantly until the result comes. Thoughtful Bible reading is giving God our ears. What goes in at the ear, warmed up as it goes through the heart, comes out at the tongue in simple, expectant, warm prayer, communion and petition and intercession.

Yes, give this Book a place in your prayers. What God says here will change what you say, and so wholly change the results. The Book will shape and mould your praying. Let it!

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

Where is the Holy Spirit? . . . In every one whose heart has opened to the Lord Jesus—not because we are good or deserving or saintly, but because He is faithful to His promise.

Yes, let the Holy Spirit teach you. . . . When you go into the quiet schoolroom, with the school Book open, ask this Teacher to teach you. And He will. You may be a bit slow and stupid—most of us are. But He is very gentle and patient.

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

The fifth need is to cultivate an OPENNESS OF SPIRIT—I mean that habitual openness of mind that opens up more and more as clearer light breaks in. It begins with that first surrender to Christ as Master, but must continue to be a habitual surrender in the actual practice of daily life. As clearer light comes in on this habit, that line of conduct, that problem, you yield and actually live the surrender you made in the initial act.

Stubbornness, sifted down, is simply refusing to yield to the new bit of light that comes. Openness to light is the one doorway to growth. Yes, we will welcome the light by obedience, we will pore thoughtfully over the Book, to get its meaning clear. We will cultivate sane, thoughtful, brooding meditating, to get things clear and clearer.

Here they are—a praying TIME, a prayer PLACE, the prayer BOOK, the prayer TEACHER, the Holy Spirit, the HABITUAL OPENNESS to more light. Let us all start into school afresh.

*Lord Jesus, teach us to pray. Help us to learn how. Thou knowest both ends of prayer, the praying end down here, and the answering end up yonder. We would be good students in Thy school, punctual in attendance, keeping the door shut, and the Book open, and the knee bent, and the will too. Teach us—in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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It is prayer that God shows his face to His children, that they have visions of His beauty and glory, that the sweet things of His love come down as gifts into their hearts, and that they are transformed into His likeness.

## OBADIAH — A COMBINED VERSION

*As an aid in the elucidation of the Book of Obadiah in the current series now appearing in this journal, this combined version has been prepared, the wording of the Authorised Version being taken as the basis, and modified by the findings of later translators in such fashion as to bring out the dramatic emphasis of the narrative. This version should be kept at hand whilst the various instalments of the series are being read.*

\* \* \*

### THE VISION OF OBADIAH

#### Thus says the Lord God about Edom

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

(2) "Behold I will make you small among the nations; you will be completely dishonoured. (3) The pride of your hearts has deceived you, living as you do in the fastnesses of the rocks, building your home on high, and saying in your heart 'Who will bring me down to the ground?' (4) Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though you set your nest among the very stars, yet even from there will I pull you down," says God.

(5) What a downfall is yours!

"If thieves and robbers came to you by night would they have stolen more than they required? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not have left some gleanings? (6) But now, what a pillaging of Esau there has been, what a rifling of all his treasures! (7) Your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground; your accomplices have deceived you and overcome you, and your most trusted friends have set a trap for you that you had not the sense to perceive."

(8) "In that day," says God, "I will destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. (9) The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off. (10) Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever.

(11) "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. (12) You should not have exulted over your brother's fate in his day of misfortune or rejoice at the ruin of the people of Judah, nor have boasted yourself in the

day of their distress, (13) nor taken possession of My people's territory in the day of their calamity, nor robbed them of their goods, (14) nor stood in the road to intercept the fugitives, nor delivered the survivors into the hands of their enemies.

(15) "And now the day of the Lord is at hand upon all the nations. As you have done, so it shall be done unto you; your deeds will return upon your own head. (16) 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.

(17) "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.

(18) "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!

(19) Then the people of the southern desert shall inherit the Mount of Esau, and the people of the sea-side plain, the land of the Philistines. Ephraim shall inherit Samaria, and Benjamin shall inherit Gilead. (20) 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.

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

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### Gone from us

—:—

Sis. P. S. Brand (*Bury*)  
 Bro. W. Burge (*Coventry*)  
 Sis. S. D. Ensoll (*London*)  
 Bro. E. Halton (*Manchester*)  
 Sis. E. Morrison (*Taunton*)  
 Bro. G. B. Tharratt (*Bishop Stortford*)  
 Sis. M. White (*Grimsby, late Luton*)

—:—

*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"*

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## OBADIAH THE MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

### 2. Declaration of War

An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah

#### "The Vision of Obadiah"

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

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

#### "Thus says the Lord God about Edom."

Another simple yet forthright statement. The message is from God and it concerns Edom. The native reverence of the prophet is revealed in his use of the term "the Lord God". To him, God is supreme and there can be no other object of his worship and adoration. Obadiah himself is but a voice, to

declare what the Lord has said. The message is not man-made, it is from God. It is not born of the prophet's own wisdom or intellectual acumen, nor yet of any insight he may have into the affairs of the nations. It is a message from the Most High God, the one who ruleth among the children of men, and giveth the kingdom to whomsoever He pleases, and as such it must be respected.

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

The message is about Edom. In Obadiah's own day such reference to Israel's brother-



nation, the children of E<sup>1</sup>au, would be quite enough to arouse interest and command attention. We today must associate Edom with all in this world who together form the worldly-minded kinsmen of the true disciples of Jesus, all who claim a degree of kinship with Christ but have no share in His Spirit. This Age has produced many spiritual Edomites and they have been and are scattered among all the denominations of Christendom. This word of the Lord God is for them too and it is a word of judgment. In this end of the Age the fact that spiritual Israelites are to be gathered together into the "general assembly of the Church of the Firstborn" implies that spiritual Edomites are to suffer the judgment that puts an end to their pretensions for ever. In the new Age there will be no Edomites.

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

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

This does not include the duty of executing it! Christians are not empowered to act as executors of judgment whilst they are still in the flesh. Some there have been who exultantly chanted together "let the saints be joyful in glory . . . to bind their kings with chains, their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgments written. This honour have all his saints." (Psa. 149). They claimed the right by virtue of that text to arrogate to themselves powers that belong of right only to the Lord the Head, and in thus exceeding the commission given to the disciples of Christ at the first they strayed into grievous error to their own spiritual hurt. There is more than a suspicion of the desire to exact revenge for past indifference or

opposition when Christians conceive it their solemn duty to inflict Divinely approved chastisement upon those whom they esteem fitting subjects for judgment.

Here in this verse the implication is plain. The other nations, not Israel, are to rise and make war upon Edom. Obadiah's mission was to proclaim the inevitability of judgment but the execution of that judgment was to be left to the nations round about. So it was in fact. Although in later days Israel did absorb the Edomites into themselves and extinguish Edom as a nation, the fulfilment of the prophecy really belongs to the Babylonians who forced the Edomites out of their mountain fortress not long after Obadiah's day, and after them the Nabatheans, another Arab people, who completed the work and occupied the Edomites' land until in the early centuries of the Christian era they in turn were dispossessed by the Saracens. The nations did indeed rise and make war upon Edom, and fulfilled every word of Obadiah to the letter.

So too in the larger fulfilment. Spiritual Edom is destroyed by the very nations of the world whose favours she solicited and for whose sake she denied and ignored, and oft-times persecuted, spiritual Israel. Hear the Divine sentence expressed in words directly applicable to the Edom of this Age, "The ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." (Rev. 17. 16). That is not an isolated instance of the Divine revelation as to God's intentions, John gave but a brief word but what he saw took its inspiration from a far more detailed prophecy spoken by the prophet Ezekiel and recorded in his 16th chapter. The picture there is of apostate Jerusalem, meeting at last the penalty of her unfaithfulness to her God. Referring to those whom she had preferred to God, He says "I will give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places . . . they shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords, and they shall burn thine house with fire, and execute judgments upon thee . . ." (Ezek. 16. 39-41). There is a Divine law of retribution which we might call, in the language of men, "poetic justice", which decrees that those who are apostates from God, unfaithful to their profession for the sake of worldly honour and interests or the approval of men, shall receive judgment at the very hands of those for whose

sake they rejected God. The nations of this world will, at the last, in Obadiah's language, "rise and make war upon" spiritual Edom, and at their hands will the Edom of this Age suffer, and fall, and be no more.

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

Small among the nations! That is a very apt description of the true Church in the flesh, the disciples of Jesus. It is also an apt description of "spiritual Edom", the nominal professors of Christianity, but for a different reason. True Christianity is at a discount because the nations of the world "will not have this man to reign over us". They do not want Christ and they are not prepared to pay the price that consecration to His service demands. So they treat the appeal of the Gospel with indifference. The Edomites know that, and they have endeavoured to compromise with the world by rejecting all there is in Christianity that runs counter to the world. For a time, in past ages, that course of action brought results. Organised Christianity was a very useful ally to kings with turbulent subjects. State and Church found many common interests and between them they ruled the common people with a rod of iron. To-day all is different. Men and women are no longer driven by fear; the State has found other and more effective means of keeping the masses in check, or at least, in these days when the masses themselves wield much power, of making those same masses serve the interests of the State. The assistance of the Church Nominal is no longer needed in secular matters and that Church has in consequence become "small among the nations", completely dishonoured".

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

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

(To be continued)

## DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

*The following eulogy was written many years ago by a Christian minister as depicting the aspect from which the typical thinking citizen of Pagan Rome regarded the Christians of that day. Although that assumption may or may not be justified, surely we would in our day ask for nothing better than that we should be regarded in the fashion expressed in these words.*

"Mysterious people", might the perplexed and pensive heathen say within himself. "Mysterious people. Moving amongst us, and yet not seeming to be of us. Passing through the world without seeming to be deeply con-

cerned in its forms or fashions, its prizes or blanks; tranquil amidst its contentions, humble amidst its pomp, silent amidst its bondage. Wrapped up, it should appear, in thoughts of your own; happy in yourselves, and never so happy as when shedding quiet blessings on all around you. How have your ways won on me, durst I but say so. How has your simple character told its tale on me, more touchingly than all the arguments of philosophy, more convincingly than all the logic of the schools. How have you almost persuaded me to be a Christian".

## THE HIGHER CONSECRATION

A talk about  
solemn things

The call of God to the higher consecration comes to us through the words of our Lord. Himself devoted and consecrated to His Father's Will, Himself the highest embodiment of the self-denying life, Himself the bearer of the world's heaviest cross, He voices forth the invitation of the Holy One of Israel to those who will venture forth to follow in His steps. If any man desires to associate with Me, says the Lamb of God, let him deny himself, let him take up his Cross, then let him follow Me. Let him deny himself! What does that mean? To appreciate it properly let its opposite thought be set out. It would then read, "Let a man permit himself" or "Let a man satisfy himself". And what would this mean? Here within the compass of a half-dozen words is set the whole course of unregenerate man.

Here is a miniature picture of a world in sin, of a world at variance, of the ruthless aggression of the tyrant, of a race in rebellion against God. "Satisfying himself" has been the cause of all the heartlessness and cruelty of man to man, of all the steep descent into the slime of sin, and of departure from the ways of God. "Permitting himself" has been the cause of the break-down of the human will, of the casting away of all righteous sanctions and restrictions, and of unholy riot in the heart and affections of man. Man has permitted himself to drift with the stream—to run with the crowd—to take the easy course; and the huge aggressive powers of the world to-day are the logical outcome of all the "permitting" and "satisfying" tendencies in fallen man, and have brought the terrific consequences which face fearful trembling men in these dark days.

How vast a field of human experience is thus covered by the Lord's words "Let him deny himself"! Let a man deny his self-hood—his self-satisfying desire, his self-permitting desires, his self-permitting ways! That short statement drives right through the heart of things. It cuts its way to the very core of all self-acquisitiveness, self-possessiveness, and self-satiatedness. It strips man of all his exaggerated sense of self-ownership and proprietorship.

He who voiced this invitation on God's behalf owned no place wherein to lay his head. When required to pay the Temple dues, the

coin was taken from the fish's mouth. He who had been rich in heavenly wealth had denied Himself to become extremely poor on earth. How fittingly then, that He should say "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" Self-denial!—death to self!—self nailed to a cross to die! "*And follow me!*" Not through Palestine's pleasant land, but into death, by being baptised into Him and into His death. No wonder Jesus says "*If any man will come after me!*" Not every man would want to follow where He led. Not every one would want to end his life upon a cross!

The Apostle Paul sets out the exacting nature of the consecration call in Romans Six. He describes it as death to sin. The degree of a Christian's death to sin will depend entirely upon the measure of his death to self, for self has always been the citadel of sin. Paul's statement makes most remarkable doctrine. After enlarging upon God's abounding grace (Rom. 5. 17-21) he asks the question "*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*" "God forbid" is his reply. Then he continues "*How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein!*" "Dead to sin!" Dead TO sin! Further along, speaking of our beloved Lord, he makes a similar statement (v. 10). "*For in that he died, he died unto sin once.*" "He died unto sin once!" Here is no reference to the great Gospel fact that Jesus died on account of human sin. Though that blessed truth is asserted and attested in a score or more of other Scriptural statements, it is not the subject of Paul's discussion at this point of his letter to Rome. It is not Jesus' death FOR sin, but His death TO sin that is the Apostle's theme.

Thus he links his first query and answer concerning themselves with the tremendous fact in the Saviour's own life and experience. "We who have died unto sin" have had (or are having) exactly the same experience which He had when "He died unto sin once." It is for that reason that the faithful follower of the Lord, in being baptised into Christ, is being baptised into His death. "His death" was a death unto sin—therefore all who are baptised into "His death" likewise experience a "death unto sin," but at the same time that He was dead unto sin, He was intensely alive unto God, and for that reason the Apostle



exhorts "*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (v. 11). This is an amazing point of doctrine, but it is the very doctrine that sets out Christian consecration at its proper value.

In what way did Jesus' "die unto sin"? Was He not always without sin? Was He not "holy, harmless and undefiled, separate from sinners"? How then could He die to sin?

It should not be thought because Jesus was sinless and remained sinless throughout all His life, that He was never subjected to temptation to sin. We have only to think of His temptation in the wilderness, and of Satan's subtle challenge to the verity of His Sonship, to realise that that was a temptation of very considerable magnitude. Nor was this the only occasion when He was assailed by the forces of evil, prior to the time of His cruel death; but from the very commencement of His ministry, yea, from His very boyhood, His mind was positively and resolutely set to do only His Father's Will. He had no ear for any other voice; He had no response for any other "call".

The same two magnet forces of Holiness and Sin—of God and of Lucifer—which exercised their pull upon all the sons of men, also exerted their pull upon our beloved Lord. But our Lord had no affinity and made no response to the magnet of sin. To it, He was "dead". He had no self-satisfying desires to fulfil. He had not come to "get" for Himself but to "give" Himself. Thus, the ways and aims of sin found nothing in His heart to stir it into life, but our beloved Lord was no automaton in His response. Of Him it is written that He loved righteousness and hated iniquity (Heb. 1. 9). Because of this He was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows.

Thus the worthy Son's love for righteousness constituted an affinity for Righteousness and Truth. Likewise His vehement hatred of iniquity constituted a tremendous de-magnetising factor against the pull of the magnet of sin. This response came about by personal choice. Hence, of His own free will, He chose to be as dead to sin as though his body was devoid of life. Again, of His own free will, He chose to be alive—intensely and zealously alive—to the drawings and leadings of His Father's Will. Because, therefore, He was so completely dead TO sin, throughout all His days, He was able to offer Himself a perfect sacrifice FOR sin, and win redemption for fallen men.

It is an amazing point of doctrine enunciat-

ed by Paul when he associated us with our beloved Lord in this deadness to the power of sin. Like Him, we are desired by God to be also dead to the "drawing" of sin, and alive, increasingly alive, to the drawing power of righteousness and holiness and truth. Is it possible for us to be like Him? Can we really live the sinless life? Unfortunately we cannot live free from sin. But God has made full provision for that. By accepting us in the beloved Son, all the excellencies of His life are attributed to us, to counter-balance our demerits, so long as we are striving daily to mortify our members which are in contact with the earth and the world of sin. We are not so free in the swing of our will as was our beloved Lord, and sometimes, if only for a moment, the pull of the sin magnet may draw us in that direction. But if we have learned to love righteousness and holiness we shall not stay with the sin. Our corresponding hatred for sin will interpose, and by the help of God, will break the connection with the sin. We shall confess our lapse to God, and in that subdued holy atmosphere, our heart will recover its free swing, and go right over to the other "pull"—the drawing power of God.

Thus Paul goes on to exhort his brethren not to YIELD their hearts to sin and unrighteousness, but to surrender themselves to God and righteousness which will lead on to holiness (Rom. 13. 22).

This is where this whole experience corresponds with the life of consecration. As individuals and as a whole, the Church of Christ has devoted itself to the Will of God. The human life has pledged itself to do the Will of God at any cost. Then that humanity, which has been devoted to the Lord, is given back as a sacred stewardship,—as a charge from the Lord, to be used only to His praise. In every act of life, in every thought and word, the offering should be "waved" before the Lord. The interference of the power of sin should grow weaker every day; the response to the Holy Power of God should become stronger every hour, and our *yielding* to our God should be more intensive and extensive with each succeeding act and thought. Thus will life become one continued and unbroken chain of consecrated experience—the yielding of each member—head, heart, hands and feet—fuller, deeper and readier every day.

Is there any wonder then, when the theme on which the Apostle was engaged reaches its noble climax, that he should put all the hallowed fire of his own consecrated heart into



that searching moving appeal of Chapter 12. 1 and 2. *"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God . . . your reasonable service"*.

Consecration, therefore, means "a living sacrifice", a daily sacrifice, a complete unreserved sacrifice of all that in us is noblest and best. But there is another side of the consecrated life that tells of satisfaction too, of satisfaction too deep for words. The priestly life was not all sacrificing; there was more in it than that. Into that mysterious dark abode the white-robed priest went betimes, still with his "two hands full" to stand at that Altar adorned with gold, and there raise fragrant odours in the air. For whom were those precious spices burned? Who saw and noted the deep reverence of that ministrant priest, as the perfumed spiral rose aloft? Who watched the holy fire eat up the crumbled incense, as the "two hands full" were given to the flames? One eye alone saw all this service—the eye of that mysterious Light which hung between the Cherubim, just beyond that separating Vail.

What meant this lonely service before the Lord? Why were those odours released by burning flame? This was communion sweet—soul-changing, transforming, sanctifying communion—at the place where the Holy One in Israel had promised to meet His chosen ones (Exod. 25. 22). But there was even more than that. *"Consecrate . . . and sanctify them that they may minister UNTO ME in the priest's office"* said the Lord God concerning Aaron and his sons. (Exod. 28. 41).

*" . . . they shall minister unto Me!"* That was the purpose of that fragrant ministry. It was no ornate ritual, nor was it waste of consecrated time to minister unto the Lord. The holy incense was not lost because it was eaten by the fire. The heart of the Eternal had been made glad. The ministry brought satisfaction to the Holy One of Israel. He it was who saw, accepted and appreciated that holy ministration. Thus the white-robed priest was consecrated to perform sacrifice before the Lord, and also to hold "communion with the Lord". Consecrated to sacrifice! Consecrated to commune! Consecrated to minister to the Lord! What a blessed privilege it was to be chosen of the Lord for this threefold end!

The substance is far better than the "shadowy" thing. Participation in the "better things" is more satisfying to the "inward man" than all the glories of the type. Those who follow Jesus in the way of death walk

also in His steps along the way of life. It is not all renunciation in the consecrated life. "Self" must go. Sin must cease to charm. The New Creature in the Christ Jesus must yield his members as servants of God and righteousness, day by day, and act by act. But there is another side. There are depths of experience from which well-springs of satisfaction flow. *"The spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit"* (Rom. 8. 16). Yes! from the Shekinah Throne of grace comes that surging flow of Holy Power which floods our souls with joy and transforms the drabness of our earth-life into communion sweet. Each consecrated child of God can retire away from the busy throng of life into a "secret place" apart, and there enjoy a privilege such as Aaron did not know. The incense of his heart (Psa. 141. 2) may rise morning, noon and night, as fragrance richer far than myrrh, or cassia, cinnamon, or calamus; and the Holy One of Israel will see and hear and appreciate the sacrifice of praise (Heb. 13. 15) which thus will rise from the Altar of his heart—an Altar more precious than gold.

Each follower of the worthy Son has been called and justified that he might offer himself in sacrifice. To that end he is set apart. But his consecration vows bring opportunities more than this. He too, as Aaron was, but on higher ground, is consecrated "to commune"—consecrated to enter the chambers of his God, and "minister unto" Him who dwells therein, and there, in that secret place, feel within his heart that soul-transforming power that will attune him to his God, and to His universal purposes.

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The Master has himself served, and knows all the difficulties of the service. It gives a master great power over his workmen when they know he is not a mere amateur in the thing itself; not merely master because he has money enough to employ them, but is a master who has done the work well and thoroughly, and joins them in the work, saying, "Come and work with me; what you do not know, I will show you." It is such a Master whom we serve.

\* \* \*

There is, in fact, a Greatness of Littleness. Costly gems are often small. The dewdrop is beautiful but very minute. A grain of sand is insignificant, but our great beaches are made up of them. A drop of water is infinitesimal, but the mighty ocean is composed of such drops.



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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JULY/AUGUST 1965

Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### Notices

A few complete sets of the "Monthly" for the years 1962 and 1963 are available and will be sent to any reader requesting a set of either or both years, while they last. New readers who have only recently come into contact with the "Bible Study Monthly" may be glad of this opportunity to read back a little.

\* \* \*

Our readers are well aware that although we rely upon voluntary donations to continue the publication of the "Monthly" we are equally pleased to send the magazine whether a donation is given or not, provided the reader is genuinely interested. We consider that this interest will usually lead those who are able to contribute something towards the cost, whilst others such as pensioners and the like who are not so able are not expected to attempt what their means will not easily allow. We believe that the ministry of the Word should be "*without money and without price*" and that the test of its value and usefulness is the extent to which our Lord endorses the faith of the sponsors by ensuring the means of continuance. Obviously however we do not wish to incur the expense of sending copies when not wanted. In order to be sure that the reader is still interested (and still at the same address), it is our custom to check once every year by sending a "renewal notice" to anyone from whom we have not heard during the preceding twelve months. It has been our practice to carry out this check on the anniversary of the date of commencing readership, but in order to simplify and streamline our office routine we shall in future send out these notices only in March of each year to readers whose reference number on the address label is below 9000, and in September to those whose number is 9000 and above. This does not imply that donations or requests to continue the "Monthly" must be

confined to those times; our friends are welcome to send their gifts or wishes at any time in the year convenient to themselves, and it is only if we have not heard anything for twelve months that the renewal reminder will be enclosed at the time above stated.

#### Bro. Alex Muir, U.S.A. — Plan of visits.

July	8	Lincoln
	11	Nottingham
	14	Glasgow
	16	Dundee
	20	Belfast
	21	Londonderry
	22	Dublin
	24	Warrington
	25	Manchester
	26	Liverpool
	27	Wallasey
	28	Bury
	29	Latchford
	29	Fazackerley
Aug.	1	Rugby & Coventry
	3	Atherstone
	5	Leicester & Blaby
	8	Aldersbrook
	10	West Wickham
	13	Maranatha Conference
	15	Cardiff
	16	Paignton
	17	Yeovil
	18	Bournemouth
	19	Eastbourne & Bexhill
	22	Central London
	24-25	Windsor
	26	Welling
	28-30	Conway Hall Convention, London
Sep.	1	Peterborough
	2	Ipswich
	5	Forest Gate

#### Gone from us

—:—

Bro. J. A. Jones (Cardiff)  
Bro. H. Thompson (London)

—:—

*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"*

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**BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES**


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**Exod. 32 & 33****EXODUS****Part 17 The Golden Calf**


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Moses had been forty days in the mountain receiving the Law, but in the meantime strange things were happening in the camp. *"And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."* (ch. 32. 1).

So soon after the making of the Covenant, when they had enthusiastically shouted *"All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient"* had they forsaken their high resolve and turned to the ever-present temptation of idolatry. It is usually suggested that this relapse was complete and that the golden calf was an image either of Athor the cow-goddess of Egypt, or one of the many bull deities of Canaan. There are a number of factors in the case which render both suppositions unlikely. The cry of the people, upon the installation of the idol, was *"These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."* (ch. 32. 4). It is most unlikely that they would attribute their deliverance to an Egyptian or a Canaanite deity. The God by whose power they knew themselves to have been delivered from the one land, and promised victory in their onslaught upon the other, was obviously no friend either of Egypt or Canaan. Also they had only just witnessed a display of the power and glory of their God which had so impressed and overawed them that they begged He should speak to them direct no more. They asked that Moses be their intermediary. It is not possible that the effect of that revelation from the mountain-top should have been lost in the short span of three or four weeks. There is also the claim of exclusiveness *"These be THY gods, O Israel"*; gods not shared by other nations. And when all was ready Aaron called the nation with the words *"Tomorrow is a feast unto Jehovah"*. A sober consideration of the whole question brings to the front one salient fact. Israel were not repudiating their God for another; they were creating a substitute for Moses!

Moses had been their visible leader and the representative of God in their midst. Moses had disappeared, and after forty days' absence

the conviction had fastened itself upon the minds of the people that Moses was not coming back. Maybe he was dead; perhaps he had in some way offended God up there on the mountain and God had destroyed him. At any rate they seem to have abandoned hope of seeing him again. The journey to Canaan must be resumed without him, but where now was the visible presence of God in their midst? To what focal point must they direct their professions of loyalty to God and how now could they assure God of their continued service? The obvious answer was an image, like to those they had seen in Egypt but symbolic in this case of their own God. Quite forgetting the prohibition of the Second Commandment, which they had so recently taken upon themselves, they called upon Aaron, as the next in authority to Moses, to have such an image constructed. The term "calf" was a more or less technical term for any kind of idolatrous symbol in ancient Israel; the word crops up many times in later years in connection with Hebrew paganism and it might well be that the image actually made there at Sinai partook of the actual lineaments of a literal calf or ox only in part. The form of the cherubim—part ox, part man, part lion, part eagle—was well known to Israel and the object of worship they constructed might easily have been a representation of the cherubim. This is made more likely by the fact that although there was only one "calf" produced, the acclamation was in the plural *"these be thy gods"* (*elohim*) and the cherubim are always referred to in the plural.

Whatever the nature of the image, Israel immediately invested it with all the paraphernalia and ritual of idol worship. The expression in ch. 32. 6 *"the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play"*, indicates that kind of intemperate feasting and intoxication followed by depraved and licentious rites which was common to all forms of idolatrous religion but hitherto had not been known in Israel. The burning words of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans are apposite *"they . . . changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the desires of*



their own hearts . . ." (Rom. 1. 23, 24). Aaron called the people to render worship to the God of Israel and came with the intention of so doing but the worship they rendered was to "*the similitude of an ox that eateth grass*" (Psa. 106. 20) and the inevitable happened. They "*forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt.*" (Psa. 106. 21) and clothed their worship with all the sensuous trappings of idolatry. In so doing they repudiated one of the basic principles of the Covenant into which they had so recently entered. Instead of relying upon the spiritual power of the unseen God for safety and guidance they were putting their trust in the magic potency of a visible fetish. The image itself, going before them, was to serve them in time of need. "*Make us gods, to go before us.*"

Moses, leaving the Divine presence after his forty days' communing, was stricken with horror as the Lord told him of the people's defection. "*Go, get thee down*" God said to him, "*for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves*". In no more telling manner could the Lord have indicated His separation from the people who had broken the Covenant. They were no longer His people; they were merely Moses' people. And the proposal He made to Moses was a test of the prophet's integrity and loyalty both to the people and to God. "*Let me alone*" said God "*that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation*". The importance of the proposal cannot be overstressed. The words imply that God put before Moses the prospect of starting again in his own person where Jacob had started; the nation sprung from Jacob's twelve sons would be blotted out for its iniquity and from the two sons of Moses God would develop a new people, still of the seed of Abraham, that would fulfil the promise, that would become the Covenant nation and eventually be God's witness to the ends of the earth. A lesser man might have closed with the offer, but not so Moses. He knew how the slow working of Divine purpose had been preparing for this time through all those generations in Egypt; he knew, none better, that the hardships of the wilderness would imbue this people with qualities that would yet rise to the top when their present faithlessness and disloyalty were things of the past; he knew that no generation or family of men is or can ever be altogether exempt from the pernicious effects of false teaching and the subtle allurements of pride and self-sufficiency. So he pleaded with God. He reminded God of the mighty

wonders and exhibitions of power by which He had brought them out of Egypt, and how the Egyptians would mock at His apparent inability to complete His purpose so that in desperation He was driven to destroy them in the wilderness. He called to mind God's promises to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob and begged that God should not turn from His declared intention at this late hour. A true servant of his people, he pleaded that they be given a second chance.

"*And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto the people.*" (ch. 32. 14).

Perhaps all this was a rhetorical proposal; the Lord knew His man and knew that he would not assent to the blotting out of all Israel. This expression "the Lord repented" occurring not only here but a dozen or more times elsewhere in the Old Testament, sometimes provokes questions, for is it not elsewhere said that God is not a man, that He should repent? (Num. 23. 19). The word itself would be more accurately translated by our modern English word *relent*. In fact it enshrines the basic meaning of being put at ease or comforted, and here in this verse it quite evidently indicates that Moses' impassioned plea had assuaged the Divine indignation and to an extent restored the broken link between God and His people.

So "*Moses turned, and went down from the mount*" picking up Joshua where he had left him, and continuing the precipitous descent until the noise of the idolatrous festivities, still proceeding, came to their ears. It was then, as the pair came into the camp, that Moses performed the act for which he has become celebrated. The two tablets of the Law, written by the finger of God, were in his hands. He dashed them to the ground and they shattered into pieces. That action has been put down as an exhibition of temper; in fact it was nothing of the kind. In thus dashing to pieces the Tables of the Law Moses expressed in symbol the breaking of the Covenant of which Israel had been guilty. At the sight of the idol "*Moses anger waxed hot*" and in this manner he displayed to Israel the enormity of the crime of which they had been guilty. But this was not the end; that Covenant provided penalties for violation just as it provided rewards for observance, and now the penalty must be paid. First the golden calf itself was destroyed and reduced to powder which was thrown into the river traversing the valley. So all Israel, who must perforce drink of the river, must in symbol swallow the idol they had made and take its

guilt upon themselves. Then the sons of Levi, men of the tribe afterwards made priests to Israel, were called upon to go through the camp with their swords executing the death sentence provided in the Covenant for the sin of idolatry. *"And there fell of the people that day about three thousand men."* It seems a barbarous deed but the age was a barbarous age, and it is logical to suppose that those who fell were the ringleaders of the apostasy which now was thus sternly suppressed. Before condemning Moses too hastily, let it be remembered that even to-day the crime of treason against the State carries the death penalty in most countries. And these men had been guilty of treason. It is important to realise that from the making of the Covenant to the Babylonian captivity Israel was neither a democracy nor an autocracy; it was a theocracy. Their God was also their king, and the occupant of the throne at Jerusalem was His representative, sitting *"on the throne of the Lord"*. The laws of God—in this case as defined by the Covenant—were the laws of the nation, and of the realm so soon as they had land of their own. By every standard therefore the men who instigated the worship of the golden calf were guilty of treason and only met the same fate as befalls men guilty of that crime to-day.

The affair was not yet ended. Sin lay on the people, the guilt of their too ready compliance in the apostasy. The link between them and their God was broken; until it was restored they could expect no Divine blessing or guidance in their onward journey. *"Ye have sinned a great sin"* Moses declared to them (ch. 32, 30) *"and now I will go up unto the Lord; perchance I shall make an atonement for your sin."* He must have had very little idea what, if anything, he could do to atone for Israel's apostasy but he was ready to enter the presence of God unbidden in order to make the attempt.

This was Moses' sixth ascent of the mountain. It must have been with heavy heart that he drew near the fiery glory which still crowned the topmost peaks and lifted up his voice to the Unseen One. *"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold, yet, now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."* There can be no mistaking the significance of these words. If it was impossible to overlook the guilt of the people then Moses offered himself a propitiatory sacrifice on their behalf. He was willing to give up his own rights

under the Covenant as laid down in the Book of the Covenant and become instead the sacrificial victim over whose death the covenant could be made anew. This expression *"thy book which thou hast written"* could hardly refer to the same thing that in later times was called "the Book of Life". That was a conception quite unknown in the days of Moses. He was more likely thinking of the Book of the Covenant he had so recently agreed with God and in which every faithful Israelite had a share.

The Lord's reply to Moses is noteworthy as putting on record at this very early age a clear definition of the Divine attitude to sin and sinner. *"Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"* (ch. 32, 33). Moses was prepared to offer himself in substitution, the innocent for the guilty; the Lord declined the offer. This is the more remarkable when it is remembered how much of the later Old Testament is taken up with the theme of the suffering Servant, the righteous innocent one who willingly submits to unjust death on behalf of the guilty (Isaiah 53) culminating in the historical fact of the death of Jesus Christ on behalf of all mankind. But here on the mountain the Lord was enunciating the principle that must be realised and understood by every man before the Divine purpose is completed, that sin can do nothing else but bring forth death just as righteousness can do nothing else but lead to life. Later on in history there was to dawn upon the minds of men the truth that God is actively working to wean men—as many as will be weaned—away from sin so that they can enter into enduring life, but in the day of Moses men's minds were not ready for that. Their ideas of sin were crude, associated with the petty delinquencies characteristic of everyday life as a nomadic people, and their conception of God's treatment of sinners was built around the idea of revenge. Even to-day it is by no means generally realised that sin is neither more or less than transgression of the fundamental laws by which the creation we know must continue upon its orderly course, and righteousness a willing conformity to those laws. Israel at Sinai was millenniums away from that understanding. Later on men were to understand that retribution is a natural as well as Divine law; *"What a man soweth that shall he also reap"*, but Israel could only think in terms of punishment and revenge. And the Divine ideal, and plan, for the reclamation of the offender after the law of retribution has done its disciplinary work

would have been completely incomprehensible to those desert nomads, that distance back in history. So they heard with dread the Divine sentence (ch. 32. 34) "*In the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them*", not knowing that in the chastisement itself reposed the seed of future restoration.

There was evidently an element of remorse in the attitude of the people; whether this was in part due to apprehension of the consequences of Divine displeasure is not altogether clear. Chapter 33 records a season of national humiliation and general self-condemnation. The fearful prospect of retribution yet to come, at an unspecified time and in an unspecified manner, lay heavily upon the host. In actual practice it was to come in the protracted wanderings of the ensuing forty years, with all the disasters and calamities associated with those wanderings. None of the adult population there and then gathered before Sinai were destined to see and enter the Promised Land; they were as yet unaware of that fact but so it was destined to be. Their apprehension was of immediate punishment but in their hearts they still hoped and expected eventually to reach the goal which had been their objective for so long. It might have been in this mood that they accepted so readily Moses' institution of a formal centre of worship, a place where God might be approached and His presence be thought to dwell, away from the terrors of the mountain top.

Verse 7 of chapter 34, stating that Moses "*took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the congregation*" has often been misunderstood to refer to the "Tabernacle in the Wilderness" the construction of which is described in Exodus 36 onwards, and which became the centre of Israel's worship and of the Levitical priesthood for some five centuries thereafter. This is not the case. At this moment, less than three months from the arrival at Sinai, that Tabernacle had not been commenced; neither had the Levitical priesthood been organised. The word "tabernacle", of course, only means a tent or temporary shelter. The structure which Moses put up after the affair of the golden calf had no officiating priesthood and no ritual or ceremony; it was a place where Moses himself could go in the full sight of Israel to consult with the Lord and from which he could emerge with the Lord's word for Israel. "*It came to pass*" says ch.33. 7 "*that every one which sought the Lord went out to the taber-*

*nacle of the congregation, which was without the camp*". When Moses was inside the tent, presumably interceding with the Lord on Israel's behalf, the pillar of cloud descended from the top of Mount Sinai and stood guard at the door. And when the people saw the cloudy pillar thus stand at the tabernacle door "*all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door*" (vs. 10). It does seem that a measure of genuine contrition for their grievous lapse had pervaded Israel and that a healthier spirit now prevailed.

There was no ceremonial associated with this tabernacle, nothing of the sacrifice and symbolism characteristic of the later and greater one to be built in the next few months. Within the interior of the tent "*the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend.*" (vs. 11), and when Moses went back to Israel after his audience with God only his faithful lieutenant, Joshua, remained to guard the sanctity of the place.

This story of Moses in audience with the Most High in that desert tent is chiefly remarkable for the Prophet's insistence that he was altogether unable to lead Israel into the Promised Land without Divine power. Unless God would go with them they must surely fail. "*Consider*" he pleaded, "*that this nation is thy people . . . wherein shall it be known that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us?*" (vs. 13-16). So he won a promise from God which was not only a source of assurance and relief to Israel but has been an inspiration for all generations of believers to this day. "*My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.*" (vs. 14). So Moses was content; he had at last effected a kind of reconciliation between God who had been so grievously outraged by the incident of the golden calf and the repentant people who now bitterly regretted their lapse. Thus was the stage set for the final scene on the mountain top, in which Moses, at his seventh and last ascent of the sacred height, was to receive two new Tablets of the Law in replacement of those he had dashed to pieces, and enter into a final covenant with God the purport of which was to preserve Israel from the type of apostasy which had been exemplified in their enterprise with the golden calf.

(To be continued)

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We sometimes think we could bear another's cross more easily than our own but we cannot change crosses with our brethren.



## OBADIAH THE MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

### 3. Voice of the Watchman

An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah

*"Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though you set your nest among the very stars, yet even from there will I pull you down," says God. What a downfall is yours!* (vs. 4-5). The supreme example of this overweening ambition is that of Lucifer, the Morning Star, related in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah. The coming downfall of the king of Babylon is made the symbol of the splendid vision of Lucifer's doom. One who aspired to share the throne of God is cast down to the lowermost hell, the only possible end for such an one. "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High." That was Lucifer's aim and intent. But he knew not, or at least refused to believe, that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he pleaseth." The One who was eventually exalted above all and made to sit at the right hand of God was One who humbled Himself, became of no reputation, and was obedient to the Father's Will, even unto death. Here is a mighty contrast which the Edomites of this Age have utterly failed to grasp. They have followed the way of Lucifer rather than the way of Christ. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel of old time, they have sought to build their own edifice and storm the gates of heaven, entering the very presence of God in the might of their own power, knowing not that against the restraining hand of God the whole of their puny efforts are as nothing. There is only one way into the celestial realm and only one avenue of approach to the throne of God; it is by the strait gate, and narrow way, that leadeth unto life. Jesus said "Few there be that find it". He knew men, and He knew that so many would attempt the way of Lucifer; few would understand the depths of His own teaching and come to Him in humble surrender, finding in that true discipleship the way to the heavenly Kingdom.

One is led to wonder if our Lord's foreview of the powers of the heavens being shaken, (Matt. 24. 29) has not something to do with this threatened "pulling down" of Obadiah 4. During the whole of this present Age the "powers of the heavens", the principalities and authorities of Christendom so-called, those who have controlled the merely nominally Christian institutions and systems, have

had matters very much their own way. One of their number, one of the most infamous of Popes, is reported to have said on one occasion *"This Christianity, how profitable a farce it has been to us."* That is the type of man from which these "powers of the heavens" have been built up. The ecclesiastical leader whose faith has been truly in Christ, who has endeavoured, however imperfectly, to lead his flock in the way of the Lord, and has honoured his Master above himself, has never been part of these "powers of the heavens". There have been many such throughout the Age and they have exercised a spiritually beneficent influence and in many cases left their mark on history. But many in high positions have sooner or later yielded to the seductive influences of the world around them and forsaken the narrow way for one that offered greater ease and more of the plaudits of men. And in so doing they have incurred the Divine sentence "From there will I pull thee down, says God".

It is a most noticeable thing in this present time, when the powers of the heavens are being shaken, that the pronouncements of ecclesiastical leaders on world affairs are given less and less attention by both the secular leaders, politicians, and the masses whom they lead. If a dignitary of the Church does venture to express an opinion on a political or social matter he is as often as not told, by the Press or otherwise, to confine his remarks to religion and leave other matters to people who understand them. Such treatment would have been unthinkable in earlier generations. Nothing can be more obvious than that the day of earthly power of "princes of the Church" is past.

Though they attempted to exalt themselves as the stars—the stars have fallen from heaven. "What a downfall is yours!" says the prophet, wondering and exultantly as he contemplates the ruin of what was once a mighty power. So it is in this Age when the great ones of the earth cry out "Alas, alas, that great city . . . for in one hour so great riches is come to naught." (Rev. 18. 17). In John's vision a mighty angel takes up a stone like a great millstone, and casts it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all (Rev. 18. 21).



"If thieves and robbers came to you by night, would they have stolen more than they required? If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not have left some gleanings? But now what a pillaging of Esau there has been, what a rifling of all his treasures! Your very allies have betrayed and brought you to the ground; your accomplices have deceived you and overcome you, and your most trusted friends have set a trap for you that you had not the sense to perceive." (vs. 5-7).

In these words Obadiah shows the futility of that trust which Edom has placed in her worldly allies. Notwithstanding many services rendered to the kings of this world and her allegiance to them in opposition to God and the true people of God, they have no hesitation whatever in discarding her completely when she has served their purposes and can be of no further use. Not only so, but the powers of this world have no scruples about taking from her such possessions and treasures as she holds, leaving her poor and naked. If ordinary thieves enter a house by night, says Obadiah, they take what they want and leave the rest. The hapless householder does not waken in the morning to find himself bereft of all his possessions; he still has something left. When the vineyard labourers gather in the grape harvest, they do not strip the vines completely bare; they leave some of the grapes for the gleaners. But not so with Edom's erstwhile friends when they become her enemies. They rifle as they will and pillage all her treasures. Sorry indeed is the condition of those who have forsaken God and trusted to Mammon, whilst retaining the name of God on their lips. They finish up by being miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3. 17). "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help" said the Lord through the prophet Isaiah. All through the Gospel Age there have been those, professed followers of the Master, who have gone down to Egypt for help, putting their trust in the arm of the flesh instead of the power of God, and although for a time they have appeared to prosper in the things of this material world, it has been at the expense of their standing before God. When it has been a so-called Christian institution that has so allied itself with the world, then sooner or later the word is fulfilled "your very allies have betrayed you and brought you to the ground".

"In that day" says God "I will destroy the wise men out of Edom, and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all

the men of Esau will be cut off. Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever." (vs. 8-10). For some reason or other the men of Teman were renowned for their wisdom. It is not clear from the Scriptures just why; there is a cryptic note in Jer. 49. 7 in which the Lord asks "Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom vanished?" and the prophet goes on very evidently to quote from Obadiah's prophecy. This alleged wisdom of Teman is that which is to be destroyed when the Lord executes judgment against Edom, for Teman and Edom were intimately connected and from the prophetic point of view are to be taken as one. Teman was the grandson of Esau, and even in his natural descent affords a picture of the worldly wisdom which is thus to perish, for the father and mother of Teman were respectively Eliphaz the son of Esau, descended thus from Abraham the faithful, and Timna the daughter of Seir the aboriginal inhabitant of the land and the one who gave his name to "Mount Seir". Thus Teman was the fruit of an alliance between the favoured line of Abraham which held the promise and the truth of God, and the earthly line of Seir having nothing in common with the promise and no share in the purposes of God. What more apt picture could we have of this alliance between the apostate ones described in this prophecy under the general title of "Edom" and the powers of this world with which they have allied themselves? Very truly Teman can be taken as a symbol of the worldly wisdom which is foolishness with God and which will be revealed at the end to be without firm foundation and doomed to be swept away as God arises to put the last great phase of His Plan into effect. "I will destroy the wise men out of Edom and the men of understanding out of Mount Esau. The powerful men of Teman will be dismayed, for all the men of Esau will be cut off."

It is in this verse that we are brought back to the great vision of Isaiah where he saw a mighty conqueror coming from afar, bearing the signs of a great conflict upon His person. "Who is this that cometh from Edom" asks the prophet wonderingly "with dyed garments from Bozrah, this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" Swift and confident comes the answer "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?" Again the strong

reply "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." (Isa. 63. 1-4). The glowing passage goes on to describe how the victorious Lord in His own power and by the might of His own right hand overcomes all His enemies and crushes all opposition to His incoming Kingdom. That is a prophecy of the end of the Age, the time when all that is opposed to the Kingdom of light and peace is to be scattered, as the vision of Daniel shows it to be, like the chaff upon the summer threshing floors. This passage alone is sufficient to assure us how completely and thoroughly the Lord will banish false religion from the earth at the time of His Kingdom, how the men of hypocrisy and deceit will find themselves, like their prototypes in the days of the First Advent, thrust out of the Kingdom in which Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets and the faithful of Gospel Age times too, will have entered. Isaiah shows this work as an accomplished thing. Obadiah takes an earlier view and depicts the Lord as viewing the iniquitous land of Edom and decreeing its eventual and early destruction.

If we want further assurance of the intensity of God's determination to make an end of false worship and set the true faith of Jesus supreme in the earth we have it in Isaiah's 21st chapter, where we have additional indication that the end of the Age, when the faithful are watching with ardour for their returning Lord, is the time when these things take place. In that vision the prophet is bidden to set a watchman and tell him to declare what he sees. The watchman has his eyes fixed on the great desert which lies between Judah and Babylonia, and in the vision he sees, crossing that desert and advancing in the direction of Judah, and therefore coming away from Babylon, a strange procession. He sees, first, a horse-drawn chariot, followed by one drawn by asses and finally one drawn by camels. That is symbolic. The horse-drawn chariot is indicative of the military conqueror returning in triumph from the scene of his conquest; the chariot drawn by asses contains the captives who have been taken prisoner and are being transported to their new home in a strange land, and the chariot or waggon drawn by camels contains the spoil and booty that has been plundered from the defeated city. The

whole tableau, for that is what it is, tells of a great and overwhelming defeat inflicted upon the city of Babylon by the victorious forces of Judah, and how the watchman sees the triumphant soldiery returning with their captives and booty.

Needless to say no such thing ever occurred in history. At no time did Judah ever overthrow Babylon. So the watchman's triumphant shout must refer to something of which these things are but figures. It is the downfall of symbolic Babylon at the hands of the returned Christ that is pictured in Isaiah 21, and the watchman who discerns these things pictures the Church in the flesh, living at the time they are imminent and fully aware of their significance. To the watchman's cry comes an answer from heaven "Babylon is fallen, and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground." That is a cry which has already gone out but has yet to be justified to the full; the fall of great Babylon is not completed and will not be until the final cataclysm of this present Time of the End in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements melt with fervent heat. But in the meantime the message has been given to a people able to understand it. There has been a harvest of the Age and those who have been subjects of that Harvest realise these things. "O my threshing, and the corn of my floor" cries the watchman "that which I have heard of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you." In this end of the Age those who can rightfully be described as the watchman's "threshing," the "corn of his floor" have had this message given to them in no uncertain terms and are in consequence "not in darkness" that the day should overtake them as a thief.

There is a passage in Isaiah 21, a charming picture of the earnest watcher for the Lord's coming and His kingdom, imprisoned still among the Edomites, but longing for enlightenment and the means of escape. "The burden (message) of Dumah" (Idumea, Edom) cries the prophet (vs. 11) "Unto me is one crying out of Seir (Edom) 'Watchman! how far gone is the night?'" That is Rotherham's rendering and it is most eloquent in its appeal. Here is one, imprisoned in the darkness and worldliness of modern Edom, longing for the morning when the Kingdom of light and love shall take control and the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, calling to the Watchman for enlightenment and comfort. "Said the watchman 'There cometh a morning, but also a night. If ye will enquire, enquire ye

—*come again*.' Truly, says the watchman, the Millennial morning is at hand but there must first be the dark night of trouble which closes this Age. But if you will know more, says the Watchman, keep on enquiring. Come again and learn of the gracious Plan of God which is to bring blessing to all families of the earth. Come out of Edom and rejoice in the light of the Truth. Separate yourself from the worldliness and hypocrisy and Christlessness of the Edomites and be joined to those who are truly one in Christ Jesus.

This is a theme on which we can speedily find ourselves grievously in error. It is all too customary to assume that the "coming out" is the separating from one body of Christians where the Divine light has burned low and joining another body where at the moment it burns more brightly. So very many thus placed have later found that in the fellowship of their choice the light has in its turn burned low again and they have had to make another move, and the Christian lives of some have been characterised by a succession of such changes, each one less enduring and less satisfactory than the preceding. In point of fact the call to come out of Edom is one to relinquish the last vestiges of the spirit of Edom and to live in that maturity of Christian character which recognises the true servants of Christ wherever they may be found, serving Christ happily and faithfully in just that sphere to which He may guide. Many have taken up fellowship and service within a new

circle of Christians under claim of having thus "come out of Edom" but without relinquishing the spirit of Edom, and their influence has tended toward disunity and the degrading of spiritual experience rather than the opposite. What we need to do above all other things is to see to it that we do not, as did those Edomites of old, come under the dread condemnation of this tenth verse of Obadiah "*Because of the wrongs you have perpetrated upon your brother Jacob you will be cut off for ever.*"

That is what it means. If we have failed to partake of the spirit of Christ and treat His brethren as He treated them; if we, like the unfaithful steward in the parable, begin to smite our fellow-servants, then we shall be cut off from all future participation in the glories of the glorified New Creation, and that without remedy. That "cutting off for ever" does not mean eternal death or anything like that—such thought is absurd—but it does mean that, having failed to attain the high degree of character-likeness to our Lord which is necessary before we can be afforded the "abundant entrance", we shall be like the unworthy of so many parables, found unfit for the high responsibility of association with Christ in His work for humanity in the next Age.

*"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."*

(To be continued)

## COMMENT ON "TOWER OF THE FLOCK"

*And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion.* (Micah 4, 8).

This has always been considered a Messianic prophecy, speaking of the time when Christ shall take His power and reign, proving Himself the true "tower of the flock", the true "stronghold of the daughter of Zion". The theme is associated with Chapter 5 "Thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah . . . out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel . . ." Bethlehem, in old time the royal city of David, is pictured as the place from which the Messiah comes forth to His people—as indeed in the days of His flesh He actually did.

The reference to the "tower of the flock" is to a tower having that name which stood near Bethlehem in ancient times. Mention is made of it in Gen. 35, 21 in the story of Jacob.

Immediately after Rachel's death and burial "on the way to Bethlehem" it is said "and Israel journeyed and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar." That name in Hebrew is *Migdol Edar*, "the tower of the flock". It was probably a tower from which the shepherd could look afar and watch the interests of his scattered flock. It must have stood all through the fourteen or fifteen centuries which elapsed between Jacob and Micah, a silent witness to the purpose of God that royalty, the leading of the flock, should one day come forth from Bethlehem. Who first built the tower and what was his purpose in so doing we do not know. All we do know is that Jacob pitched his tent there, that it stood through the centuries, that Micah addressed it with poetic fervour and prophesied that the promised dominion would one day come to the true "tower of the flock", the Lord Jesus Christ.



## GOD'S PECULIAR TREASURE

A consideration of  
Divine purpose

In the outworking of His purpose the Lord God has chosen two particular peoples for Himself—one under Moses, the other in Christ. Both are spoken of as a “peculiar people” and as a “treasure unto Him”. The Psalmist says “For the Lord hath chosen Jacob, Israel for *his peculiar treasure*” (*segullah* Psa. 135. 4). Peter, addressing the Church, who have a “living hope” through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, says “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people” or as Rotherham translates it “*a people for a peculiar treasure*” (1 Pet. 2. 9). In due time both these peoples will be complete—“made up”. Speaking of one of these, the Lord, through the prophet, says “They shall be mine . . . in the day when I make up my jewels (*“my special treasure”* see margin Mal. 3. 17). Which treasure is here mentioned? In order to answer this it is necessary to note the time and setting of the prophecy in the light of the history of the Lord’s people in the Old Testament.

When the Lord had delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt by the hand of Moses they came in the third month to Sinai and camped before the mountain. Moses was commanded “tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 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*”. To this the people answered “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” (Exod. 19. 3-8). Moses was instructed to prepare them for the third day, when “the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people”. On that day there were thunderings, lightnings and thick cloud upon the mount, and the sound of a trumpet loud and long. The record says that Moses brought the people forth to meet with God. As they stood there before the mount “*the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the whole mount quaked greatly*”. At these manifestations of the Lord’s presence the people feared and trembled. It was here that they heard the “voice of the Lord” as He gave to them what are known as the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19. 10-25; 20. 1-21). It was to this people who witnessed this manifestation of His presence that He said “IF ye will obey my voice indeed and keep

my covenant THEN shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me”.

When the time came for Israel to enter the promised land, Moses exhorted them to “*take heed . . . lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen . . . but teach them to thy sons and to thy son’s sons . . . specially the day thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb*”. They were to remember all that had happened there and not forget the commandments of the Lord lest they corrupt themselves and fall away into idolatry. If this should happen they would be chastised and be removed out of the land which they were about to possess, and scattered amongst the nations. They were to remember that “the Lord hath taken you and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him *a people of inheritance*” (Deut. 4. 20 and context). Moses reminded Israel of their calling “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God and the Lord hath chosen thee to be *a peculiar people (segullah; a special treasure)* unto himself” (Deut. 14. 2). “And the Lord hath avouched (avowed) thee this day to be *his peculiar people*, as he hath promised and that thou should keep all his commandments” (Deut. 26. 18, 19). The blessings and benefits which would be theirs if they were obedient and the penalties for disobedience were clearly set forth for them by Moses (Deut. 28. 1-68). The story of Israel is one of repeated falling away from the way of the Lord, one of forgetfulness and disobedience. Yet there were always a few who loved the Lord their God and had His approval because of their faith.

After the reign of Solomon the people became two nations, two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Because of their continued apostasy and disregard of the servants of the Lord, Israel was taken out of her land by the Assyrians. (2 Kings 17. 1-41). Later, Judah, for the same reasons, was taken into exile in Babylon. (2 Chron. 36. 11-21). As Jeremiah had said, the Lord opened the way for some to return to their own land after seventy years in Babylon. (Jer. 29. 10). Through the proclamation of “*Cyrus king of Persia*” all “*whose spirit the Lord had raised up*” left Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. After two years the foundation of the house was laid,



and after some delay the temple was completed and the house of the Lord was dedicated with joy. (Ezra 1-6). Later Ezra "*a ready scribe*" went from Babylon with others taking free-will offerings to further the work at Jerusalem. There he learned that all was not well. The returned exiles had corrupted themselves with the people round about and had committed great sin. They had forgotten the covenant of the Lord their God. After confessing their sin before the Lord Ezra counselled the people to reform in order that the anger of their God be turned away from them. This they did in a solemn covenant. (Ezra 7-10).

Nehemiah, still in Babylon and cup bearer to the king, heard that those who had gone to Jerusalem were in "*great affliction and reproach*". The wall of the city was broken down and the gates burned with fire. He fasted and wept and mourned and prayed to his God. He knew that their plight was due to their failure to remember their God and His law. In answer to his prayers and because the "good hand of God was upon him" he was sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and restore the city. This he did in spite of much opposition from enemies, because, as he said when the work had begun, "*the God of heaven will prosper us*" and when finished, "*the work was wrought of God*". The people also "*had a mind to work*". The task completed and the people registered, they were gathered together to hear Ezra read *from the book of the law of Moses*, so that all could hear with understanding. In the same month they were assembled with fasting and sackcloth to make confession of their transgressions and to make a covenant "*to walk in God's law which was given by Moses*". The dedication of the wall was kept with thanksgiving and singing; the worship of the Lord was restored. Whilst Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem, the people began to corrupt themselves again. *How soon they forgot the law of their God and their covenant!* Nehemiah had to make further reforms on his return.

Some think that Malachi was contemporaneous with Nehemiah, but facts seem to indicate that Malachi was later, probably well over one hundred years after the return from Babylon and about four hundred years B.C. His prophecy tells of the same transgressions which called for reformation in Nehemiah's day. The people had fallen again into the same evil ways. It was the last message from the Lord to Israel before John the Baptist. (It is worthy of note that they were addressed as Israel, not just as Judah). They were remind-

ed that God had loved them and chosen Jacob their father in contrast to Esau. They had forgotten all this, and His dealings with them as His people. They had no appreciation of His love and had lost all consciousness of their calling as the people of the Lord. The priests were denounced for their unworthy and contemptible offerings. They brought the blind and the lame for sacrifice. They dishonoured God and despised His name. Unlike Levi of old who had walked faithfully before God in a covenant of life and peace and turned many away from lawlessness, they had departed from the way of the Lord and caused many to stumble at the law of their God. Because of this God had sent a curse upon their ministry and made them contemptible in the eyes of the people. Abominations were committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. They had become weary of the word of the Lord. In turn the Lord had become weary of their murmurings and their corrupt ways. They were as bad as their fathers and had not kept His ordinances. Called upon to return unto the Lord, they were not aware that they had gone away from Him, and said "*Wherein shall we return?*" They (the whole nation), were robbing God by neglecting the tithes and offerings due to Him. If they would but keep their part and bring their tithes and offerings the Lord would pour out upon them such a blessing that there would not be room to receive it. The curse upon the land would be removed and they would enjoy all the blessings promised under the covenant with them through Moses. The lack of these blessings testified to their apostasy. Instead of turning to the Lord they made excuses saying "*it is vain to serve the Lord*". But there were some who loved and feared the Lord. These often spoke to each other about their God and His ways. "*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 the day when I make up my jewels.*" (*segullah*, special treasure). Each faithful one was a "jewel" belonging to His special treasure. *The Lord will have "a people of inheritance,"* His "*holy nation*" His "*special treasure*" when the faithful of all generations in Israel are gathered in "*a better resurrection*". The unfaithful of all generations must come forth in a resurrection of judgment for discipline and correction in order to find their place in the purpose of the Lord. "*Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the*

wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." "THEY SHALL BE MINE saith the Lord of hosts" is therefore a precious promise to all the faithful in Israel.

The Israelites living in the land at the time of the First Advent of our Lord were no better than the unfaithful generations before them, but as in the days of Malachi, there were some who loved the Lord and believed His word. These were "*Israelites indeed*". They received Jesus as their Messiah, the one "*of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write*" (John 1. 40-47). To these was given the great blessing of a new relationship to God, the blessing of sonship, which they could not have under the law of Moses. (John 1. 11, 12). They had been members of the house of God under Moses but now became the first members of the house of God under Christ. They became partakers of a heavenly calling, not confined to Jews only but extended to people of all nations; chosen in Christ. (Heb. 3. 1-6. Phil. 3. 14, 20, 21. Acts 15. 14. Gal. 3. 26-29). This call has not yet ended. Everyone who has "received Him" and heeded the call to follow Him, belongs to this chosen company. Peter speaks of these as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people (a people for a *peculiar treasure*)" 1 Pet. 2. 9. see Rotherham). Each member of this class is a "jewel" in the treasure which God has been preparing during this age. To those who belong to the Lord, Paul says "*For the favour of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath shone forth,—*

*putting us under discipline—*

*In order that—*

*Denying ourselves ungodliness and worldly covetings—*

*In a soberminded and righteous and godly manner we should live in the present age—*

*Prepared to welcome the happy hope and forthshining of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Christ Jesus,—*

*Who gave himself up in our behalf,—*

*That he might redeem us from all manner of lawlessness,—*

*And purify for himself a people as his own treasure, zealous of noble works."* (Tit. 2. 11-14. Rotherham).

The grace (favour) of God appeared over nineteen hundred years ago. "*Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*" (John 1. 15, 16). Jesus, whose name means "saviour" is the Saviour of all men from the condemnation brought upon the race by Adam. In Him there is hope of deliverance for all in due time. (Rom. 5. 19-21; 8. 21). We who have received Him now

have the blessed hope of His coming to receive us unto Himself, as "his own treasure" (John 14. 1-3). In preparation for this there must be a teaching, a training, a disciplinary process. "*Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure*" (1 John 3. 1-3). Peter says "Therefore gird up your minds and fix your hopes calmly and unfalteringly upon the boon which is to be yours at the re-appearing of Jesus Christ. And since you delight in obedience, do not shape your lives by the cravings which used to dominate you in the time of your ignorance, but in imitation of the One who has called you, you must be holy in all your habits of life, because it stands written 'You must be holy, because I am holy'." We have been redeemed by the "precious blood of Christ" and called to holiness. (1 Pet. 1. 13-21 Wey). As His peculiar people, His special treasure, we must be zealous of good works, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15. 58).

Israel as a people was unfaithful to the Lord and forgot her covenant made through Moses, but there were in each generation, some who loved the Lord and thought upon His word and name. The Lord says "THEY SHALL BE MINE IN THE DAY WHEN I MAKE UP MY JEWELS, MY HOLY NATION." This will be when they come forth in the resurrection to life, to possess the promised earthly inheritance.

In this Christian dispensation there have been many professing Christians, but few have entered the "strait gate" and walked the "narrow way" (Matt. 7. 13, 14). Those who do so have a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ". Theirs is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1. 2-4). This "*treasure*" will be completed in the First Resurrection when they will "be like him and see him as he is". Those yet on earth belonging to this class, in the midst of great apostasy, love the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They speak often to each other—they "forsake not the assembling together". They are looking for the day when they will be together for "ever with the Lord" as *His own treasure, to possess the inheritance reserved in heaven.*

Both these classes are chosen of God in the outworking of His glorious purpose to "*gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth*" (Eph. 1. 10).

## MORE ABOUT MATTHIAS

*The article "Matthias the Apostle" in the March issue elicited the following observations from another contributor; they are published as supplementary to the original thesis.*

\* \* \*

The article "*Matthias the Apostle*" calls for more comment. The original twelve apostles were *directly* appointed by their Lord, as also later were the seventy disciples. It would seem proper, therefore, that if one of those specially appointed men should fail in loyal service his place should be filled by He who chose the first apostles. All know that one failed his Lord, even betraying Him; and the question would arise of filling his post. The faithful eleven apostles may have thought of this, but seemingly they did not ask their Lord in the forty days of resurrection to appoint another in Judas' stead. It may well be that prior to the Ascension their minds were occupied with the wonder of His resurrection and their own revived faith and hope, but a golden opportunity to broach the subject came Peter's way according to the narrative in John 21.

Our Lord had closely questioned Peter as to whether he loved Him more than these, and Peter had each time asserted "*Lord, thou knowest that I love thee*" and each time his Lord had replied "*Feed my sheep*". Peter had been grieved that three times he had been asked to affirm his loyalty and love. His grief, however, was short-lived, for he turned about and asked about the future service of he whom Jesus loved. Why so solicitous of John's future if Peter thought it imperative that Judas' place be filled? Peter had missed a great opportunity of asking the One who above all others should appoint another apostle. Peter appeared to think the appointment of a successor most urgent, from the details in Acts 1. They had been instructed a few days previously (Acts 1, 4-5) not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, and that they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. Could not they wait just those few days before taking upon themselves to decide who should succeed Judas? The descent of the Holy Spirit would no doubt help them to choose a successor to Judas if it was *their* duty to appoint. Why the haste? Why not wait a few days more—they had already waited forty?

True enough their motive was good—they

thought it right to select a successor who had been with them all along and a witness of the Lord's resurrection; and Peter quoted scripture; and in prayer they asked for guidance. They nominated but two, Matthias and Joseph Barsabas (no doubt both good men) and prayed that their Lord would indicate in *their* voting which of *their* nominees should succeed Judas. But their problem about a successor (and our question on their selection) would never have arisen had they asked *their Lord* prior to the Ascension. It could be that heaven accepted their choice on the basis of Matt. 18, 19 "*If two of you shall agree on earth touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven*".

In reading the proofs of our Lord's resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 we see that he "*was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve*". Can we name these twelve? For this is before the Ascension; before the choosing of Matthias; before Pentecost. We all know the eleven; who was the twelfth who saw Him in risen power? If our Lord had already Himself appointed Matthias, the hurried election by the faithful apostles need not have taken place. It is possible that the "twelve" of 1 Cor. 15 were in fact eleven, and that it was customary for believers then to refer to "the twelve" whatever number they were at the time. If so, Paul, years later, had fallen into the habit.

The Lord only made one more *direct* appointment of an apostle, and he *more* than any other, filled the requirement of the disciples that he be "*a witness of His resurrection*". Later Barnabas was associated with him in special service and was given the status of an apostle, but his appointment seems not to have been so personal, so direct as that of the eleven and Paul. Further, if the words "*the twelve apostles of the Lamb*" means the twelve whom the Lamb appointed we have no difficulty in naming them all. It is significant that He appointed twelve *directly* and no more—disregarding Judas, of course, in the total. Many would say that Paul was of a different rank of apostle to the others, partly because the original chosen ones served their Lord solely for Israel and within "*the limits of the land*", and that Paul was particularly for the Gentiles. This was gloriously true, though in Paul's original commission he was made the apostle of Israel, and kings, and Gentiles (see Acts 9, 15). Some go further



still and say that the original chosen apostles will in the regeneration sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, but that Paul will receive a heavenly inheritance far above their earthly rank. If this is so, let us hope

that Matthias did not join the eleven who receive an earthly reward, but that he became a member of the church, which is His body, destined for heavenly glory.

## VOYAGE TO ROME

No. 19 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

It is noteworthy that the two great stories of storms at sea, one in the Old Testament and one in the New, have their setting in the same locality. The storm which caught and nearly wrecked the ship carrying Jonah the Hebrew prophet was of identical nature to that which overtook and did wreck the vessel carrying St. Paul to Rome eight centuries later. The same peculiar combination of climatic conditions which makes this particular kind of storm possible and creates such havoc over this area of the Mediterranean Sea still exists, with the same effect, an interesting confirmation of Scriptural accuracy.

Paul was committed to appearing before Cæsar. He seems to have viewed this prospect with considerably more confidence than he had the trials and inquiries to which he had been subjected in Judea. At this early date there was no official Roman persecution of Christianity. The opposition came from the Jewish ecclesiastical hierarchy. Every Roman official having anything to do with the case—Lysias, Felix, Festus—besides the Jewish king Agrippa, had given his verdict for Paul's innocence. He evidently had sufficient confidence in the impartiality of Roman justice to expect a formal acquittal before the tribunal of Cæsar. Whereas a matter of two years previously he came to Jerusalem convinced that not only bonds and imprisonment, but probably death, awaited him there, he now cherished a reasonable expectation that he would soon be embarking upon a new phase of evangelistic activity. It had long been his ambition to visit Rome and preach the Gospel in the world's capital city; now it seemed that his wish was to be fulfilled.

It was probably a comparatively cheerful party which stood on the deck of the little coasting vessel making ready to cast off from the jetty at Cæsarea. Paul himself was under guard, with a number of other prisoners also consigned to Rome, but Julius, the centurion in charge, appears to have been a kindly and considerate man and allowed Paul to associate with his friends Luke and Aristarchus. These two had determined to go to Rome with him and were most likely on the boat as fare-

paying passengers. Luke would have had with him his manuscript of the major portion of the Book of Acts, or at least the notes and documents on which the Book was to be based. It does not come readily to the mind that in the ensuing shipwreck this invaluable literary work might easily have been lost; through all the vicissitudes of that experience the "beloved physician" must have been at pains to preserve his work intact, that he might complete it during the ensuing two years spent with the Apostle at Rome.

The "little ship of Adramyttium", a port of Mysia not far from Troas in Asia, was built only for close inshore sailing. Julius could expect to get part of the way to Rome by its means, but when it reached the ports of Asia he would look for a larger ship bound directly for the Imperial City. The first port of call was Sidon, sixty miles or so along the coast, and this was reached after one day's sailing. Whilst cargo was being loaded and unloaded Julius gave Paul leave to visit his friends in the town; one can imagine the hurried coming together of the believers and the short session of fellowship and exhortation before the three travellers had to rejoin their ship. From Sidon the normal route lay across the sea south of Cyprus to the port of Myra (modern Finike) in Lycia but at this point rumblings of the approaching storm became evident. "We sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary." The Etesian winds, which blow with gale force from the north-west during the summer months, should by now, late August, have given place to a soft south wind which the shipmaster would be relying on to take him home to Asia without trouble, but had failed to do so. So he had to tack round the north side of Cyprus under the shelter of the high mountains of the Asiatic mainland in order to escape the full force of the adverse wind and so attain his objective.

Myra was a kind of maritime interchange point where vessels plying between Judea and Asia made contact with those sailing between Egypt, Greece and Rome. Julius was probably not surprised to find, riding at anchor in the harbour, one of the giant Egyptian cornships



whose function was the transport of wheat and barley to Rome, for Egypt was the principal source of Rome's food supply in those days. In the name of the Emperor, Julius demanded, and obtained, passage for his soldiers and prisoners—he may very well have used his good offices to include Luke and Aristarchus also. At any rate, any seagoing captain would accept passengers for a suitable consideration so that without doubt the Apostle's two companions experienced no difficulty in getting accommodated.

Several detailed descriptions of Alexandrian cornships exist in the works of ancient Roman writers and it is possible to visualise the vessel which was involved in the shipwreck. Built especially for the transport of wheat, they were about three hundred feet long and could carry something like fifteen hundred tons of cargo. They were, of course, sailing ships, having one enormously strong mast bearing a gigantic sail carried on long cross spars, and usually two lesser masts with smaller sails for use generally in stormy weather, when it was dangerous to use the mainsail. In order to keep the ship moving in times of calm or to manoeuvre her in difficult positions, rowers handling huge oars, four to six men to an oar, were often included. Steering was not by rudder as in modern ships, but by two large paddles, one on each side of the stern. Under full sail and a fair wind the vessel could make about seven knots, equal to eight miles an hour. When in the open sea they sailed by day and night, steering by the sun and the stars; in the vicinity of land it was usual to anchor at night for safety. Under these conditions the run from Egypt to Rome could be accomplished in about a fortnight. A great many ships were engaged in the trade and when, as sometimes happened, during seasons of prolonged stormy weather the arrival of the ships was delayed for a protracted period, Rome suffered famine conditions.

So Paul found himself on the second stage of his journey to Rome. At the outset there were difficulties in consequence of the persistent adverse wind. "*And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone.*" Leaving Myra, the vessel coasted close to the land, the high mountains of the Asian hinterland shielding it from the north-west wind which was still blowing with unmitigated force. From Myra to Cnidus is about a hundred and fifty miles, no more than a two-day cruise with a good wind, but under these

circumstances, constantly veering and tacking against the head wind, they "*sailed slowly many days*". At Cnidus, where the coast of Asia turns sharply northward, the vessel encountered the full force of the wind blowing down from the Aegean Sea, so that the captain had no choice but to turn and run before it in a more or less southerly direction towards the island of Crete, passing the western extremity and immediately running under its southern coast to secure the same kind of shelter he had just lost on leaving Asia. The ship, protected from the wind by high cliffs, could now veer and tack its way along the coast of Crete and make some progress.

After about a hundred miles of this they reached the port of Fair Havens—no longer existing—and it was here that the captain began seriously to consider whether he should put off the rest of the voyage until the following spring. It was customary to treat the period October to March as a "close season" for sailing; ships caught in mid-voyage would "lie up" at a convenient port and wait until the passing of winter made the seas safer for navigation. Verse 9 indicates that this time had been reached; "*now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was already past . . .*" The "fast" referred to is the Day of Atonement, 24th September in that year, roughly at the end of the sailing season. The unusual persistence of the north-west Etesian gale, which should have subsided a month before, justified the captain's doubt as to the wisdom of proceeding.

This is where Paul comes to the fore-front, a position he maintains until the end of the story. He advised staying where they were; he believed there was grave risk of damage and loss if the voyage continued. Paul could speak with some authority; he was no stranger to sea travel. During the course of his missionary journeys he had crossed and re-crossed these same waters a number of times and he had known storm and shipwreck before. To that might be added the probably not inconsiderable maritime experience of Luke. It is not likely that there was any Divine revelation to either of them in this matter; more likely that their combined judgment was adverse to proceeding. It seems that something like a vote was taken and the majority thought was against them. The wisdom of staying in Crete for the winter was conceded, but a strong body of opinion advocated taking a minor risk and pushing on another thirty-four miles to Phenice (modern Lutro) which

had a better harbour and, from the point of view of shore amenities and attractions, was preferable to the rather third-class port of Fair Havens. The vessel had a total complement, crew, passengers, soldiers and prisoners, of two hundred and seventy-six and most of them would be greatly dissatisfied if there was not enough amusement and excitement on shore to keep them occupied. As if to justify the decision to make the move, at long last the persistent north-west wind dropped, a full month late, and was replaced by the usual seasonal south wind which could normally be relied upon to continue for a considerable period. With alacrity and no doubt some enthusiasm the anchors were hauled in, the mainsail spread, and the vessel began to scud along the Cretan coast in good style. Past difficulties and delays were forgotten; thoughts were centred on the more cheerful prospect of a few months' respite from the daily round amid the pleasures and attractions of Phenice while the ship lay at anchor waiting for springtime.

Their rejoicing was premature. Before they had reached the safety of Phenice a new and more serious danger presented itself. Without warning, a raging hurricane, the dreaded "Levanter", as it is called nowadays, swept down from the mountains of Syria and whipped the sea into fury. The Levanter is a wind of gale force originating over Syria and blowing westwards across the sea; when such a gale meets the south wind from the African coast the result is a cyclonic storm, a typhoon. (The word itself is derived from "Typhon", the storm-demon of Greek mythology. "Tempestuous" in vs. 14 is "typhoon" in the Greek). Caught in the grip of this storm the mariners were helpless. To make Phenice was out of the question; the gale was driving the ship in a south-westerly direction away from all land and there was little or nothing they could do about it. Their entire attention had to be given to keeping the ship afloat and in front of the wind to avoid the danger of capsizing.

Twenty-three miles from the mainland of Crete lies the rocky islet of Gozzo, known in ancient times as Clauda. The account says "*when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive; and running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much ado to come by the boat, which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven*". All of which

is quite unintelligible until the nautical expressions are sorted out and the map consulted. The storm struck the ship somewhere between Fair Havens and Phenice. For twenty-three miles she pounded along with her huge mainsail bellied out to full capacity by the raging wind, her mainmast straining and threatening to snap under the tremendous pressure, the ship's timbers creaking and groaning as if to give way. Her south-westerly course, dictated by the wind, brought them within a few hours and by good fortune within sight of the little islet, and by what was probably a bit of good seamanship the ship was brought round to the "lee" side of the island, protected by its shelter from the full force of the gale. This is what Luke means by "*running under a certain island . . .*" With this temporary respite they first took in the boat. Ancient ships always had in tow behind them a small boat; in a storm there was danger that it might be swept away and so they took it up on board and made it secure. Next "*they used helps, undergirding the ship*", an ancient practice known as "frapping", consisting of passing strong ropes completely round the hull to hold the timbers together against the hammering action of the heavy seas. The quicksands here mentioned are those known as the Greater Syrtis, off the North African coast near Cyrenaica, some two hundred miles southwest of Crete. The sailors knew that with the wind in its present quarter they stood in grave danger of being blown directly on the sands, so they "strake sail", a term implying that they lowered the mainsail and set the smaller stormsails in such fashion that the vessel no longer ran directly before the wind; by allowing her to drift westerly several points out of the wind they hoped to pass well to the north of the quicksands and so avoid the danger.

The policy was one of despair, for they were thereby committed to drifting, at the mercy of the elements, without any guarantee of reaching land before the vessel succumbed to the battering of the waves and foundered with all on board. The storm continued and now black despair did settle on the ship's company. "*When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay upon us, all hope that we should be saved was taken away*" (vs. 20). The compass was unknown in those days; ancient ships set their course by the sun in the daytime and the stars at night. The sky was obscured by heavy clouds and the mariners had no idea where they were. They might be hundreds of miles

from land in the open sea; they might be dangerously close to unknown reefs or rocks. Their vessel was waterlogged and liable to go to pieces at any moment; they gave up hope and waited for the end.

That night Paul saw a vision; the angel of the Lord appeared to him with a message of assurance. "*Fear not, Paul!*" he said "*thou must be brought before Cæsar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee*" (vs. 23). Such visions were no new experiences to the Apostle; several instances are recorded in the New Testament and it does seem as though the Spirit-filled mind of Paul was peculiarly receptive to other-worldly revelations, particularly at times of stress such as this. There was evidently much more in the message than is recorded, for in the morning Paul recounted his experience to the entire company, exhorting them to be of good cheer, for that although the ship must be lost, they themselves would be saved, cast upon a certain island. The extent to which he was believed is debatable, but in quiet certainty Paul reiterated "*I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*"

At midnight on the fourteenth day since leaving Crete, there was a sudden excitement on deck. The lookout believed he had sighted land! Perhaps a light, perhaps the darker outline of a mountainous mass silhouetted against the darkness of the night sky with its storm clouds. Eager to clutch at any straw, the sailors dropped their sounding line and found the sea-bottom at twenty fathoms—a hundred and twenty feet. That at least confirmed they were not far from land. The vessel drifted a little farther and they tried again; this time the depth was only ninety feet. They were evidently approaching a shore, but on what coast and of what nature they had no idea. "*Fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks*" they dropped four anchors to hold the ship stationary "*and*" says Luke rather quaintly "*wished for the day*".

Again Paul took the lead; throughout the voyage he was the one most in command of the situation. Reminding them that for fourteen days they had eaten virtually nothing, in their labours and anxiety ignoring the necessities of life, he recommended that now there was prospect of escape they would be wise to build their strength; there was no knowing what may be demanded of them in the next few hours. Assuring them "*there shall not an hair fall from the head of any one of you*", and taking bread, he solemnly gave thanks to God and began to eat. Heartened by his example,

the whole company followed suit. The knowledge that, for the moment at least, they were at anchor not far from some kind of land, and the example of Paul's own confidence and doubtless that of his companions, changed despair into hope. "*Then were they all of good cheer.*" The storm continued; the ship was still taking in water and in danger of foundering even as she rode at anchor, so that after the meal "*they lightened the ship and cast the wheat into the sea*" (vs. 38). This wheat was, of course, the cargo. There must have been at least a thousand tons of grain in the vessel. It is not necessary to suppose that all of it was jettisoned, but a considerable quantity, enough to remove the immediate danger, went overboard, and by that time it was daylight and the most experienced among the crew began to scan the coastline in an endeavour to judge where they were.

No one recognised the land. As they looked across the heaving waters they did see what appeared to be a wide creek with a flat beach and the possibility of running head-on into that beach and so getting to land became the focal point of discussion. The wind would be behind them and if the mainsail could be raised a bit and the vessel get some way on her the manœuvre might succeed.

Unknown to them at the time, they were at the north-eastern tip of Malta, having drifted nearly five hundred miles during those fourteen days. Luke's description of the place is so precise that the exact spot has been identified and is now known as St. Paul's Bay, seven miles from the Maltese capital, Valetta. The "*certain creek*" which the sailors perceived, although it looked like a creek from the position of their vessel, is not really a creek at all. A small island now called Salmonetta is separated from the mainland by a channel only a hundred yards wide; strong currents enter this channel from both sides of Salmonetta and meet in the middle, creating a tumultuous mass of rough water. This is the place described in vs. 41 as "*a place where two seas met*", a fine example of St. Luke's accuracy of description.

Confident that their plan was workable, the crew raised up the anchors and "*loosed the rudder bands*" (vs. 40). During the long period of drifting the two steering paddles had been lifted out of the sea and lashed to the deck for safety. They were needed now for this operation and consequently were unloosed and lowered into the sea, with strong men ready to manipulate them as necessary. The great mainsail was slowly hoisted, and as the still



fierce wind filled it the ship began to move forward towards the shore.

Too late, the steersmen, bearing heavily upon their paddles, realised the true nature of what they had taken for an inland creek. The other end of the channel came into view, and beyond it, the open sea on the other side of Salmonetta. Before anything could be done they were in the middle of the maelstrom formed by the opposing currents meeting head-on. Beneath this meeting-point of the waters there is an extensive mud-bank. Luke says that *"the ship ran aground, and the fore-part stuck fast and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves"* (vs. 41). It was this mud-bank in the middle of the channel upon which the ship

had stranded; the bows were held firm but the stern, still floating, began to be battered to pieces. A vessel three hundred feet long could easily break in two in such circumstances and that is what appears to have happened in this case.

They were only fifty yards from land. The water was rough but the distance not great. Those who could swim threw themselves into the sea and got to the muddy shelving beach without mishap. The remainder followed them, riding over the breakers on planks or anything that would carry them. *"And so it came to pass"* the narrative concludes, that, just as Paul had foretold, *"they all escaped safe to land"*.

(To be continued)

## ASKING QUESTIONS

A thinking point

The habit of asking questions is one of the most valuable that one can acquire. A person who is always asking "How did this happen?" or "Why did he say that?" will never find life dull, and, what is more important, will be continually adding to his store of knowledge. This desire to get to the bottom of things has led to all the inventions of modern science. Probably the first man who invented the wheel saw some stones rolling down a slope, and asked himself some such questions as "Why does that particular stone keep on rolling when these others have stopped?" Such questions are at the back of all our knowledge.

We all know how children are always asking questions, awkward ones sometimes, like the pick-pocket's son who piped up loud and clear "Why did you put your hand into that gentleman's pocket, Father?" Children want to know: Jesus was no exception, for at the age of twelve he was found in the temple asking questions of the priests. What questions we ask will depend on where our interests lie. Yet even in the things dearest to us, there is a danger when we stop asking questions. There is the risk of taking things for granted. Familiarity, it is said, breeds contempt, and this can apply to the words of Scripture, which may become so well known to us that we fail to get the best out of them. It is here that the art of asking questions can be of real value.

Questions are of help to others besides those who ask them. Consider how much of Jesus' teaching we should have lost if his disciples

had not always been saying "Master, explain this parable to us . . ." When will this be? . . . Then who can be saved? . . ." The great thing about the disciples was that they were humble. They were not afraid to admit their ignorance, and as a result they became less ignorant. Those who were puzzled at Jesus' miracles and teaching, and said "What does this mean?" (Mk. 1. 37), were far more likely to profit from his ministry than those who had a ready-made explanation—"He has a devil!"—and were ready out of their wisdom to pass judgment on him and his works. We have no need to be ashamed or afraid of asking questions, for we do not yet know fully as we are fully known. The time has not yet come when with the first disciples we need ask no questions (Jn. 16. 23).

Not all questions are asked by those who seek knowledge: questions can also be used to pass it on to others. Often we are well aware of certain facts but have not realised what they imply, and then a question may help us. For example, in the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand, the disciples had helped distribute the food, and were astonished at the number it had fed. But the next moment they were worrying because they had forgotten to bring any bread with them, and Jesus used questions to remind them of the miracle he had just performed. "Don't you understand?" he asked. They had failed to realise that what he could do for others, he could do for them, and they had no cause for worrying about so small a matter. And then again, they had seen his miracles, had heard



his teaching, and yet they had not fully grasped who he was and what he was doing. So he asked them pointedly, "Who do you say that I am?" It was Peter who came out with the answer, but they were all strengthened by answering in their own minds. It was to Peter also that Jesus when he was risen put the question "Simon . . . do you love me?" It gave Peter the opportunity humbly to affirm his love: but Jesus' thrice repeated question was followed each time by the reminder that loving him means serving his flock. Jesus certainly knew that he was dear to Peter, yet he asked the question for Peter's sake.

There were others besides his disciples who asked Jesus questions. Questions such as "Is it lawful to pay taxes?", "What is the greatest commandment?", and the old chestnut concerning the wife of the seven brothers in the resurrection, were put in a very different spirit from that of the simple disciples. The questioners desired to catch this new teacher out, yet though their desire was to discredit Jesus, their questions did elicit answers of real value, and he came successfully through their examination, so that they asked him no more questions. In a way their conduct was very proper. Jesus set himself up as a teacher, and before accepting him they were justified in trying his worth with teasing problems. So with us; if we ever take it upon ourselves to examine a preacher or his doctrine, we should do so humbly: but there is nothing wrong with making the test.

It is in studying the Bible that the gift of asking questions is specially valuable. The one who before a Bible study reads through the passage to be considered, and comes prepared to ask about points he or she cannot understand, does as much to make the study profitable as those who "know all the answers". For a study is something in which all should share, and often the simplest points open up a whole field of discussion. On the other hand, the elders in a class might do well on occasion not to expound a passage at length, but to imitate their Master and ask such simple questions as will gently draw their brethren to a fuller understanding.

But it is not always easy to ask the right questions. There is a limit to our knowledge, and to some questions we cannot know the answers. But yet many questions can often be answered by reference to other passages of Scriptures or to commentaries, or simply by reference to what is said in the next verse or the next chapter. The Bible was not written in

a vacuum, it was written by and for men in a particular time and place. Neither is it a collection of texts, for much of it is connected argument or narrative. Knowledge of customs, of history, of botany even, will help us first to understand what was written before we start looking for a lesson for ourselves.

It can be helpful both for public and for private study to ask certain questions methodically concerning any passage. First one might consider who wrote it and to whom, and what was the particular need which it met. Next it is often profitable to read through the passage as a whole, noting the divisions of thought, how it falls into paragraphs. Verse by verse study is good in its place, but it is probably better to pay attention to detail only after such questions as "What is the writer's message?", "How does this thought lead on to the next?", or "What inspired this remark, or this parable?" have been considered. Then is the time to pick through the passage, getting the meaning of difficult words and verses. Concordance references have two values, firstly in leading to other scriptures where the same topic occurs, and secondly because they help in the understanding of particular words. Finally, when the meaning and context of a scripture is grasped, one begins to wonder "Is there a lesson here for me? or for our class? What is the reason for this exhortation—do we really need to follow this course?", or "What place did this event have in God's purposes?", or "Surely in another scripture it says exactly the opposite?" These are but a few of the questions that one can ask. Of course, this is far from being the only method of study. Yet questions, whether asked in a simple desire for enlightenment or judiciously pointed to bring out a particular thought, can be of real help in bringing a passage to life.

Questions are the sign of a lively mind, of mental watchfulness. But it is not enough for our minds to be awake—our hearts too must be open, our consciences alive. At times we may be sleepy, or even perhaps lazy, in our attitude to life and the study of the Bible. This should not be, and asking questions is one way in which we may provoke one another to good works. But above all, through prayer we can draw upon God's spiritual storehouse: and if Bible study does not come easily, or if any man lacks wisdom, "let him ask God for it, who gives with open hand to all men without upbraiding; and it will be given him."



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Vol. 42, No. 6

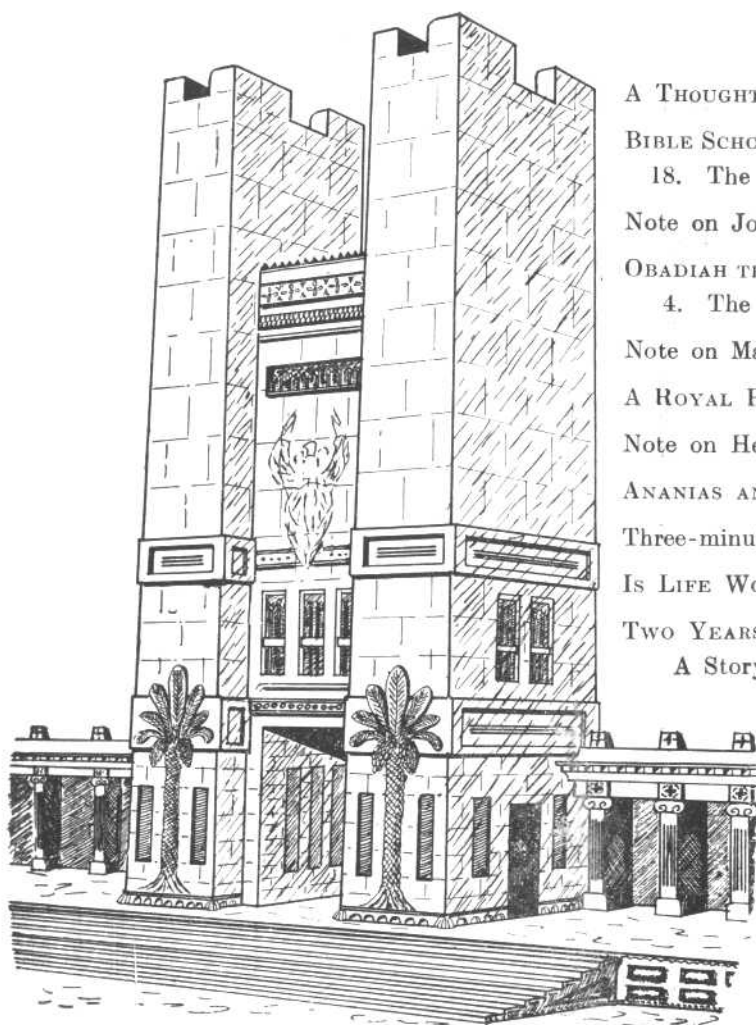
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### A Thought for the Month

*"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Gen. 1. 26).*

Celebrated scientist Sir George Thomson's book *"The Foreseeable Future"* (1955) throws an interesting light on the possibilities of the Millennial Age when, one fervently hopes, men return to a much closer harmony with Nature and a more natural way of living. Discussing the modern trend towards mechanical operation of so many processes and the supersession of Nature's methods by man-made ones, he says *"Think what a lot of electronics it would take to make a machine capable, for example, of picking an orange from a tree without wrecking the tree. One would feel one had done pretty well to get the gear into a large lorry, and it would take kilowatts of power to operate it. The monkey does it on a weight of forty pounds and a daily consumption of a pound of nuts. It seems to me that this combination of hand and eye connected through a moderately intellectual brain is one of the best bargains Nature has to offer us. We ought to make more use of it and I have little doubt that we will."*

There are, of course, current instances of animals assisting the work of men. Horses and oxen have been used in agriculture since the dawn of history. The use of elephants for transporting and piling timber is an example where the active co-operation of the beast requires some moderate degree of intelligence even if short of reason.

Remembering that in that coming Age the benevolent dominion of man over the lower creation is to become an accomplished fact,

thus achieving the ideal of Gen. 1. 26, it is possible to visualise many such applications of animal co-operation in the life of the future, and without any hardship to the creatures concerned, all of whom are created and fitted by Nature for active participation in the orderly conduct of this terrestrial world. With the present curse of commercialism removed there will no longer be need for so-called "efficiency" in the processes of production beyond Nature's own methods and the prospect which Sir George sees may become a commonplace.

Speaking again on the production of synthetic materials, he says *"I venture to predict that plants, moulds and bacteria bred for the purpose will in the long run compete successfully with the chemist in making some of the more complicated compounds"*. There is more than a hint here of the possibility that the factory production of such materials, with all the dirt, squalor and discomfort at present inseparable from such places, will give way to the orderly and cleanly processes of Nature and thus something much more like an up-to-date conception of the Garden of Eden result. Wilfred Branfield, in his work *"Continuous Creation"* (1950) drew a vivid word-picture of the earth and all that is in it being built *"by the labours of the creatures that dwell therein"*. Just as we already know that the energy received every day in sunlight could make all our coal, oil and uranium unnecessary if only we knew how to capture it and divert it to the world's power demands, so it might well be that in the coming day many present mechanical and chemical processes will give place to the production by Nature herself of the material substances that man needs to satisfy his wish for a full and enduring life.

## BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Exod. 34

## EXODUS

Part 18 The Iniquity of the Fathers

And now the curtain begins to fall on the long drama of Sinai. The people were to stay in the plain for another six months while the Tabernacle was being constructed and the priesthood inaugurated, but there were no more mighty spectacles in the heights above, no more meetings between the Most High and Moses, no more obligations to be laid upon Israel. Following this seventh and final ascent of the mountain Moses found himself at the head of a people strangely docile and content, the while the construction of the Tabernacle proceeded and the newly appointed priests were learning their duties.

First of all there had to be this seventh ascent. The incident of the Golden Calf was in the past; Israel had repented and God was reconciled to them. The Tables of the Law had been shattered to pieces but Moses was promised that he would be given new ones. The 33rd chapter closes with a very human side-light on Moses' inner thoughts. During these three months of successive ascents and interviews with God against a background of awe-inspiring natural phenomena, storm, lightning, wind, earthquake, he had been under a tremendous mental strain. The responsibility of his position, demanding an accurate retention of all the detailed instructions the Lord had given him, together with his knowledge of Israel's tendency to apostasy, coupled with the final catastrophe of the Golden Calf, would have broken a less stalwart and determined man. Even as it was, Moses must have been almost at the end of his tether. He had the Divine assurance that despite all the unhappy events of the immediate past God would still be with them and go before them to the Promised Land but his tormented soul yearned for some further evidence that all was well. "I beseech thee" he pleaded "show me thy glory" (ch. 33. 18). In that request Moses reveals to us his realisation that the blinding radiance and thunderous tempest with which he had become so familiar whilst on the mountain with God was not really God; those things were manifestations to awe and impress the senses but God Himself was hidden, somewhere behind all that natural phenomena. He asked that, as a special sign of Divine favour and an evidence that he was fully accepted in God's sight, he might be granted a glimpse of the

Deity Himself.

It is likely that up to this point in their history both Moses and all Israel conceived God as much like the gods of the Egyptians and the Canaanites, a mighty supernatural Being Who kept Himself out of sight, rode the skies on the thunderclouds, manifested His presence only in fire and lightning, never had been seen by living men of their own time and yet on the authority of their sacred books was known to have appeared upon earth in former times and talked with men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham and so on. The Lord's reply to Moses' plea must have given the prophet, and through him all Israel, a new and more profound concept of the Deity than had been attained by any nation previously; it is noteworthy that Israel clung tenaciously to that new understanding throughout all history, and in Judaism enshrined the lofty conception of God which was later developed by the teaching of Jesus to the still higher one of Christianity.

"*Thou canst not see my face*" was God's reply, uttered, we may be sure, in superlatively gentle tones "*for there shall no man see me, and live*" (ch. 33. 20). To those untutored desert tribesmen, vividly conscious of this material world but having no idea or knowledge of an extra-terrestrial order of life incapable of perception by human senses, that was perhaps the most effective way of conveying this truth to their minds. King Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple five centuries later, came closer to the ultimate truth. "*Will God in very deed 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?*" (2 Chron. 6. 18). Later still St. Paul added his word "*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*" (2 Tim. 6. 15-16). We, even in this more enlightened day, cannot visualise God; we think of Him as a benevolent Father or as an All-wise Ruler seated upon a celestial throne, but this is only an accommodation to our need of a terrestrial image to give shape to our thoughts. In reality we have to admit that the Deity, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, All-knowing, All-powerful, All-wise, is outside the range of human understanding and cannot be defined



in terms of human experience. We are told that He knows the number of the stars and calls them all by their names, in the sphere of the infinitely great (Isa. 40. 26), and that He numbers the hairs of our heads and marks the fall of every sparrow, in the sphere of the infinitely small (Matt. 10. 29-31) and we cannot understand that either. But we know that it is so.

Moses apparently was well content with the vision granted. He could not look upon the face of God but he was to hide in a cleft of the rock and the Lord would cover him with His hand as He passed by and then Moses could look upon His retreating glory; that was the greatest manifestation his mortal flesh would be able to endure. The following chapter (34. 5-8), describes the fulfilment of this promise; in all probability Moses witnessed a vision of glory perhaps analogous to that seen by the three disciples of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17) and with that was satisfied.

This experience marked the commencement of Moses' last sojourn on the summit. Commanded by God to provide two new tablets of stone upon which God would re-write the Covenant, he made his way, for the seventh and last time, up the familiar ascent and into the burning fire where God awaited him. But as he entered, and although to the watching multitudes, seven thousand feet below, the summit remained crowned with stormclouds and flashing lightning and the noise of thunder, Moses found only a great calm and a quiet radiance, in the centre of which there moved a Figure so quickly that Moses could not discern the lineaments, and could only gaze after the retreating glory whilst he heard a majestic but, without doubt, this time a quiet, assuring Voice.

*"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but that will by no means declare innocent the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation"* (ch. 34. 6-7). And Moses bowed himself to the ground and worshipped.

This statement about the iniquity of the fathers being visited upon the children often provokes enquiry and sometimes criticism—it seems on the surface to be foreign to the character of God. The perplexity arises from the assumption that this is a definition of the general principle of Divine dealing with men

whereas in fact it has to do only with the behaviour of Israel during the Exodus and nothing else. The declaration occurs at the giving of the Commandments (Exod. 20. 5; Deut. 5. 9-10) and again upon this particular occasion when the broken Covenant was being renewed (Exod. 34. 7; Deut. 7. 9; Num. 14. 18). It was not repeated on any other occasion and is not referred to at any later time. There is a contrast involved. Although the iniquity of the fathers is to be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation *"of them that hate me"*, the Lord, Who is inherently merciful, gracious and long-suffering, even though His justice forbids His *"declaring innocent the guilty"* will exercise mercy and benevolence to *"a thousand generations"* of them that love Him and keep His commandments. (*"Thousands"* in Exod. 20. 6; 34. 7 and Deut. 5. 10 is properly *"thousand generations"* as in Deut. 7. 9). The explanation of the apparent paradox is found in Num. 14. After the twelve spies, sent to reconnoitre the Promised Land, had returned with their report and news of the massive walled cities and giant defenders, and Israel in consequence had completely lost faith in God's promise that their successful entry was assured, Moses pronounced the Divine sentence. Because of their unbelief, the generation which left Egypt would die in the wilderness without seeing the Promised Land. Their children, born during the wanderings, would eventually reach it but not before they had wandered forty years in that wilderness waiting for the older generation to pass away. *"Your carcases shall fall in the wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, from twenty years old and upward . . . shall not come into the land . . . but your little ones, which ye said would be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land . . . but as for you, your carcases shall fall in the wilderness."* Then follows the word to which these statements about the third and fourth generations apply. *"And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness"* (Num. 14. 27-35). The iniquity of the Israelites who came out of Egypt and were unfaithful in the wilderness was visited upon their children; because of that iniquity those children were condemned to a forty years' ordeal in the desert which would not have been theirs had their fathers been faithful.

The expression *"third and fourth"* is probably intended as a general definition, stressing the fact that the visiting of iniquity

was confined to a relatively short time—the forty years in the wilderness—compared with the thousand generations who are to receive Divine blessing. In actual fact, elucidation of some of the genealogical lines detailed in the Old Testament does show that some at least of those born in the wilderness were of the third or fourth generation from their progenitors who left Egypt at the Exodus. Achsah the daughter of Caleb and Othniel the son of Kenaz were both fifth in descent from Hur the deputy for Moses. At any one time in a given community there are always a number of generations living simultaneously, the greater in proportion to greater average length of life and the earlier the age at which marriage is customary. An analysis of the position at the Exodus based upon such data as the Old Testament affords indicates that there were probably representatives of six generations of Israelites leaving Egypt at the Exodus, of which five had to die in the wilderness, leaving the remaining generation, those under twenty years of age at the time, to enter the land with those born during the wanderings.

The sentence was carried out. The guilty generations died in the wilderness and for forty years their iniquity was visited upon their children until the last of their fathers had died and the children entered the Land of Promise. There the matter ended; in no other sense and of no future time has it been said that God will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. It is true, of course, that individuals of every generation are liable to suffer for the deeds of their fathers, in the way of inherited disease and tendency to wrongdoing; all men are sons of Adam and cannot but be affected by much that has occurred in past generations. It is true, as Ezekiel was told (Ezek. 18. 2) *"the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"* but this general condition among men subsists not by reason of Divine ordinance but by reason of man's sin; it is not limited to three or four generations either. The statements made to Israel have no connection at all with this general law operating amongst men, which will in any case come to an end when men have attained the Divine ideal in the days of God's Kingdom upon earth. *"As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel . . . The soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right . . . he shall save his soul alive"* (Ezek. 18. 3-9).

At this point the Lord propounded to Moses

the terms of a subsidiary covenant, one that might well be termed the Covenant of the Land, for it enshrined injunctions which would be of particular importance when they were settled in the Promised Land. These terms are covered by ch. 34, verses 10-27. *"Behold"*, said the Lord *"I make a covenant; before all thy people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation"*. This covenant was a bilateral agreement, and additional to the principal Law Covenant already made and ratified. On the Lord's side He undertook to eliminate the existing inhabitants of the land by natural decrease as fast as the Israelites were able to occupy the territory thus left vacant. The term *"drive out"* in ch. 34. 11 has to be understood this way in conjunction with the more complete definition in Exod. 23. 30 and the implication in ch. 34. 12 that even after Israel's entry to the land there would be at least a period of living side by side with the natives and a consequent danger of ensnarement in their idolatry. The rest of the passage is a warning and an exhortation aimed at maintaining the level of social and religious life in Israel above the degradation and immorality of their Canaanite neighbours. It consists of four injunctions. The first bade them have nothing to do with Canaanite worship; *"ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves; for thou shalt worship no other god"*. Associated with this was the prohibition of inter-marriage with the Canaanites; such unions would inevitably increase the influence of Canaanite idolatry in Israel families. The second injunction was a reminder scrupulously to observe the feasts of Passover, of Pentecost, and of Tabernacles, the three annual feasts so closely associated with the Covenant, memorials of their national origin in the deliverance from Egypt, and an acknowledgment of the special relation in which they stood to God. The third injunction, also harking back to the events of the Exodus, commanded the devoting every firstborn, of man and of beast, to God as His lawful possession, in acknowledgment that all gifts are of God. The firstborn of man was to be redeemed with money, the offering of which delivered the firstborn son from the obligation and restored him to the world of men. The firstborn of beasts were to be offered in sacrifice, except, strangely enough, the firstborn of an ass, which was to be redeemed by a substitute in much the same fashion as man. This perhaps was in recognition of the important part played by the ass in the

national economy, as a valuable beast of burden, the sacrifice of which might impose undue hardship upon poorer members of the community. In similar fashion the first of the firstfruits of the land were to be offered to God. All this was to impress the fact that all increase, whether of man, beast or growing crops, is possible only by the beneficence and provision of God. The fourth injunction stressed the command to labour only for six days in the week and rest on the seventh, the sabbath. A somewhat strange remark in this connection (ch. 34. 21) "*in eaving time and in harvest thou shalt rest*" preserves a seventeenth century English word which is now obsolete. "To ear" means "to plough" and the remark here is evidently intended to stress that even in ploughing and harvesting times when the need for sustained effort is greatest the sabbath must still be observed. (Other occurrences of this archaic verb "to ear" will be found in Gen. 45. 6, Deut. 21. 4, 1 Sam. 8. 12, Isa. 30. 24).

At the close of this second sojourn of forty days and nights alone in the mountain the long period—something over three months—of successive audiences with the Deity was ended. Moses came down the mountain for the last time, bearing the second set of tablets engraved with the Law. During those three months he had ascended and descended the

mountain seven times, received and transmitted the Ten Commandments, negotiated and ratified the Covenant between God and Israel, received the two Tablets of the Law and set down the terms of the Covenant in writing—the Book of the Covenant—erected an altar with twelve surrounding pillars within which the ratification ceremony at which Israel accepted the covenant was conducted, participated in company with Aaron and seventy of the elders in another ratification ceremony on the top of Sinai where in vision they had shared in a covenant feast with God Himself, received and set down in writing the detailed instructions for the construction and ceremonial of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, dealt with the nation's apostasy in the matter of the Golden Calf, pleaded with and effected a reconciliation between God and Israel and re-establishment of the broken Covenant, erected a temporary tabernacle as the centre of worship and meeting with God pending the completion of the permanent Tabernacle, and finally came down the mountain for the last time, carrying the new tablets of the Law. A strenuous time indeed for a man already over eighty years of age; but Moses had been trained in a hard school and he came into the camp conscious that, so far from being finished, his real task was only now beginning.

(To be continued)

### A NOTE ON JOB 38.7

*"When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy"* (Job 38. 7).

This is said of the time when the creation of earth was proceeding, before man existed and indeed before this planet could support life of any kind. The 38th chapter of Job reaches back to the time when the Architect of the Universe was fashioning His material in the mighty crucible of Nature. If the verse is to be understood literally it is evident that the "sons of God" who "shouted for joy" were the angels, the citizens of the spiritual world, the place of the Divine Throne. It is a reasonable conclusion from what is said about the subject in the Scriptures that the spiritual world existed before the material and therefore this "shouting for joy" could well describe the interest that angelic creation must necessarily have displayed in this new development of the Divine purposes.

The "morning stars" are not so easy to define. The chapter is a straightforward description of the operation of natural forces

and although poetic to a high degree it is not metaphorical or symbolic, and literal stars do not "sing". It would seem that in harmony with the well-known parallelism of Hebrew poetry the morning stars which "sing" are complementary to the sons of God who "shout for joy", and therefore must refer to some in the spiritual world who, like the angels, rejoice at this new departure in God's creation. In all probability the allusion is to the Lord Jesus Christ, the "bright and morning star" of Rev. 22. 16, who before His coming to earth did, as the Divine Word, preside over its creation (John 1. 3). It might also include the one-time holy celestial being who afterwards rebelled against God and is commonly known as Satan, the Adversary, named by Isaiah Lucifer, the Morning Star. (Isa. 14. 12 margin). It can be supposed that this verse then pictures the entire hierarchy of Heaven, from highest to lowest, rejoicing in harmony together at the creation of this earth with all the possibilities that it held.



## OBADIAH THE MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

### 4. The Day of the Lord

An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah

*"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 the 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).*

*"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 shew 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 by the civil powers 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 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 as stubble*" (Mal. 4. 1). It is in this 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 all 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 Sun of righteousness shining down upon a vast concourse of liberated captives returning to take possession of their rightful heritage. After judgment comes conversion, reconciliation to God, and the establishment of everlasting righteousness.

(To be continued)

### A NOTE ON MARK 6, 3

"Is not this the carpenter?" Mark 6. 3.

Those four words enshrine all that the Scriptures say concerning eighteen years of our Lord's life, from the age of twelve when He was presented at the Temple by his parents, to thirty, when He came to Jordan for baptism. He worked and was known as a carpenter; He had four brothers—James, Joses, Jude and Simeon—and at least two sisters. Mary's family, judged by present day standards, was a large one. Joseph disappears from the story after the incident at the Temple; it is often suggested that he must have died whilst Jesus was a youth, but two references to his name in the Gospels might be held to indicate otherwise. "*And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*" (John 6. 42). "*And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*" (Luke 4. 22). These texts are not conclusive, for such expressions could conceivably be used of a deceased person, but to say "whose father and mother we know" does almost seem to indicate living persons. On the other hand, the many references to Mary and her family without the inclusion of Joseph in any instance

favours the view that he was dead by the time Jesus entered upon His ministry.

So Jesus worked as a carpenter at Nazareth for eighteen years. At first He helped his father; later on, maybe, after Joseph's death, He took charge of the work and his brothers helped him. After his crucifixion his brothers James and Jude both became converts and in the course of time wrote the New Testament epistles which bear their names. James became leader of the Church at Jerusalem and his name is recorded in Church history as the first Bishop of Jerusalem. Grand-children of Jude are known to have been living in the time of the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 103) but apart from this one well-authenticated fact the world has no record of any descendants of Mary's family. So the curtain which veils the details of our Lord's life before his ministry began is drawn only just enough to make us realise that our interest is intended to be fixed upon his mission and his message, the pouring out of his life to death on mankind's behalf, and not at all upon the days when He was but as a youth and young man amongst men.

## A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

*On the priesthood  
of all believers*

The sheer wonder of New Testament Christianity is that in its simplicity it is sublime. The words "*Ye are a royal priesthood*" (1 Peter 2. 9) were addressed to a very ordinary people, who by reason of their relationship to the King-Priest were constituted a royal priesthood. Every Christian a priest, with the inestimable privilege of direct access into the Divine Presence, is a fundamental New Testament principle. It clearly teaches the priesthood of all believers. Alas! ritualistic Christendom has drifted—tragically drifted—from this apostolic position.

It may help us if we consider for a moment how we first came to read of the priest in the Old Testament. When man rebelled against God, the personal intimacy which he had enjoyed with God came to an abrupt conclusion, and so there arose the necessity of finding some means for the re-establishment of communion with God. Since access into the Divine Presence became possible only by way of sacrifice, the sacrifice demanded a priesthood.

In patriarchal times, the head of each family was the household priest. For example, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built altars and offered sacrifices to Jehovah. After the flood, Noah offered representatively on behalf of those who were saved in the Ark. Job offered sacrifices for his sons. So the story continued until the priesthood became a most elaborate system. At last we see the priestly class quite distinct from the remainder of Israel: its members alone could draw near to God, and no other Israelite had such a privileged position. But when our Lord, the great High Priest Who offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, came, all such distinctions were removed: "*the veil of the temple was rent in twain*" (Matt. 27. 51): the former order had passed away. Now all believers have an equal right and privilege to draw near to God.

New Testament Christianity recognises no special distinctive priesthood—all Christians are alike priests. Observe that in 1 Peter 2. 9 Christian believers are spoken of together, and together they make up one indivisible priesthood. A distinctive sacerdotal class, in contrast to the rest of the believers, is not only unknown to the New Testament, but contradictory to its whole spirit. When the apostles

founded churches, they never linked them up with any priestly conceptions such as had obtained in the Old Testament. We never read of priests and people, but of bishops (elders), deacons and saints. So that when a man claims for himself that he is a priest, beyond and above the sense in which all Christians are so, we must reject his pretensions. We have no thought of going back to those elements of Judaism which were done away in Christ. We see in priestcraft a system which not only exalts itself, but one which limits God to the actions of men, and whilst it honours Christ, deprives others of the privileges which he so dearly bought for them. That is one of the reasons why we protest against Romanism, because it defrauds the common believer of his right of access into the presence of God without human mediation. It perpetuates an utterly false conception that one human being, who is at best only a sinner, must mediate between a Holy God and another human being.

We must be careful to distinguish between the priestly privileges which are the right of all believers, and the calling of those qualified to be shepherds and teachers of the Christian assembly. Their distinction is one of gift rather than privilege.

It is vital that we should lay hold of the thought that ALL Christian believers are constituted a priesthood. Peter was not addressing a privileged class when he said "*Ye are a royal priesthood*"; when we are in Christ, we have our priestly functions to fulfil. This royal priesthood is not made up of those who could plead any merit in themselves or declare any derivation of grace from men by apostolic succession and the like. It is composed of all those who have been united to the great High Priest. This is not some outward and visible order, but is of a much nobler fashion.

The priests of Aaron's line were priests by birth, and so are we—by a high spiritual birth which brings the priesthood with it. Were they anointed? At their consecration the blood was sprinkled on ear, hand and foot (Lev. 8. 24). We assume our spiritual priesthood by the anointing of the Spirit of God, which dwells in us.

Have we not the listening ear which waits to respond to His voice? And have not hands



and feet come under the same binding act of consecration? That is why we sing—

*"Take my hands, and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love:  
Take my feet, and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee."*

For us there are no priests save those who are in Christ, and of ALL who are in Him we say, indeed the New Testament says, that they are priests. To us all is given the right of access into the presence of God. *"For through him we . . . have access by one Spirit unto the Father."* (Eph. 2. 18). *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."* (Heb. 4. 16). *"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, . . . let us draw near . . ."* (Heb. 10. 19, 22).

This, then, is what we understand by the doctrine of the priesthood of believers.

Now it will follow that in our thinking we develop this truth of profound significance and thus come to see what our priesthood means to us personally, and how it enables us to function in the interests of others. To us personally, our priesthood should mean worship, confession and sacrifice.

Worship! To worship God aright, it is not essential to have altars, candles, images and vestments. *"The heart of worship is: worship (or adoration) in the heart."* All the ritualistic trappings of men are a sign of spiritual retrogression. As men drifted spiritually, they came more and more to rely upon externals. Said our Lord, *"the true worshippers . . . worship the Father in spirit and in truth"*. (John 4. 23).

We worship God as priests whenever in our hearts we think magnificently about God. And this we may do when far removed from any earthly temple. But how much do we know of genuine spiritual worship, that adoring contemplation which causes us to cry out, *"My God, how wonderful Thou art"*?

Confession! It is significant that though the apostles had received a unique Divine commission, they never heard confessions as such, and never pronounced absolution. The confession of our sins is essentially a personal matter. And the promise is given, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1. 9). Let there be with any son of Adam's race a sincere confession with the resolve to amend his ways; to him there is given pardon full and free. We have no need of a priest, we are members of the priesthood.

We sometimes hear evangelists speak of a lack of sense of sin in the world today. That is not the real problem. The problem is within the Believers. Is it not because of our own inadequate conception of the holiness of God that we do not perceive the exceeding sinfulness of sin? We may rejoice in the fact that we do not need a priest to act in our interests, but do we fulfil our own priestly functions for ourselves? There will never come a time in the life of any one of us when we shall need so to do.

Sacrifice! That is a priestly function—to offer up sacrifices. *"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 2. 5). These are spiritual sacrifices as opposed to the literal. We bring no oxen, sheep, goats, and so on. He became the perfect sacrifice *"to put away sin"*. We offer up spiritual sacrifices.

We offer the sacrifice of ourselves. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."* (Rom. 12. 1). The word "present" in this verse is a technical word for a priest's action. And is there not a very real sense in which this is exemplified in the New Testament practice of Baptism? It declares that our lives should be lived as a continual offering to God, with a continual denial of self.

We offer the sacrifice of praise. *"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."* The singing of a hymn of praise is a solemn and significant act: it is a priestly offering. How can our lips be mute and our attitude careless and indifferent during the singing of a hymn to God's praise? Needless to say, the sacrifice is invested with deeper significance when the singer is being beaten about by the contrary winds of life.

We offer the sacrifice of our gifts. Paul described the love gift sent to him by the Philippian church as *" . . . an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God"* (Phil. 4. 18). Christian giving is the function of the Christian priesthood. It is the presenting of our offering.

We offer the sacrifice of all good works as a priesthood. *"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."* (Heb. 13. 16). Let us consider then how our priesthood enables us to function in the interests of others, as Intercessors, as Messengers and as Benefactors from God.



Intercessors! There is the privilege of not only praying for ourselves, but the responsibility of praying for others. The priests of old were set apart to speak with God on behalf of the rest of the congregation. Now, the word comes to the royal priesthood, "*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;*" (1 Tim. 2. 1).

We must needs pray for the Church of Christ, members of which we ourselves are, both with regard to its life and its witness; surely there will also be a special concentration of priestly intercessory prayer for any who have slipped from their earliest steadfastness. If we are in line with New Testament teaching, we shall pray too for all who are in positions of authority in national and civic life. (1 Tim. 2. 1 & 2). In fact, the scope for the priestly exercise of intercession would seem to be almost boundless. And if this be so now, how much more will it be true during the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ, when the privilege will be ours of using our priestly office so as to assist all families of the earth attain their right relationship with their God?

Messengers! We have no right to forgive sin, but it is ours to proclaim the gospel of pardon. We are to awaken others to a deeper sense of their responsibility to God, and to the doing of His Will. In Old Testament times, the priests had the keeping of the silver trumpets. They were to arouse the people. It was theirs to sound the trumpet on the new moon, to proclaim sabbath and jubilee. They gave the alarm of war. In the wilderness, the

trumpets summoned the tribes to march or bid them halt according as the Lord commanded. So we are to proclaim the message Jesus committed to His disciples, and so to us. (Mark 16. 15 & 16). Yet while proclaiming this message now, we must not forget that "*strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*". (Matt. 7. 14).

Benefactors from God! The people of Israel were blessed after the priest had been in the presence of God, and the New Testament teaches that the royal priesthood is to go forth into the world as benefactors from God. That is to be our function and ministry in every place. "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" (Gal. 6. 10).

We may think of God's priests as working in the office, in the factory, the shop, the school, or wherever they may be. They live in the presence of God, and go forth to bless all whose lives they touch.

May the thought ever be with us that we are not only a royal priesthood when we meet together in our place of worship. We carry our temple with us since the body itself has become a temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are arrayed in priestly garments as we do His Will.

What dignity God has placed upon us! Are we of the royal priesthood? Then let us ever "*walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called*". (Eph. 4. 1).

### NOTE ON HEB. 11.19

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews declares that Abraham offered Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him up from the dead. How did the writer know this? The account in Genesis 22 gives no statement as to the state of Abraham's mind on this occasion; it only reveals his implicit obedience. There is one clue. When leaving the servants with the ass which had carried their goods he said (Gen. 22. 5) "*Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.*" If Abraham meant those words seriously—and we have no right to suggest that he did not—then it could well be that Abraham, knowing how the promise centred in Isaac, went up the mountain-side fully confident that after the sacrifice of his

son, God would raise him to life again. If that be indeed the case, the faith which won the emphatic approval of God was not merely a conviction that God would still find some way of fulfilling His promise concerning the Seed despite the loss of Isaac, but that the power of God was superior even unto death, and Isaac himself would live again and become the heir of promise. It would almost seem that Abraham did not only believe that God *could* raise Isaac from the dead, but that he assuredly *would* do so, and in that confidence went forth in full faith. But even so, what a faith it was that would slay the only son and still trust God to restore the life thus lost by one's own deliberate act!

## ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Examination  
of the facts

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chap. 5 has been seized upon by critics of the Christian ethic in order to disparage Christianity. What kind of a man was Peter, they ask, that he should strike this man and woman dead for what appears on the surface to be a minor case of deceit? Ananias and his wife had sold a piece of land with the avowed purpose of giving the entire proceeds to the Cause but in reality of keeping back part of those proceeds for themselves. Deceit, hypocrisy, yes, but not a crime justifying so extreme a punishment as death. In this modern day of ours it would not even be considered a crime, just an instance of "being smart". In the hurry thus to condemn the Apostle Peter the story itself is not considered with the attention it deserves.

First of all, the background. The Christian church had just commenced its development. The incident occurred not long after Pentecost, when, by means of the fervent preaching of the Apostles, a nucleus of three thousand people accepted the faith on the first day and came together in spontaneous fellowship. A few days later another five thousand were added. Repeated references to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the multitude implies that the general atmosphere was highly charged with emotion and excitement. Conviction that Jesus Christ had indeed risen from the dead and ascended to His Father in heaven, and would speedily come again to establish His Kingdom upon earth, was general, and the assemblies of the believers were characterised by intense enthusiasm and zeal for further evangelism. The Lord had commissioned them to preach the Gospel in all the world for a witness unto all nations before His return and the end of the Age, and they were setting about that commission in no uncertain fashion. To that end there was a wholesale selling of land, houses, and any other kind of valuable property, and presentation of the proceeds to the Apostles both for the prosecution of this evangelism and to meet the needs of the poor among their number. Loud were the hallelujahs and expressions of praise to God as each successive donor came forward to add his contribution to the total; in their sincerity and zeal no one thought of doing other than present the whole of the money received from the particular sale.

In such an atmosphere Ananias came forward. He had sold some land and here was the price received. Secretly, and with the connivance of his wife Sapphira, he had retained part of the money for himself but the onlookers were not to know that; he allowed them to go on thinking that, like themselves, he had given the whole of the receipts to the cause. He stood before Peter, the money in his extended hand, basking in the approbation of the surrounding believers. Peter was not deceived. He knew the truth of the matter although how he knew it is not explained. It may be an example of knowledge imparted by reason of his attunement with the Holy Spirit—as we would say, inspiration—or it might have been his shrewd knowledge of human nature and something in Ananias' attitude which did not ring true. At any rate, he knew.

It is important to notice that Peter did not condemn or pass sentence on Ananias. His words define a clear statement of the offence, nothing more. "*Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land. Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God*". The printed record cannot reproduce the tone of the words or the demeanour of the speaker. They may have been spoken in indignation and anger; they may have been uttered in accents of infinite sadness. We just do not know. The consequences we do know. Ananias, smitten either by remorse or terror, fell to the ground and died immediately, to the consternation of the onlookers. Heart failure, obviously, but what caused it? There is no indication or evidence that Peter was responsible, no statement that he called upon miraculous power to strike the offender dead there and then. Neither is there any suggestion that Deity intervened in any way to bring about this unhappy man's death. There is no clue whatever to the cause, only the bald fact that upon hearing the Apostle's measured reproof Ananias fell down and breathed his last.

Here we should recall the highly emotional and excitable atmosphere prevailing at the moment. Ananias' mind must already have been in a state of strain, what with that and

also the inward knowledge of his own deception. To that might well have been added one further factor. A believer in Christ and a son of Israel, he would have known the history of his people well. As he listened to Peter's declaration that he had attempted to deceive, not man, but God, did there flash into his mind, from his knowledge of the past, the story of Achan? Achan, in the days of Israel's entry into the Land of Promise under Joshua, was guilty of exactly the same crime. Israel had been instructed that the spoil of the conquest was to be consecrated to God and offered to Him; no man might keep any for himself. Achan coveted a wedge of gold, some silver, and a goodly Babylonish garment, and he kept back these items from the spoil he brought to the general offering, and hid them in his tent. The element of deceit rendered the offering unacceptable to God; disaster came upon Israel and men lost their lives in consequence. The sin of Achan came to light and he was put to death with all his family, and his possessions destroyed, in accordance with the custom of those days. Is it possible that Ananias, in one self-revealing moment, realised that he had defiled this present offering to God in the same fashion, and saw himself as worthy only of the same fate that befell Achan? He had tried to cheat God! That sudden realisation coming on top of the tenseness of the moment might well have been sufficient to induce the heart failure which caused his death.

Three hours later his wife came in. By then the dead man had been buried; the Judean summer forbade delay in such matters. There is a different element in Peter's words to Sapphira. They imply a knowledge of what was to come. *"How is it that ye have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out!"* It seems a cruel, almost savage, statement, but here again much depends upon the tone in which it was spoken. The same words uttered sadly, regretfully, slowly, could be those of a man sorely troubled and distressed over the whole matter and conscious only that this woman must in any case now be apprised of her husband's untimely death. It seems certain that Peter was given a fore-glimpse of the coming event; the same faculty of prevision which is evident in so many instances in Scriptural narrative was Peter's at this moment and he must have seen in his mind's eye what was going to happen in a few minutes. It need not be thought that he exer-

cised miraculous power to cause Sapphira's death, only that he knew she was going to die—as die she did. The extent to which Peter's words accentuated the shock she would have experienced anyway on hearing of her husband's death is not possible to estimate; she might well have realised that her own share in the plot had helped to cause the tragedy and that had she dissuaded him from the scheme he might yet be alive. The shock which killed her might not have been altogether, or even in great part, due to Peter's words but to the realisation of her own guilt in the matter and its tragic outcome.

In line with the general level of understanding of the times the spectators would ascribe the happening to Divine intervention. The judgment of God had come upon this guilty pair. The whole thing created a profound impression and without doubt everyone connected with the infant Church took a little more care with their own personal life in the community. To what extent, if any, there was specific Divine judgment in the matter may be open to debate; one has to remember that Judas Iscariot likewise misappropriated funds entrusted to him without any immediate retribution. The narrative states the facts but does not attribute them to any kind of Divine intervention.

Did this lapse affect the eternal destiny of Ananias and Sapphira? There have always been some to insist that the couple are eternally lost; it is possible that the prominence given to their story in the Book of Acts highlights their case more than those of many others who have lapsed from their high standards in this or other ways. There is no reason for thinking that these two were other than perfectly sincere converts to the faith, overtaken by the temptation to win full plaudits from their fellows without meeting the corresponding obligation. The fault was one of greed; it was not flagrant immorality or deep-rooted hostility to righteousness or love of evil. They wanted God to have part of what they had but not all. Many Christians are like that today in things much more important than money. *"Some of self and some of thee"* runs the old hymn, and in a spiritual sense that is much the same thing as the withholding a portion which led to the premature deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. It does not seem very reasonable to think that the tremendous potentialities inherent in two intelligent creatures to whom God had given life should be vitiated and extinguished by what was, after all, not a very terrible crime,



when there is no evidence at all that those two beings were already irrevocably committed to evil. And God has *"no pleasure in the death of him that dieth"* but would rather by far that he turn from his evil ways, and live. Perhaps the right view of this question is that stated by Canon R. H. Charles in his

*"Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life"* when he says *"the idea that forgiveness is impossible in the next life has only to be stated in order to be rejected; for till absolute fixity of character is reached, repentance and forgiveness, being moral acts, must be possible under a perfectly moral Being"*.

### Three Minute Parable

In Greek tradition Odysseus was a famous warrior, King of Ithaca, and Orpheus a great musician. Somewhere in the ocean, a long way from Greece, there lay an island on which dwelt three maidens, known as the Sirens. Their singing was so sweet and compelling that any sailors upon whose ears the strains of their song fell were driven to turn their ships to shore, where the Sirens met them and after making them intoxicated with wine, slew them and devoured their flesh. No seafarer, said the story-tellers, had ever heard the Sirens' song and escaped with his life. So Odysseus determined that he would be the first to hear the song and yet live to tell the tale. A time came when his ship came within sight of the enchanted island. Odysseus commanded his men to bind him firmly to the mainmast with leather cords, stop their own ears with wax and row swiftly past. As they came near, the three maidens could be seen making gestures to the travellers to come closer. The sweetness of their voices seemed to draw the very soul of Odysseus out of his body. He struggled and strained to break his bonds which encircled him; he alternately implored and commanded his men to set him free; he groaned and cried in agony as they refused to heed him, until, bending to their oars, they had carried their ship out of earshot and their commander was himself again.

Later on, Orpheus, the sweet musician at whose playing, it was said, the birds hushed their songs and wild beasts became docile and gentle, passed the Island of Sirens. But there were no bands and no straining in agony this time. Orpheus played his lyre so skilfully and sang so sweetly that neither he nor his shipmates heard so much as a note of the Siren's song, and they passed swiftly by the fateful place into safety.

So it is with the Christian. If we try to enlist mechanical aids to resist temptation, or endeavour to withstand the Devil by the strength of our own will, we may possibly get by, for God will surely honour our good intentions, but it will prove to be a hard way. Much easier will it be if we fix our eyes upon

Jesus and let His voice ring in our ears; the temptations then will not obtrude themselves so easily upon our notice and we shall withstand them with greater ease.

God does not ask us to give up anything that this world has to offer without putting something else in its place. Perhaps that is why Jesus gave the parable of the man who was cleansed of a demon but put nothing else in his mind and life to replace the obsession. The demon looked back and saw his old home empty, swept and garnished. So he took seven other demons more evil than himself and they all entered in and dwelt there, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. And there was no need for it. The man could have filled his emptied mind with Christ. So should we, "bringing every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ," so being transformed at the last into His own image.

To be a disciple of Christ signifies much more, both in the way of responsibility and of advantage, than many think. Our Lord's words are very explicit in defining the terms of discipleship to be nothing less than a full, complete consecration of all that we have and are to him who has bought us with his own precious blood. It must be a consecration to daily crossbearing and to following in the footsteps of Christ, even unto death.

\* \* \*

Life without forgiveness would be a constantly increasing cloud and fear. Forgiveness renews life, calls back banished youthfulness, throws open the radiant gates of new opportunities. We may know that we are growing in grace in the degree in which we are prepared to exercise the grace and duty of forgiveness. Not how I would forgive, but how Christ would forgive, must be the standard of conduct.

\* \*

If you would be blessed, get many seasons of prayer into your busy, harassed, tempted, struggling life. It is in these quiet moments that you really grow.



## IS LIFE WORTH LIVING ?

A Question

*The following reflection was penned half a century ago by a then well-known minister.*

'Is life worth living?' 'What a question! Who would die?' gladly youth replies, buoyant with hope, unfettered with care, the ruddy cheek glowing with health, the eye sparkling with pleasure. How sweet to be, to think, to move, to drink of joy on every hand. Oh, who could part with life? 'Is life worth living?' 'Tis youth again gives answer, but hope has fled. The pale face, emaciated form, and sunken eye betoken affliction's heavy hand, with days and nights of anguish and unrest. Oh what is life to me!—to be, and suffer. Life is a synonym of pain, and time means torture.

And what has life for you, O man of riper years, busy from early morn till close of day? Has labour aught of joy that one should care to live? Talk not to me of giving up to plan and do, gaining of knowledge, wealth, honour's wreath, and fame's fair title. 'Tis true, life has its trials, cares, its stormy days, but these are only fleeting shadows that serve to gild the intervening time with brighter splendour. But again answer comes from him who has reached the meridian of life in our day. Misfortune on the right hand and the left. Life to me means toil for naught. Affection has no sooner settled firm around earth's fairest blossoms than death puts an end to all our cherished hopes. Friends are gained but to be lost again. Honour is a bubble to burst by the first foul breath of jealousy. The cup of pleasure scarce is lifted to the lips till dashed to earth again. To judge the future by the past, what has life in store that I should crave it?

And what of life? 'Tis now the gray-haired veteran gives reply. The weight of years has bent the once proud form, furrowed the cheek and brow, and robbed the senses of their acuteness. Alone, and trembling on the verge of the grave, memory of younger days is all there is left of comfort. The days of the years of my pilgrimage have been few and dull of sorrow. The beacon lights of pleasure, wealth and glory are as fleeting as the moments we employ in their pursuit, as changeful as the firefly, and if secured are only vanity. Humanity's portion is, to be, to hope, to hover between its fruition and despair, and end in death, fitting finale of the fitful dream.

*But Christian, what say you of life? It is our*

first and greatest blessing, the preface to eternity, the time in which true happiness may be forever gained. I look not for the present earthly joy, knowing full well that the afflictions, trials and temptations which abound are means by which God proves me, whether I will do His sovereign will. What virtue in obeying Him if there are no desires of my own to disregard? How may I prove Him to be the chief object of my affections and not be called upon to deny myself for His sake? Life affords the opportunity to battle for immortality, to struggle for an existence that shall prove eternal. They who use it for a baser purpose are void of understanding. The curse of God now rests upon the land. We need not think to find our heart's desires where such a blighting curse exists. But He has promised to remove all evil in His own good time, when, with His blessing here instead, happiness shall be ours. Rejoicing in His love so freely manifested in the gift of His only son, who even died to redeem us from our present sin-cursed state, gladly do I seek to follow Him, scorning all that earth now has in store, and present my body a living sacrifice to God, a reasonable service. I am made conformable unto His death, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. I rejoice in His self-denial, and partake of His sufferings, that I may share in His joy and glory. Glory to God in the highest, for the being and time by which I may work out so great a destiny. Whatever may be my portion now, I praise His name for life; for I look not at the things that are seen; they are temporal; but at the things that are not seen, which He has promised, for they are eternal. "He that loveth His life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." *"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Those who live to make the most they possibly can of earthly objects through their present fleshly nature, are doomed to bitter disappointment. This life can prove a blessing only when lived for God.

(P. W. Pope)

## TWO YEARS IN ROME

No. 20 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

*"The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the roots of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever; yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God."* (Jonah 2. 5-6).

That eloquent thanksgiving by the Hebrew prophet Jonah after his deliverance from this same sea must have echoed in Paul's mind upon finding that he and all with him were safe on dry land—dry only in a relative sense for apparently the rain was beating down remorselessly, and in the early morning it was biting cold. So says St. Luke who, like the rest, stood there dripping wet after scrambling up from the sea. The wind blew strongly and the great waves came rolling up the beach; out in the channel the ship from which they had escaped was rapidly breaking up. They were safe, but they needed warmth, shelter and food.

Their plight did not go unobserved. The inhabitants of the island quickly came to their aid. *"The barbarous people showed us no little kindness"* continues Luke *"for they kindled a fire and received us, every one"* (ch. 28. 2). The term "barbarian" as used by the Greeks did not indicate savages, as would be denoted by English usage. It was a word describing any people outside their normal circle of contacts in the Roman and Egyptian worlds, without reference to the stage of culture or civilisation achieved. The Maltese of that day were descendants of the Phoenicians and just as cultured as the Greeks and Romans. They were friendly too, and set about doing something practical for these shipwrecked mariners so unceremoniously introduced to their country. Probably some kind of encampment was set up to house the two hundred and seventy-six, and a great fire made around which the shivering men could dry themselves and take stock of the position.

Julius, the centurion, soon turned his official position as a military officer to good account. Not far away was the residence of the Governor of the island, one Publius. Paul and his fellows, Luke and Aristarchus, together no doubt with Julius and his senior men, were entertained at the house of Publius for three days, probably whilst suitable permanent lodgings were being found. This visit herald-

ed a short season notable for the last recorded exercise of miraculous power by St. Paul and therefore the last to be noted in the New Testament. It is rather remarkable that when, later on in Paul's life, there were two instances of close personal friends and valued fellow-workers, Onesiphorus of Colosse and Trophimus of Ephesus, being seriously ill the Apostle did not use this power to heal them; it is almost as if its exercise was strictly reserved for purposes connected with the witness of the Gospel to unbelievers and not for the converted. At any rate, when Paul found that the father of his host was lying sick of fever and dysentery—the "bloody flux" of the Authorised Version reflects the hazy knowledge of medical matters possessed by our seventeenth century translators; St. Luke uses the correct medical term—he lost no time in effecting a cure, and in consequence was soon besieged by suppliants from all over the island bringing their sick and diseased for healing.

It is not likely that any question of "faith-healing" in the modern sense of the term is involved here. The subjects of these cures were pagans, worshippers of Roman and Greek and Oriental gods and goddesses. No suggestion is made that they believed in Christ and by faith in the power of His Name were made whole. Paul prayed, and laid his hands on the sufferer, and the healing was effected. Any faith involved in the transaction was that of Paul himself. In this the proceeding differs from certain similar instances during the lifetime of Christ, when the suppliant was specifically told that if he had faith, then he could be healed. In at least one notable instance the Lord could do no mighty works because of unbelief. When Peter healed the lame man in the Temple porch he said *"His Name through faith in his Name hath made this man strong"* (Acts 3. 16), but here in Malta there was nothing of that, only the belief that Paul possessed a marvellous power of healing. The account is certainly literally true; Luke is too sober a historian to embellish whatever happened with imaginary details, and as a physician he must definitely have known whether these were genuine cures or not. His professional outlook would lead him more likely to tone down the record to a sober note of the facts. One remembers

that when John Mark wrote of the afflicted woman who had "*suffered many things of many physicians and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse*" (Mark 5. 26), Luke, in his own account written a decade or so later, feeling perhaps that Mark had rather overstated the case, merely remarked tersely that she was incurable. The presence of Luke as a witness here is therefore a reliable guarantee that Paul did call upon Divine power and that Divine power was exerted to heal.

To what extent that demonstration advanced the Christian faith in Malta is not recorded and is unknown, but there is every reason to surmise that at least a number of those concerned, or of the onlookers, were led to become Christians in consequence of what they witnessed, and that when Paul sailed away from the island he left behind him a nucleus which afterwards played their part in furthering the cause of Christ in the world.

Thus passed three months; with the approach of February the seas became safer for sailing and Julius began to look around for a means of getting away. He found another Alexandrian cornship which, more prudent than the ill-fated one that nearly cost them their lives, had laid up for the winter at Malta and was now preparing to resume its voyage to Rome. A passage for the legionaries and their prisoners, and for Paul's companions, was soon arranged—the crew of the wrecked vessel probably remained at Malta until they could find a means of returning to Egypt and home—and before long the travellers were on the last stage of their journey. Rome was now only four hundred miles away and the weather was propitious. The vessel called first at Syracuse in Sicily, across the Straits to Rhegium (modern Reggio) and a day later to Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) near Naples.

Here Julius landed his party with the intention of completing the remaining hundred and forty miles to Rome by road. Perhaps the ship itself was going no farther. In this seaside town, says Luke "*we found brethren and were desired to stay with them seven days, and so we went toward Rome*". Christianity was already well established in Italy if this little place, so far from Rome, possessed a company of believers. The centurion Julius must have been a very accommodating man to wait here a week with his other prisoners purely for Paul's benefit. It is quite likely that he held the Apostle in some esteem, realising that he and his men owed their lives to him; it is evident that Paul was not regarded by the

authorities as an ordinary prisoner and Julius probably had orders to treat him with consideration. So for seven days the little party of missionaries enjoyed a brief season of fellowship with their fellow-Christians at Puteoli amid the scenic loveliness of the most beautiful part of Italy. Much of that loveliness was to be destroyed eighteen years later when the sleeping volcano Vesuvius, just across the bay, awoke in fury and blotted out the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum, less than twenty miles distant. In both these towns, since their excavation in modern times, there has been found evidence of Christian worship, so that Paul might well have met believers from these places also during that short stay.

The week passed all too quickly; the travellers took their leave of the brethren and set out on the road with their escort. Twenty miles farther on the party reached the Appian Way, the main highway traversing the length of Italy and ending at the capital. It is not likely that they walked; they were probably provided with horses or asses on which to ride. The legionaries marched on foot, but they were accustomed to that. The journey must have occupied at least a week or ten days. Forty-three miles from the city, at the village of Appii Forum, they were met by a party of Christians from Rome who had heard of the Apostle's approach and had come this distance to welcome him. Ten miles farther, at another village called Tres Tabernae (the "Three Taverns" of Acts 28. 15) they were met by another contingent "*whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage*". It must have been with quickening interest that the Apostle strained his eyes for his first sight of the city about which he had heard so much. This was Rome, the capital of the world and the mistress of all nations. This was the city whose iron rule had imposed a Roman peace upon all the earth and made it possible for Christianity to spread in the way it did. Paul had a certain admiration for Roman rule and administration. His words in Romans 13 and 1 Tim. 2 illustrate the importance he placed upon the position of the "powers that be" in the Divine scheme of things. These "powers that be", he insists, are ordained by God and those who resist them are resisting the ordinance of God. He counselled that in the Christian services prayer should be offered for kings and all who are in authority, "*that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all goodness and honesty*". It must be realised that Paul wrote these words at a time when Christianity was not subject to persecution.



Later on the position was decidedly different, and by the time the Book of Revelation was written, ten years or so later, Rome had become synonymous with Babylon, the persecutor of the saints and an object of Divine judgment soon to come.

Rome in Paul's day was a city of four million inhabitants, covering an area about two and a half miles square. It was therefore just about the size of a modern English city such as Leicester. Although adorned with many magnificent public buildings and monuments, temples and palaces, and a greater proportion of parks and open spaces than most English cities, it nevertheless consisted, to a great degree, of tall multi-storey tenement buildings in which the working classes and the poor lived in crowded and insanitary conditions. At first Paul passed through the outer suburbs, containing the better class houses and villas of the wealthy. Then he came to the poorer quarters, blocks of flats, five and six stories high, teeming with occupants. Finally he entered the centre of the city where were concentrated government buildings and the palaces of the Cæsars.

Here the journey ended. Somewhere near the Forum, the centre of Rome and the centre of the world, the little party entered the barracks of the Prætorian Guard, and the centurion Julius handed over his prisoners. Before entering, Paul might have set eyes on the *Miliarium Aureum*, a tall column marking the centre of the city and having engraved on its sides the names and distances of the distant cities to which roads radiated from Rome. Jerusalem appeared there as the capital of Judea; Paul might also have noticed another name which was also there, one not so familiar to him, *Londinium*, the capital of a far distant province called Britain. He may have noticed it; he could not have known that many centuries later that same city of *Londinium* was to possess a great cathedral of the Christian faith bearing his own name—St. Paul's Cathedral!

Temporarily, he was parted from Luke and Aristarchus, and those two faithful friends went off to find lodgings in the city. It is almost certain that the Christians who had come out to meet them would accompany them back to this point so that the two were not likely to have any difficulty in finding an abiding-place. And it was not long before Paul was reunited with them. The nature of the charge against him did not demand confinement in prison and he was allowed a measure of freedom. He was not to leave

Rome but he could make his own arrangements for a place to live and conduct himself as he pleased, the only stipulation being that he must be constantly under the surveillance of a legionary who would remain with him day and night. His occasional references to his chains at this time has given rise to the assumption that he was chained to this soldier. This is possible but it might well be that the reference is metaphorical, and that he was merely not at liberty to be out of his guard's sight.

It must have been the first time for many long years that Paul had a house in which to live. He had been more or less constantly on the move from place to place; now he was perforce compelled to rest. He had "*his own hired house*" in Rome (Acts 28. 30) perhaps sharing it with Luke and Aristarchus, the three of them working at their respective trades in order to support themselves. There was no knowing how long a time would elapse before his case would come up for trial; in the meantime he could realise his long cherished dream of preaching Christ in Rome.

Three days after thus settling in, Paul called a conference of the leading Jews. This does not imply that he ignored the Christian community in the city nor that they were not already well known to the Jewish colony. The fact that Paul was a Pharisee made him unique among the Christians; it gave him a standing in the eyes of orthodox Jews which no other Christian in Rome possessed. The Jews were prepared to come to him and enter into discussion. Perhaps Paul felt that in the liberal atmosphere of Rome he could expect a more tolerant and dispassionate examination of his claims for the Gospel than could be had in fiercely nationalistic Jerusalem. He certainly had a good hearing. They came to him without prejudice or antagonism and were anxious to know what he had to say, remarking only that there was a general prejudice against the Christians among Jews everywhere. It is apparent that they welcomed this opportunity of hearing an authoritative exposition from the most famous Christian apologist of the day. From morning until evening Paul talked to them, "*persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the prophets . . . and some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not*".

So far as can be discerned, this was the last time Paul tried to convert his own people. With the close of the Book of Acts at this point we are dependent on stray allusions in



the Epistles for information as to his future activities, but it does seem as if from now onward he devoted himself entirely to the Gentiles. That is in keeping with his pronouncement as the disagreeing Jews departed from his house. "*Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it*". Christianity was now spreading like wildfire throughout the Roman empire and eastward into Asia. Christian communities existed in countries so far apart as Britain in the west and the north-west of India in the east. No one really knows how the Gospel spread so quickly; there is not much doubt that many Roman soldiers became Christians and carried the faith with them as they were moved from place to place. The activities of the twelve Apostles, apart from those of Peter and Paul, are only vaguely known but it is fairly certain that several of them were as active in the lands east of Judea as Peter and Paul are known to have been in the west, but there was no St. Luke with them to act as chronicler and historian. By one means and another during the years between the Crucifixion in A.D. 33 and Paul's arrival at Rome in A.D. 60 the Gospel had penetrated every part of the Empire and quite a few places outside. The bigoted refusal of orthodox Jewry to recognise this universal appeal of the Gospel, that God is the God of Gentile as well as Jew, was still reflected in the thinking of most Jewish Christians and in consequence the purely native churches in Judea and Galilee were either stationary or retrogressing. The Jewish rebellion of A.D. 67-70 which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the depopulation of all Judea virtually extinguished

hope of further missionary work from that centre and although the Jerusalem church reformed after the catastrophe the flaming torch had left them for ever. As the years went by those native Jewish churches dwindled until there was nothing left. Words spoken by Jesus half a century previously had become burningly true, "*the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*".

This is where St. Luke concludes his narrative. St. Paul, dwelling two years in Rome in his own rented house, under constant guard but free to preach and teach as he saw fit, received all who came in to him. Most of those who came were Gentiles—Romans, Greeks and men and women of all nations who for one reason or another had business in Rome. The Christian companies in the city were growing in numbers and must have owed much to Paul's continued fellowship and ministry. During this period he wrote what are called the Pastoral Epistles, to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and that to Philemon. He received visits from some of his old friends from Asia—Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Demas, Timothy, John Mark—and confident of release when he was called to trial, laid plans for the future. The indomitable spirit of the Apostle refused to consider any relaxation from service while any remained in the world to whom the Gospel had not been preached. The Book of Acts concludes with this remarkable man still at work "*preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him*".

(To be continued)

Every member, in proportion as it is in harmony with the head and its spirit of love for the members, will be prompt to act. Sometimes in our human bodies the hand may stretch forth assistance to the injured member so quickly that it seems impossible to conceive that the message first went to the head, and that our hand was subsequently directed by the head to assist; and so it is with the members of the body of Christ.

\* \* \*

The Church is not dying, nor likely to die, of too much truth; but it is sure to languish if its teachers, even for the most amiable reasons, suppress the truth that is in them.

(Dr. Samuel Cox)

\* \* \*

Not only does death open the door into the world of acquittal, and again into that of holiness, but also into the realm of surrender, and thence into that of sacrifice. For the essential idea of the Cross is a life lost, to be found again in those around. "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it*."—Matt. 16. 26.

\* \* \*

The chief lesson and study in divinity is well and rightly to learn to know Christ . . . and Christ Himself also teacheth that we should learn to know Him only out of the Scriptures where He saith, "*Search the Scriptures, for they do testify of me*."

(Luther)



Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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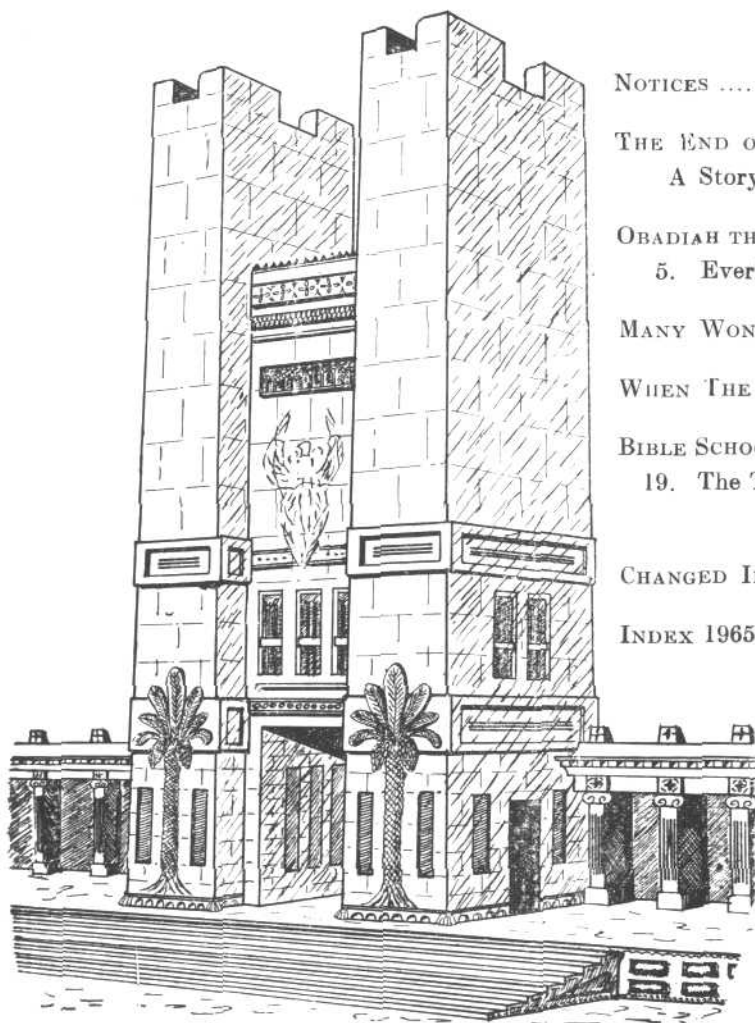
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## Notices

It is usual at this time of the year to mention, for the benefit of those who are interested, the special fund administered by Bro. E. Allbon and to say that contributions will be warmly appreciated and acknowledged if sent to Mr. E. Allbon, 9 Esher Close, Nyetimber Lane, Pagham, Bognor Regis, Sussex. Details of known cases of need should also be sent to Bro. Allbon.

\* \* \*

The series entitled "*Obadiah the Messenger of Judgment*", which is concluded in this issue, is to be published in booklet form within the next few weeks. Friends interested in securing copies may order now at the price of 1/6 (25c) or 5 for 7/- (one dollar) post free in either case, and the booklet will be sent as soon as ready.

\* \* \*

As a means of meeting rising postal and stationery costs it is intended as from the first issue of 1966 to enlarge the "Monthly" to 24 pages and to issue it at two-monthly intervals instead of every six weeks as at present. This change will leave the total amount of reading matter virtually unchanged but beside saving a proportion of the incidental costs—which is important in view of the fact that publication depends upon free-will gifts—becomes a real assistance to our rather restricted voluntary "man-power" available. The first issue for 1966 will be published as at date January 1st.

\* \* \*

Attention is invited to the list of current publications in the opposite column. Several of these booklets are quite useful as small Christmas gifts to Christian friends, and for this purpose the ones on Jonah, Samson and the Tower of Babel are appropriate. A complete set of the eight booklets is available at 9/- (\$1.30) post free.

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"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"

## THE END OF THE WAY

No. 21 in a series of  
stories of St. Paul

It was springtime, A.D. 62. The Apostle Paul stood in the streets of Rome, a free man. His trial was over and he had been acquitted. Henceforward he was at liberty to go where he would and conduct his evangelical work without hindrance.

Those two years in captivity had been ones of great activity. Not only had Paul enjoyed the constant companionship of Luke and Aristarchus throughout, but at some time during the two years Timothy, John Mark, Demas of Thessalonica, and Epaphras of Colosse had arrived to remain with him. With these six stalwart friends of long standing at his side it is easy to understand why the Christian cause in Rome prospered as it did. The faith spread among the slaves and the poor, the high-born and the wealthy, even into Cæsar's household. These were the halcyon days when the joyousness of the teachings of Christ overwhelmed and extinguished the gloom of paganism; none knew of the ferocity of persecution which lay only a few short years ahead.

There were visitors who came and went. Epaphroditus arrived from Philippi and after a short stay returned home bearing with him Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (Phil. 2. 25). Onesimus, the runaway slave from Colosse, reached Rome, came into contact with the faith and was converted, returning to Colosse a Christian, in company with Tychicus, the pair taking with them the Epistles to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and that to Philemon (Col. 1. 8, 4. 7-8, Eph. 6. 21, Philem. 12). Paul's enforced stay in Rome had been a productive time, and our New Testament is the richer in consequence.

From this point the only clues to Paul's activities are casual allusions in his epistles to Timothy and Titus. Two of these were written during his subsequent journeyings and the Second to Timothy whilst he was in prison in Rome for the second time. Why St. Luke ended the Book of Acts just before the first trial when it is obvious from Paul's own testimony that he remained with him to the end is not known; this has been a matter of speculation for centuries. The fact remains that there is no record of Paul's later life and in consequence any picture of that period has to be founded on a reconstruction of these few allusions and such basis of truth as can

be concluded lies beneath the traditions of the Early Church and the scattered statements of Early Church writers.

There are some half-dozen such reconstructions, all attempting to describe Paul's movements between his acquittal in A.D. 62 and his death in A.D. 67 or 68. Most of them seem to suffer from the demerit of having been built up on the basis of the literary allusions without looking at the map; in consequence they imply a bewildering sequence of to-and-fro crossing of tracks without any credit being given the Apostle for an orderly and economical planning of his journeys. A presentation of all the facts, evidences, and arguments for these unknown travels of St. Paul would take up a great deal of space and would be outside the scope of this treatise, but a brief outline of what seems to the writer to have been a possible sequence of happenings is offered and this will be based upon two important factors which do not seem to have received full weight in other expositions of the subject.

The first is Paul's own conviction that he had been called to preach the Gospel to the whole world of the Gentiles, which in that day meant the entire Roman Empire. Long before his appeal to Cæsar he had cherished the idea of going to Rome as the first step in a wider programme embracing the western side of the Empire. Writing to the Roman church many years previously he had told them he proposed to visit them on his way to Spain. Now he was in Rome, free to go where he wished; it is almost a certainty that before returning to the East he would want to fulfil his original plan and proceed farther west to preach Christ in Spain, and, a little less likely perhaps, extend his ministry through the remaining provinces of the west, Gaul and Britain, before making the long journey home. Once back in Asia, at his time of life—he was now sixty years of age and in indifferent health—he might have thought, it was unlikely that he would again have the opportunity to return to the West. So if Paul went to Spain at all—a point on which there has always been some doubt—it must have been directly after his release.

The second factor is also connected with his age. Paul would have been less than human if he had not desired to see his Asiatic converts again before he died, and particularly



his old friends of his own home Church, Antioch in Syria. After all, it was the Antioch Church which had originally commissioned him to set out upon these travels and had it not been for the riot in Jerusalem, his arrest, and despatch to Rome, he would long since have been back among them with his report. Memories of his fellow-elders in that Church, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, must have inspired a longing to see them again and tell them of the experiences he had undergone. A final visit to Antioch after he had reached the uttermost parts of the Empire with the message, perhaps to end his days among his early friends, must have played an important part in his planning.

Now these considerations, added to such allusions in Timothy and Titus as throw any light at all upon this journey, coupled with sundry statements by Clement of Rome, Eusebius, Jerome, Chrysostom and other early writers are all satisfied by the assumption that immediately upon his release Paul set out for Spain and during the next two or three years travelled through the western part of the Empire, returning by way of Northern Italy and the eastern side of the Adriatic Sea to the converts he had previously made in Illyricum, then to Crete, back through Greece by way of Corinth, Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi, and across the sea to Troas with the intention of visiting in sequence Ephesus, Colosse, Laodicea, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and the other churches of the Asian hinterland, again taking ship at Tarsus, his birthplace, for Antioch in Syria as his terminus. The programme could take five or six years and he might well have felt by that time he would be too old for further travel. If, then, it so fell out that he completed this itinerary as far as Troas or perhaps Miletus and was there arrested and sent back to Rome, every requirement of the references in Timothy and Titus is met; this at any rate is the basis upon which this final picture of Paul's life is here drawn.

It seems, then, that on this spring day in A.D. 62 there was a rapid re-appraisal of the situation and a deployment of forces. Timothy was to go at once to Philippi (Phil. 2. 19). When next we hear of him, some years later, he is at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1. 3). John Mark was to stay for the present in Rome, where during the next two or three years he would work with the Apostle Peter who seems to have arrived in Rome shortly after Paul departed, and would write the Gospel according to Mark, the first of the Gospels to be written.

When next we hear of him he is also at Ephesus. Of Demas nothing is said; he may have stayed at Rome or gone to Greece. Luke certainly accompanied Paul wherever he went and was with him at the end; the other member of the trio, Aristarchus, who joined Paul during his third missionary journey and had stayed with him ever since, is likewise not mentioned but it can be taken as a tolerable certainty that if Paul and Luke were off on another journey then Aristarchus would be insistent on going with them.

To one of Paul's ardent temperament there was no time to waste and probably before many days had passed he was taking his leave of the Roman brethren, with whom he had fellowshiped for the past two years—Flavius Clemens, nephew of Vespasian the coming Emperor, Linus, soon to become Head of the Church in Rome after the martyrdom of Peter, Clement, a young man now but in later years to succeed Linus as Bishop of Rome, and a host of others some of whose names are recorded in Romans 16 and others in 2 Tim. 4. The three missionaries boarded the ship at Ostia, the port of Rome, and sailed out into the west, seven hundred and fifty miles across the blue Mediterranean, until the coastline of Spain appeared and the vessel tied up at the quays of the port of Nova Carthago (now Cartagena).

It is quite impossible to say what St. Paul achieved in Spain, if in fact he did go there. Not a whisper of tradition beyond the confident assertion that he went to Spain has survived. He would naturally make for the main centres of population and the first would most likely be Cordova where there was a considerable Jewish colony. From there he could make his way northward, perhaps spending a time at Toletum (Toledo) and Cæsar Augusta (Saragossa) so that after eight hundred miles or so and the expiry of say nine or ten months he found himself on the borders of Gaul (France).

Long distance travel was very easy in the days of the Romans. The famous road system covered the whole of the Empire and every road was equipped with Government rest houses a day's journey apart at which horses or asses for travellers able to pay for them could be secured for the next stage. Order was maintained by the legionaries, and military detachments were constantly traversing the roads en route to garrison duties in distant lands, so that travel for the civilian was safe—safer than in later centuries after Roman power had been withdrawn. It must not be

imagined that St. Paul had to pick his way over trackless wastes in imminent danger to life and limb. From this point of view there is nothing incredible in the idea of his having visited any part of the Empire, however remote.

At the conclusion of this ministry in Spain the Apostle would have to face alternatives. He could either retrace the eight hundred miles to Nova Carthago and sail back to Rome and so eventually home to Asia, or he could follow the road over the frontier to Lugdunum (Lyons) in France where was an important meeting point of roads to Spain, Italy, Northern France and Britain. One can hardly imagine the Apostle resisting this challenge. If he went to Spain at all and found himself on the northern frontier he would surely have continued into Gaul to preach the Gospel there. So, after another four hundred miles, the three companions could have arrived in Lyons.

The origin of the Church in Lyons is shrouded in obscurity. The celebrated Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, lived in the 2nd century and the Church was already old in his time. No one really knows by whom it was founded but the fact that a church existed apparently from the very earliest period at this important meeting place of the roads is at least an indication that some fervent missionary of the faith must have evangelised this district in the First Century.

Here again the Apostle had a choice. He could now consider his ministry in the West at an end and take the road for Italy and Rome, or by diverging before reaching Rome could travel overland to Greece and home. On the other hand he could take the northerly road and set out to preach Christ in all Gaul as he had just done in Spain. He could cross the Oceanus Britannicus—the English Channel—and preach Christ in Britain. There are not wanting scholars and protagonists who insist that sufficient documentary evidence exists to make it a certainty that Paul did in fact visit Britain and preach in London at this time; it is probably fair to say that the consensus of authoritative opinion is against the evidence being conclusive but there is no doubt that many early traditions do point this way. A consideration which does not depend upon tradition or documentary evidence, however, is that unless St. Paul did spend a couple of years or so in the west or north of the Empire it is difficult to understand why he only got as far as western Asia before being arrested the second time. During his

five years or so of liberty he got no farther east than Troas in Asia—not even to Ephesus where Timothy, whom he so ardently longed to see, awaited him. The conclusion is well-nigh irresistible that Paul must have spent a considerable time in hitherto unvisited lands before he returned to Greece. The traditions concerning his visit to Britain may therefore have more substance in them than is generally supposed.

From Lyons, then, the party may be pictured as continuing northward, making converts as they went, probably no longer troubled with Jewish opponents since they were now traversing parts of the world in which the Jewish Dispersion was not so much in evidence. The natives were not savages; the old idea of Gaul and Britain at this time being inhabited by blue-painted barbarians has long since been exploded. The Gauls had known Roman culture for a long time and the Britons were a tolerably civilised race before the Romans came—and able to render a good account of themselves, as the Roman commanders Aulus Plautius and Vespasian found to their cost only twenty years earlier when Britain was conquered after stubborn resistance.

The next eight or nine months, then, might well have been occupied by a missionary tour through Gaul, ending on the coast at Portus Itius, which is now Calais. Here the Roman road ended but ships were available to take soldiers, travellers and merchandise across the Channel to Britain only twenty miles away. Paul and Luke and Aristarchus, if they indeed had come so far, would most certainly want to go the last few hundred miles necessary to include Britain in the journey before setting their faces definitely for Asia and home.

If this reasoning is sound, then round about the early summer of A.D. 64 one of the merchant vessels engaged in the Channel crossing business included among its passengers the Apostle of the Gentiles and his companions, standing in the prow of the ship gazing with intense interest at the white cliffs of Dover, or Porto Dubris as it was then called. Of all the lands the Apostle had visited this must have been the one of which he knew least. Britain had only recently been added to the Empire (Julius Cæsar claimed a lot for his invasion in 54 B.C. but in point of fact he was soundly beaten by the Britons and retreated to Gaul as hurriedly as dignity would permit). Rome was greatly interested in Britain; it was believed that great opportuni-

ities for exploiting the mineral and agricultural resources of the island existed and the business men of Rome were expecting rich pickings. Paul would have known all about this and be naturally curious to make contact with this hitherto relatively unknown people.

The traditions say that he preached on Ludgate Hill in London where St. Paul's Cathedral now stands. It is about the only echo of what happened if he really did set foot in Britain. In practice, of course, if he came at all, he must have stayed some time, perhaps six months or a year. As a Roman citizen he travelled under the protection of the armed might of Rome; as he and Luke and Aristarchus passed out of the city gate of Dover and headed along Watling Street for the commercial city of Londinium (London) they must have felt as much at home as in their native East. The relatively short journey of eighty miles, passing Canterbury and Rochester on the way, would mean nothing to these well seasoned travellers. On the third or perhaps the fourth day, still following the Roman road, they would cross the last sizeable stream at Crayford and commence the long five-mile ascent to the summit of Shooter's Hill where a Roman garrison kept ward over the south-eastern approaches to the city.

From this vantage point Paul would have had his first view of London. Below him, four or five miles away, he could see the wide silver loops of the River Thames—the Thames—and on its northern bank the city itself, a city of traffickers and merchants. The political capital of Britain was at Colchester, but Paul's custom was to concentrate on the commercial centres, and as he traversed the last few miles and crossed the bridge which even then spanned the river where London Bridge now stands he must have been eager to commence his witness, here in this strange land, to the Gospel which was the passion of his life.

If thus he entered London there is nothing improbable in the tradition that he preached on Ludgate Hill. From time immemorial it has been a sacred spot. In later Roman times a Temple to Diana was built there; in Paul's day it was sacred to the British god Lud—the name London is derived from "Lud's city"—and the impulse which led him to stand on Mars Hill in Athens would direct him similarly here. From London he may have travelled the country—Colchester, St. Albans, Leicester, Lincoln, Chester, Worcester, Bath, Lewes; these were the chief cities of Roman Britain—nothing definite or dogmatic can be

affirmed except the one inescapable fact that Christianity was in Britain within thirty years of the Crucifixion, and that is just the time of St. Paul's "unknown" journeying.

The missionaries could go no farther, for there was nowhere else to go. They had reached the end of the known world; beyond this land lay nothing but raging seas, intense cold and Stygian darkness in which dwelt monsters and horrors unimaginable. At least that was what the geographers of their day told them. This was the end of the outward journey; it was time to set course for home. At some time in A.D. 65, it might be, the valiant three were on another vessel heading across the Channel for Gaul. The seed had been sown and watered; they must leave the increase thereof to God.

As they returned through Gaul to Lyons they may have met travellers who told them of dark happenings in Rome, of the great Fire which in the summer just past had virtually destroyed the city, that the Christians had been blamed, of the scenes of persecution and martyrdom which were being enacted. There may even have been some of the Roman Christians who had escaped the holocaust, taking refuge with the believers at Lyons; if such there were, the missionaries would learn that the Apostle Peter had proved a tower of strength to the Church in Rome during this time of trial, John Mark and Silvanus still there with him, as yet unhurt. Perhaps at that point Paul realised that the quiet days were over and the time of testing had begun. Perhaps already the shadow of his own approaching end fell across his mind.

From Lyons the route took them across Northern Italy and through Dalmatia and Illyricum towards Greece. Here at last Paul could meet with companies of converts he had made on previous journeys and here we begin to find Scriptural clues to his movements. 1 Tim. 1. 3 is best understood by supposing that upon leaving the borders of Illyricum he headed across Macedonia to Berea from where he sent a message to Timothy urging him to remain at Ephesus; perhaps Aristarchus left him here and went home to Thessalonica near by and later went on to Ephesus with the message. From here Paul could get a ship to Crete, where he seems to have found Titus, unless he met Titus at Berea and took him along. After a stay in Crete he returned to the Greek mainland and made his way to Nicopolis on the west coast where he had decided to spend the winter (Titus 3. 12), which must have been the winter of A.D. 65, doubtless



spending some time with the churches at Cenchrea and Corinth on the way. At this time the First Epistle to Timothy and that to Titus were written and despatched. With the advent of springtime—this desire of Paul to “lay up” for the winter, so unlike his old self, is an indication that the weight of years was beginning to tell—he set out for the churches of Macedonia—Berea, Thessalonica and Philippi—thus at last fulfilling his promise in Phil. 2, 24. Thence he took ship to Troas in Asia and did so probably feeling that he had seen his fellow-believers in Greece for the last time. So far the journey had gone according to plan and within another year he would have re-visited all the Asiatic churches and come to rest at last in his home church at Antioch. After meeting with the brethren at Troas he would have had a few days’ sea voyage along the coast to Miletus and then a forty-mile journey overland to Ephesus, where he would at last meet his beloved Timothy from whom he had been separated the past four years. Next to Antioch, Paul had had more to do with Ephesus than any other centre and it must have been with quickening anticipation that he looked for the reunion in the familiar city.

But Paul never went to Ephesus and he never saw Timothy. Troas was the last place where he was to know freedom.

Just what happened is obscure. It is fairly clear that he was apprehended by the authorities either at Troas or at Miletus, a hundred and fifty miles down the coast. In the Second Epistle to Timothy, written from his prison in Rome, he asks for the cloak and books and parchments which he left with Carpus at Troas to be brought to him, from which it has been inferred that his arrest was so sudden he had no time to collect his personal belongings. In the same Epistle he tells how Trophimus had to be left behind at Miletus, being sick, from which it is plain that although only forty miles from Ephesus he did not visit the city or have any communication with the believers there, and that can only be accounted for by supposing that upon touching at Miletus he was already in custody. It is probable therefore that he was arrested at Troas and taken to Rome by sea, the vessel calling at Miletus on the way, but that Paul was not allowed to contact any of the Ephesian believers.

A few weeks later he was in prison at Rome, awaiting trial. The nature of the charge is unknown but since Paul’s last appearance the situation had changed. The Neronian persecu-

tion of the Christians lasted only six months in A.D. 64 but its effects were still felt. Christianity was now an illegal religion and any Christian was an object of suspicion. The fact that Paul was an acknowledged leader among them was in itself a factor in ensuring an adverse verdict. In addition he was a Jew, and Jews also were now anathema at Rome. Judea was in open rebellion against the Empire and at this very time, or at most but a few months later, Rome had been infuriated by a great military catastrophe. The Twelfth Legion under Cestius Gallus, with auxiliary forces totalling twenty thousand men, had been defeated by the Jews defending Jerusalem, pursued to Beth-horon (where in time past Joshua defeated the Canaanites), and ruthlessly massacred. Six thousand Romans perished and the rest only escaped by headlong flight. It was one of the greatest disasters Roman arms had ever suffered and Rome was eager to avenge herself. The consequence was the despatch of Vespasian to Judea and the war which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These happenings would have made matters no easier for the Apostle. The Christian expectation that the Second Advent was at hand and their dire predictions of the imminent fall of Rome before the coming King were taken by the authorities as incitement to rebellion. In all probability the charge against Paul was one of treason, and in the then state of public and official opinion the verdict was an almost foregone conclusion.

Paul arrived in Rome in late A.D. 66 or early 67. He seems to have had two trials, the first one resulting in a remand for a season. Probably the assessors were unable to agree on the evidence and the case was put back. This was the time at which he wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy. He told Timothy of the ineffective first trial (ch. 4, 16) but was under no illusion as to the ultimate outcome. He knew that his time was come and he was ready. His one desire was to see his adopted son once more before he died. “*Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me*” he pleaded, and again “*Do thy diligence to come before winter*”. That must have meant the winter of A.D. 67. Onesiphorus of Ephesus had visited him in Rome during his imprisonment and he noted this with gratitude; “*he . . . was not ashamed of my chain, but when he was in Rome he sought me out very diligently, and found me*”. The defection of Demas is noted with sadness: Demas who had been with him for so long. “*Demas hath forsaken me, having*



loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica". A world of tragedy lies in those regretful words! Perhaps the terrors of the persecution had been too much for Demas and he had slipped quietly away. Titus had been sent to Dalmatia and Crescens to Gaul (not Galatia as in the A.V.). These two missions tend to support the view of the journey here described; if Paul had recently evangelised Gaul and Dalmatia it is characteristic of him that he should now send two of his helpers to follow up the progress of the faith in those regions. *"Only Luke is with me."* Luke, faithful Luke, remained with the Apostle in his last days and did not leave Rome until it was all over. Tradition says he afterwards preached in Gaul, and finally settled in Bithynia on the shores of the Black Sea, where he died twenty years later. It may be questioned how Luke himself escaped the notice of the authorities in his close association with the accused man; probably the fact that he was a Greek, and a physician apparently in constant professional attendance upon Paul, diverted suspicion. Some at least of the Roman church were in a degree of fellowship with the Apostle for he sends greetings from Linus, and from Pudens and Claudia—there is a romantic theory that Pudens was a young Roman officer in Britain during the conquest and his wife Claudia a British princess, daughter of the British king Caractacus who was taken prisoner to Rome in the reign of the Emperor Claudius, but it rests upon a slender basis and both names were not uncommon in Rome at the time—and from all the brethren.

But the sands were running out, and the busy pen was laid down. With the Second Epistle to Timothy, written some time in the summer of A.D. 67, the written word comes to an end. After that there is nothing but the memory of the Church, the recollections of men like Clement and Linus, who were there at the time and knew what happened, and

handed down what they knew to succeeding generations of believers, the recollection growing fainter and less definite as the years passed.

Paul appeared before the tribunal. A few months previously St. Peter had been put to death in Rome after leading the Church fearlessly through the persecution, and Mark had then returned to Ephesus. Now it was Paul's turn. Whatever the considerations which had given rise to doubts of his guilt at the first hearing, there was no hesitancy this time. The death sentence was passed. Paul's Roman citizenship saved him from the crucifixion which had been Peter's lot; he was to suffer beheading. Towards the end of A.D. 67 or early in 68 the valiant heart came to rest.

Did Timothy and Mark reach him in time? No one knows. They certainly must have made the attempt. When Timothy received the letter they probably had four or five months in which to reach Rome, long enough for the purpose. Perhaps, at the last, the Apostle's tired eyes did light up at the sight of these whom, with Luke, he probably loved more than any others of his fellow-labourers.

Then it was all over. An old tradition says that he was taken to a place outside the city and there led aside a few paces. The executioner stepped forward; a swift movement, and the man who had never wavered in his steadfastness to the Master he had served since the day of that vision on the Damascus road came to the end of the way.

*"For I am now 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, shall give me at that day. And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."*

(THE END)

One of the football pools firms looking for new clients addressed a set of trial coupons to Mr. John Bunyan, Elstow, Bedfordshire. The firm concerned evidently did not get this particular name out of the telephone directory, neither, apparently, were they aware that John Bunyan died three hundred years ago. But there is no doubt of the reception which the tinker of Elstow would have accorded the plausible missives which find their way

through so many of our letter-boxes nowadays. *"Here is a silver mine"* said Demas, *"and some digging in it for treasure. If you will come, with a little pains you may richly provide for yourselves."* *"Let us go and see"* said Hopeful. *"Not I"* said Christian; *"I have heard of this place before now, and how many have there been slain; and besides, that treasure is a snare to those that seek it, for it hindereth them in their pilgrimage."*

## OBADIAH THE MESSENGER OF JUDGMENT

### 5. Everlasting Righteousness

An exposition of the  
Book of Obadiah

*"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 to-day, 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 that 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 be 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 shall inherit Samaria and Benjamin shall inherit Gilead. The Israelite exiles in Halah shall inherit Phoenicia as far as Zarephath, and the Jerusalem exiles in Sepharad shall inherit the cities of the desert."* (vs. 19-29).

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 places 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 henceforward there is

only glory—a glory that is eventually to enshroud all the world of men in its radiance.

(THE END)

## MANY WONDERFUL WORKS

A Reflection

Coming at the climax of a sermon unparalleled in all the recorded sayings of Jesus Christ, that reference to those who sought entrance into His Kingdom by virtue of their words and works has formed the subject of many a homily. With a very ready unanimity we join together in condemning the man who puts his trust in the arm of flesh and brings the fruits of his own works as an offering to the Almighty. Here in no unmeasured terms the Saviour of all men denounced the mental attitude which had made the Pharisees what they were in His day—a class of men who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. The awful results of that self-blinded egotism were manifested when they crucified the Prince of Life, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them. Thus does the evil bring forth its bitter fruit—the husk of an outward righteousness as fair to the casual eye as the whited sepulchres to which Jesus pointed, but concealing a corruption and a defilement as nauseous and repugnant to the All-seeing One as ever the contents of those same whited sepulchres were to the Jews.

Is it because, like Isaiah, we see the glory of the Lord and wish straight away to be used as His messengers that we so easily fall victims to the temptation of engaging in outward activities for their own sake rather than the inward work of the heart, to which all external things are but handmaidens? Just as a church is a shell which houses a congregation of worshippers and has no lasting value in itself, so also must the whole fabric of our earthly fellowship and service ever remain but an avenue by means of which we can feed and build up each other with the realities of Divine Truth. And yet just as in a church there is an altar which symbolises the presence of God, so in every form of Christian activity and service springing from the efforts of sincere and loving hearts, there is always manifest the Spirit of Christ—the material erection becoming in very truth an agent of Divine things.

Still must be remembered that truth enun-

ciated by Paul in saying “*we know that if this earthly house of our dwelling place be dissolved, we have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*”. So must it be with all our fleeting arrangements and organisations, all those things which minister to the needs of the saints while in the flesh, but which must necessarily vanish away when their work has been done. Not one of these “mighty works” goes with us into the eternal light of the Divine Presence—for their purpose will have been served, and amply served, in the ministry to the saints here below. The Church, founded at Pentecost upon a hope and conviction which had its anchor in things unseen, developed and multiplied by means of the unremitting toil of saintly men and women who counted not their lives dear unto them, and who in lives given up and sacrificed on the altar of service found a richer and fuller and nobler life even here amidst the imperfections of the earthly state. Paul in organising new communities of believers; Timothy setting in order the things that were wanting; the seven first deacons administering the serving of tables; in all of this we do not see the frantic building-up of a vast and imposing edifice which would absorb the thoughts and energies of all believers and dissipate those energies in a useless beating of the air. What we do see is the serious and solemn administration of a sacred trust left by the Master Himself, who knew only too well how the heart left to theorise and meditate upon His message without the broadening influence of service for others must inevitably become self-centred and egotistic. We see thoughtful and zealous men and women full of the Spirit and of wisdom, rejoicing not only in the intellectual satisfaction of a clear knowledge of the Truth, but also in the abundant opportunity of manifesting the influence of that knowledge by their works and activity among their brethren and neighbours. There can be little doubt that the early years of the primitive Church were years of ceaseless activity. “*And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple and breaking*



*bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*". The wonderful growth of the Christian community was due as much to the burning zeal of those who went forth to propagate the new faith as to the readiness of a sinweary world to listen with hope to the message.

But in all of this the early Christians thought little of their own personal relation to the organisation they were building. Sufficient that this marvellous fellowship which was coming into being was steadily making progress through every stratum of society. Sufficient that the name of Jesus Christ was becoming increasingly familiar to those who met on the Sabbath day throughout all the cities of the Dispersion. Sufficient that the words of Jesus "*Ye shall be witnesses unto me—to the uttermost parts of the earth*" were having a glorious fulfilment. Of their own place in these things they thought not at all, but, like saints of earlier times, took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and a more enduring substance.

Let us take to ourselves the lesson they so nobly taught. Let us, in all our activities and arrangements, our organising and building, ever remember that all these "mighty works",

desirable and even necessary as they are today, are not intended to endure for all time, to be jealously guarded and handed down to posterity. They are for the needs of the moment, for the promulgation of the Word of God and the "*edifying of the Body of Christ—UNTIL we all come, in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the full stature of the Anointed One*". Happy is the brother or sister who can touch lightly these things of this earth, realising their place in the leadings of the Good Shepherd, thankful for their provision, and yet without regret or repining seeing them wax old and vanish away when their period of usefulness has passed.

So doing, we shall not be of those who, at the end, must needs claim their wonderful works as their only recommendation for entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom. If our building has been with the gold, silver and precious stones of the eternal truths which are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit of God, and if we have so learned Christ that the failure of all material supports and defences leaves us "*strong in the Lord and in the power of His might*" then indeed we shall not be of those to whom will come the sad, regretful words "*I never knew you. Depart from Me*".

### In the Crucible

John in Patmos knew that all was not well with the inner life of the churches. Failures in love, readiness to listen to false teaching, low standards of conduct and character, lukewarmness and self-complacency—such were the fallings away from the true marks of their high calling in Christ Jesus of which he had to write. The first century was no golden age; nor was the Church then a Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Church militant has never been a Church without fault. It has been a tempted Church, a struggling Church, a Church that has fallen again and again; and yet through it all a Church that learns how to conquer, how to overcome. For, then and always, what is needed in the Church is the spirit of the victor. The true Christian spirit is not that of mere endurance and resignation; it is the spirit of victory. And so it is that although the story has to tell of disappointments, shortcomings, of compromise with the world, of faltering, of unworthy discipleship, and of evil in high places, the torch of victory has never burnt itself out. From generation to generation of the Church's life it has been passed on, and there have

always been some to receive it. The kingdoms of the world come and go; they may play their part in the development of civilisation, but they possess not the power to never grow old. The Gospel of Christ is ever renewing the freshness and triumphs of days that may seem far off, but are linked by an unbroken chain to the Church of today. There is far more of permanent victory in Augustine landing in the Isle of Thanet than in Julius Caesar disembarking his forces near to the cliffs of Dover, and a Christian village in Africa or India is a truer symbol of the eternal things that cannot be shaken than the earth-shaking armies of the greatest of this world's conquerors from Nebuchadnezzar to Napoleon. In those armies of destruction we find but the witness to some man who strives to be a superman; in the peaceful village we find a living testimony to the victorious power of God. (Selected)

Filled with the Spirit, we shall be a blessing to others, and rivers—not a mere stream—of blessing will flow out from us to refresh the dry and thirsty wilderness of this world.

## WHEN THE SUN STOOD STILL

An examination of a wonderful happening (Joshua 10. 6-14)

The story of the sun and moon standing still at the command of Joshua provides the incentive for many excursions into astronomical science in order to demonstrate that the idea is by no means so fantastic as it sounds. Some enthusiasts, such as Prof. Totten in the Nineteenth Century, have produced elaborate calculations to show that such a supernaturally lengthened day must have happened once in human history, and the records of ancient nations have been searched for stray allusions to so noteworthy an event; but in all this fervour of scientific research the fact that a careful examination of the passage in question fails to justify the popular impression has generally escaped notice.

It was shortly after the entry into the Promised Land that Joshua's army, battling to secure possession of their new home, marched all night from Gilgal to Gibeon, an uphill journey of sixteen miles, involving a climb of several thousand feet into the mountains, to intercept and do battle with the Canaanites and Amorites. Upon their arrival, at probably about five in the morning, Joshua gave battle, and, tired as his men must have been after their all night forced march, defeated the enemy and pursued him for seven miles to Beth-horon (Josh. 10. 10) and over the crest of the mountain into the valley of Ajalon, which runs in a south-westerly direction to the Mediterranean Sea. It was apparently at this point that Joshua, seeing that his prey was escaping him, uttered the cry which has been interpreted as an invocation to the powers of heaven to intervene on his behalf: "*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves on their enemies. . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day.*"

Whatever the real purpose of Joshua's appeal, the powers of heaven were already taking a hand in the battle in another manner. A violent hailstorm from the Mediterranean was sweeping up the valley of Ajalon—a not uncommon phenomenon in the valley, then or now—in its course overwhelming the fleeing Canaanites. Their rout was complete; many of them perished; "*they were more than that died with hailstones*" says the chronicler "*than they whom the children of Israel slew with*

*the sword*". The Israelites, high up on the summit of Beth-horon, apparently escaped the hail but the Canaanite host was decimated. This was the decisive battle which laid the land of Canaan open to the invading Israelites.

From verses 10 and 11 it is clear that the Canaanites encountered this storm whilst they were between Beth-horon and Azekah, and therefore well down in the valley. Joshua must have been standing on the summit of Beth-horon, and from his exalted position perceived the storm approaching from the sea long before the Canaanites were aware of its onset. From where he stood, facing the south, his gaze could take in the heights of Gibeon on his left hand, and on his right the valley of Ajalon, crowded now with the retreating foe. The time would have been about eight a.m., for the seven mile pursuit between Gibeon and Beth-horon could hardly have occupied more than two or three hours. Gibeon lies E. by S.E. of Beth-horon, so that at this time the sun would appear to Joshua to be directly over the heights of Gibeon. Upon turning to his right and looking W. by S.W. through the valley of Ajalon, Joshua would see the crescent moon, in its last quarter, directly over the valley, faintly illumined by the rays of the sun. That this was the phase of the moon at the time is deduced from the fact that the Israelites crossed Jordan on the 10th of Nisan, and therefore ten days after the new moon, and that a study of the subsequent events with their datings as recorded in the Book of Joshua shows that the battle took place about six weeks later, within a day or two of the 24th of Zif, the second month, so that the moon would be in the third quarter of the second lunation of the year. It is an interesting testimony to the historical accuracy of the Book of Joshua that only at this one time in the month could the sun be over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Ajalon simultaneously from the point of view of an observer on the summit of Beth-horon.

It was not the "standing still" of the sun and moon, but the hailstorm, that achieved the victory for the Israelites. The confusion and disaster into which the Canaanite hosts were thrown by the pitiless rain of hailstones completed the havoc begun on Beth-horon by Joshua's warriors. What then was the purpose of Joshua's command to the sun and

moon?

The words in question are not original to the Book of Joshua—they are quoted from the "Book of Jasher" (see vs. 13). The account of the battle occupies vs. 10 and 11, and the thread of the narrative is not taken up again until vs. 16. The intervening portion is a parenthesis, inserted by some later transcriber of the Book of Joshua, in order to place on record the words used by Israel's great leader on this occasion, words which apparently had been preserved only in this "Book of Jasher". After the quotation, which occupies vs. 12 and part of vs. 13, and the acknowledgment "*Is not this written in the Book of Jasher*" there follows a short observation (vs. 14-15) by the same unknown transcriber by way of comment on the situation.

The Book of Jasher is referred to once elsewhere in the Scriptures, namely, in 2 Sam. 1. 18. Here there is mentioned a song or poem called (the song of) "the Bow", dealing probably with the prowess of archers in battle; a song which David ordered should be taught the children of Judah. From this fact, and the fact that in the Joshua quotation the passage concerned is, in the Hebrew, not prose, but poetry, it has been concluded that the Book of Jasher was a poetic composition telling of the great events in Israel's history, and was in existence certainly in the time of David. We probably do well therefore to allow for poetic licence in the words in which Joshua's appeal is recorded—much as must be allowed when reading Jud. 5. 20 "*The stars in their courses fought against Sisera*" and Psalms 18. 9 "*He bowed the heavens and came down*" both of which expressions are taken from similar poetic compositions.

The passage in question then needs to be considered as a fragment of true history preserved in a fine piece of poetic language.

"*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.*" The word here rendered "stand still" is "*dom*" and means to be silent, quiet, still or dumb. Gesenius says that it is derived from the sound made by the shutting of the mouth and that its literal meaning is "to be dumb". Its significance is not that of standing still in the sense of cessation of motion, but of being still or silent in the sense of ceasing to perform a customary activity. Instances of its use are in Lam. 3. 28, Jer. 8. 14 (silence), Hab. 2. 19 (dumb), 1 Kings 19. 12 (still). The literal English of the Hebrew text is "Sun, on-Gibeon be-dumb, and moon, on-valley Ajalon".

The Israelites would be hard put to it to

keep up with their fleeing foes. They had been on the move since the previous evening and it was essential that this victory be complete and that no appreciable number of Canaanites be allowed to escape. The sun's heat was rapidly increasing as the morning advanced, and Joshua must have feared above everything else its effects upon his weary troops. In this extremity he appealed to the Lord (vs. 12), not for the cessation of the sun's progress, which would involve a corresponding increase in the duration of noonday heat, but for the silencing or cessation of the sun's activity so that the greater coolness of the day might invigorate his tiring forces.

God answered the prayer by sending the hailstorm described in the account. As the dark clouds swept up the valley, first the crescent moon over Ajalon, and then the sun over Gibeon, were blotted out, and their rays "*ceased*" from the earth for the remainder of the day, "*until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies*".

In vs. 13 "*The sun . . . hastened not to go down about a whole day*" there is no justification in the Hebrew text for the use of "down". The word is "*boa*", a verb meaning to come in or to enter, but not to go down or descend. It is normally used for "to enter" as into a chamber, and is so used in some parts of the Old Testament to describe the sun's setting, as if entering into his chamber, but in the passage under examination it probably signifies that the sunlight failed to break through the clouds so as to enter upon the earth for the remainder of that day. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the word for "sun" used in this account is not "*chammah*", the sun itself, but "*shemesh*", the sun's radiance or rays, or as we would say, the sunlight. Similarly the word for "moon" used in the passage is "*yareach*", "the scent of the moon", i.e., moonlight, and not "*levonah*", the lunar satellite itself.

"*And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel*" (vs. 1. 14). This is the comment of the unknown transcriber who felt bound thus to complete his quotation from the Book of Jasher. The reference is of course to the hailstorm, which, the account tells us, was definitely sent by the Lord to ensure the Israelite victory.

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If we believe that His touch has still its ancient power, it must mean that His outstretched hand continues to effect salvation.



## BIBLE SCHOOL ON THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Exod. 25-31 & 35-39

### EXODUS

Part 19 The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

The six months following the making of the Law Covenant was spent very quietly. A small band of artificers and weavers engaged themselves in the construction of the Tabernacle whilst Israel in general were busy with the care of their flocks and herd; grazing in the extensive plain which lay at the foot of the Mount.

Chapters 25-31 record the Divine instructions given to Moses in the Mount for the construction of this Sanctuary and the appointment of its Priesthood: chapters 35 to 39 describe the execution of the project and consist very largely of an almost word-for-word repetition of the instructions. With the completion and erection of the Tabernacle the Book of Exodus comes to its close.

The purpose of the Tabernacle was to provide a meeting place between God and man, where God could symbolically dwell and be approached through the avenue of an appropriate ritual by a suitably ordained priesthood, a place where offerings could be made to express contrition for sin and where cleansing from sin, again in a symbolic sense, could be effected. The Tabernacle, with its different apartments and varied furniture, its ritual and ceremony, was really an elaborate piece of symbolism in which every element possessed a meaning illustrative of the fundamental principle governing the Divine relationship to man. It is because of that fact that the Tabernacle and its ceremonies is of no less importance to the Christian than to the Israelite, for every aspect and every movement associated with the building and the ceremony is a figure, a type, a "shadow", as the Book of Hebrews has it, of matters connected with the Divine Plan and the philosophy of redemption.

Stated very briefly, the erection consisted of a sanctuary correctly referred to as the Tabernacle, surmounted by a Tent for protection from the weather, standing in the middle of an enclosed space known as the Court. The Tabernacle comprised a portable building forty-five feet long by fifteen feet wide and fifteen high constructed of acacia wood boards covered with gold leaf and roofed in by a richly embroidered tapestry. This building was divided into two apartments. The inner one, called the Holy of Holies or Most Holy (holy place with "place" in italics in

the A.V.) contained the sacred "Ark of the Covenant" where a mysterious light, the "Shekinah", represented the Divine presence. The outer apartment, called the Holy Place, contained the Incense Altar, the Golden Table and the seven-branched Lampstand. This outer apartment was the place where the High Priest stood before God to offer incense preparatory to entering the Holy of Holies, for the purpose of the ritual of cleansing away the sins of Israel. A heavy tapestry, the Vail, adorned with figures of Cherubim, divided the two apartments, and another tapestry called the "Door" in the A.V. hung across the entrance to the Holy Place from outside.

Above this building was erected the Tent, carried down from a central ridge-pole about twenty-two feet high at a slope sufficient to conduct away all rain water. The Tent consisted of woven goats-hair cloth covered for waterproofing purposes with dyed rams' skins sewn together and then a top covering of the tanned skins of sea creatures from the Red Sea, dolphins, dugong and probably sharks. These were tanned to form a thick leather-like covering which gave efficient weather protection. In the A.V. these skins are incorrectly rendered "badger-skins".

The Court, toward the rear of which the Tent stood, was seventy-five feet wide by one hundred and fifty long, surrounded by a white linen curtain some six or seven feet high carried on silver rods stretched between acacia wood pillars standing in cast sockets of copper or possibly bronze.

At the eastern end an opening shielded by an embroidered curtain gave access; within the Court stood the Altar of Sacrifice and the Laver, a basin of water for ceremonial cleansing, both of copper. This Court was the place where the High Priest offered burnt offerings and sin offerings to God on behalf of the people as an essential preliminary to his entering the Divine presence in the Holy of Holies, and none but Levites, members of the priestly tribe, were permitted to enter the Court. The remainder of Israel must remain outside, in the Camp.

On the annual Day of Atonement the hosts of Israel gathered around the outside of the Court to await the ceremony of cleansing from sin. The High Priest, senior living descendant of Levi the son of Jacob, and titular



head of the sacred tribe of Levi, took his place inside the Court arrayed in white sacrificial robes. Following his ritual cleansing with water at the Laver and attended by his subordinate Levites, he offered in sacrifice on the Altar, first a bullock and then a goat, in symbolic expiation of the sins of Israel. The flesh of the sacrifice was burned with fire on the altar but its blood was carried by the High Priest into the Holy Place, where he offered incense before proceeding, then into the Holy of Holies where he sprinkled it upon the Ark of the Covenant. Returning to the Holy Place, he exchanged his white robes for the splendidly adorned "robes of glory" in which he emerged into the Court, lifted up his hands and invoked the blessing of God upon the people in token that God had removed their sin. The details of this ritual are contained in the third book of the Bible, the Book of Leviticus, and form no part of Exodus, but the initial inauguration of the priesthood does come within the scope of Exodus and is found in chapters 28-29. The splendid vestments of the High Priest comprised, principally, a blue robe adorned with blue, purple and scarlet embroidery in the shape of pomegranates interspersed with golden bells, above which was worn a richly ornamented breastplate seven inches square displaying twelve varied precious stones symbolic of the twelve tribes. A ceremonial white mitre on his head bore a gold plate frontlet inscribed with the words "Holiness to the Lord" and in a little pouch carried on the breastplate were placed the "Urim and Thummim". The words can be made to mean "Light" and "Truth", expressed in the plural, and in some manner they established the authority of the wearer to act as High Priest of Israel in the presence of God. There have been plenty of speculations as to their physical nature and there is a common impression that they were miniature objects or figures by means of which the High Priest could determine the reply of God to questions put to Him after the fashion of some pagan priestly rituals. It does not seem fitting or perhaps likely that such "magical" objects should be given a place in a symbolism which was intended to elevate the mind to a higher and nobler conception of God and it might well be that whatever it was that did lie next to the High Priest's heart was nothing more than a scrap of goatskin or other writing material inscribed with some short synopsis of the Divine Law or some ascription of reverence such as that which appeared on his golden

mitre plate, something the possession of which indicated as it were his Divinely appointed office and authority. But no one knows; even Jewish theological circles are uncertain.

Thus splendidly attired, the High Priest and his sons, the deputy priests, were anointed with the holy anointing oil, compounded according to a formula set out in chapter 30. Four sweet-smelling herbs, myrrh, cinnamon, calamies and cassia, in all fifteen pounds weight, powdered and mixed with an *hin*—twelve pints—of olive oil, provided the necessary quantity which was used, not only on the priests, but the Tabernacle furniture, formally to declare sacred all that was thus anointed.

Familiarity with the successive steps in the believer's progress toward full communion with God as displayed in the New Testament will suggest the general manner in which the symbolism of the Tabernacle should be understood. Thus the Camp of Israel surrounding the structure immediately pinpoints the position of the unbelieving world in general having no vital interest in the mystic glories of its interior and yet profoundly affected by all its ritual and ceremonial because upon that depends their ultimate opportunity of salvation from the consequences of sin. The court, with its white enclosing curtains, then easily pictures the place or condition of all believers who by reason of faith in Christ and acceptance of Him have become "justified by faith" (Rom. 5. 1). Hence the "Laver" in the Court symbolises their cleansing (the "washing of Water by the Word" Eph. 5. 26) and the Brasen Altar of offering, the central fact of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ offered Himself unresistingly to be put to death upon behalf of the people He came to save. And here the predominant feature of construction in the Court, the copper of the furnishings compared with the gold of the Holy apartments within the Tabernacle, might well indicate that there is a closer and more fundamental state of union with God than is afforded by the mere state of justification by faith. Plenty of Christians find their aspirations after righteousness fully satisfied by the consciousness of sin forgiven and a state of "being right with God" as evangelist Tom Rees put it, but some there are, like Isaiah of old, glimpsing the heavenly vision more clearly than their fellows and hearing the Divine call "whom shall we send, and who will go for us" who cry out impulsively as did that zealous messenger "Here am I; send me".

(Isa. 6). Such are not content with the realisation of conversion and reconciliation with God; they must needs go on to a full and unreserved dedication and consecration of life, of talents, of possessions—all—to the service of God in whatever sphere He may direct. These are the priests who alone have access to the Tabernacle itself, enlightened, as one has said, by the light of the Golden Lampstand, the Holy Spirit of God; feeding upon the sacred bread on the Golden Table, the Word of God, and presenting their offering as incense upon the Altar of Incense before the magnificent curtain behind which, in light which no man might behold, dwells the Most High, the Father of All. The implications of this symbolism could be elaborated in tremendous detail in a study devoted to that purpose but enough can be hinted at here to show beyond all reasonable doubt how this ancient building with all its elaborate ceremonial was not devised only for the sake of Israel in the fifteenth century B.C.; it enshrines in eloquent imagery every important aspect of the Christian faith and the progress of man from the state of alienation from God to that of reconciliation and freedom from sin.

Two men of Israel, Bezaleel of the tribe of Judah and Aholiab of the tribe of Dan, craftsmen both, were selected to have the oversight of this project (ch. 31). Under their supervision and instruction the people were encouraged to bring their offerings, of gold, silver, copper, woven fabrics, jewels, and to work according to their abilities in the manufacture and erection. Something like one ton of gold, three tons of silver, two tons of copper and one ton of timber, were employed in the fabrication. (The "talent" of this account was a unit of weight equal to 67 lb., the sacred shekel or "shekel of the sanctuary", of which 3000 went to the talent, being about one-third of an ounce). Some skilled metallurgy was involved. The statement in ch. 37. 3 that they beat some of the gold into thin plates and cut it into wires means literally that they manufactured gold leaf wherewith to cover the wallboards of the Tabernacle and gold wires as fine as threads to incorporate in the embroidery. Articles discovered in Crete and dating from practically the same time as the Exodus include stone vases and an ivory gaming table covered with gold leaf with a skill which cannot be matched to-day. Bronze wire plated with gold and as fine as human hair was found doing duty on ivory human figures. Casting, welding, and soldering were all well-known accomplishments to the

ancients at that time and it seems that the Israelites had some among their number who were experts in these arts. It is not surprising therefore to read in this account that the sockets for the posts and the carrying "rings" for the altars and other articles of furniture were castings, made by pouring molten metal into sand or clay or even stone moulds. There is no doubt that Bezaleel and Aholiab were craftsmen of the first order.

There are quite a few words in the account the meaning of which is not clear in the Authorised Version, due in some cases to their being good seventeenth century English words which have since dropped out of the language and in other cases to the A.V. translators' inability to understand the original Hebrew technical terms. In the first category come such words as *knop* (ch. 25. 31) meaning a knob, *taches* (ch. 26. 6) meaning a clasp or means of attachment, *ouches* (ch. 28. 11) a word also used by Shakespeare and meaning the setting or mount in which precious stones are set. Words which have changed their meaning since the A.V. was translated are *curious* (ch. 28. 8) meaning that which is artistic or unique, and *cunning* (ch. 26. 31) which had the sense of ingenious, intricate or clever. Bezaleel was not a "cunning workman" in any derogatory sense and the modern rendering should rather be that he was a clever craftsman. In the second category come such words as *crown* (ch. 25. 11) an ornamental moulding or cornice surrounding the top of the Ark, *corners* (ch. 25. 12) properly shaped feet supporting the Ark and Table and most likely in the form of animals' feet something like the legs of some Victorian furniture, *shewbread* (ch. 25. 30) literally "bread of the presence" or bread exhibited in the presence of God, as it was when placed upon the Table in the Holy Place, *network* (ch. 27. 4) the firegrate upon which burned the sacrificial fire of the Brazen Altar, *fillets* (ch. 27. 10) connecting rods of acacia wood covered with gold or silver, stretched between the pillars, and from which the curtains were suspended, and *pins* (ch. 27. 18) tentpegs to take the guy-ropes which held the Tent in position.

The precise dimensions of the Tabernacle and its furniture has always been a subject of dispute owing to considerable uncertainty as to the length of measure translated "cubit". It is not always realised that the cubit changed its length more than once through the ages and that in fact the ancients employed a variety of cubits. It seems to be established that Hebrew length-measures are derived from the

Sumerian system—only natural since Abraham came originally from a Sumerian city, Ur of the Chaldees—and on this basis the Exodus account can be tolerably well understood. The Sumerian system was based on a primary unit, the palm, (*gar*, Hebrew *tophach*) which was the width of the palm of an average man's hand and was equivalent, so far as can be ascertained, to 3.6 inches. Multiples of this unit gave three cubits—3-palm, the 4-palm and the 5-palm cubit, the first used only for goldsmith's and similar artistic work, the second for general constructional work, and the third for buildings and land measurements. The Egyptians at a later time used cubits equivalent to 6-palms and 7-palms and these were sometimes used by Israel. At the time of the Exodus the Israelites also had a 2-palm unit of 7.2 inches which they called a *zereth*. In Exodus therefore the units used are the palm or *tophach* of 3.6 inches (translated "handbreadth") the "span", (*zereth*) of 7.2 inches, the 4-palm cubit (*ammah*) of 14.4 inches, to which the furniture was probably made and the 5-palm cubit (*ammah*) for the structure and surrounding enclosure. Whilst it cannot be claimed that the last word has been spoken upon ancient Hebrew metrology there is not much doubt that this system of multiple "palms" of 3.6 inches each is the key which yields the most satisfactory explanation of the physical construction of the Tabernacle.

So, on the first day of the first month in the second year of their departure from Egypt, the erection of the Sanctuary was completed and the solemn initiation ceremony of the priesthood conducted. They had been nearly ten months at Sinai; the memorable Passover which marked the night of their escape from slavery in Egypt was nearly a year in the past and in another fortnight they would be cele-

brating Israel's first commemoration of that Passover. Hearts must have beat fast and hopes run high as the people gazed upon the white curtains of the Court and the upper part of the Tent rising above those curtains, and knew that within that Sanctuary was the place where God had set His Name and manifested His presence with His people, ever ready at all times to send out His power for their sustenance in the time of want and their defence in time of danger.

The Book of Exodus ends at this point. Six weeks later they were to leave Sinai and resume their journey, embarking on the forty years' wanderings in the Wilderness, but that epic is the subject of the Book of Numbers. Exodus closes with the erection of the Tabernacle and Israel's rapturous acceptance of this visible symbol of their covenant relationship to God. The tragedy was that their faith did not hold and that even with God's presence in their midst and His ministers waiting to cleanse them of all defilement and maintain them at least ceremonially clean and acceptable in His sight they still came short of that which could have been. Once again the burning words of Dr. Becher Webb come upon the mind:—

*"Just to have known themselves to be but  
men;  
Just to have let Him lead them by His hand;  
Just to have had a little faith, and then  
All had come safely to the Promised Land.*

*"And yet they failed! O, by their failure  
teach  
Those that come after, in the same distress,  
More faithfully to follow till they reach  
The land that lies beyond the wilderness."*

THE END OF  
EXODUS

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## CHANGED INTO HIS LIKENESS An exhortation

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Our Lord was born a Jew; the vehicle of his earthly life was that of a Jew, subject to the national and hereditary characteristics of the race, but having the spirit of His Father within. There must have been, as He grew, a certain adjustment, a development towards a perfect balance, a perfect sensitive obedience to the Father. It could not have been easy, living in this world of very "human" beings. There must have been many ways in which He "learned obedience" before He came to the

age of thirty and took upon himself His great work of ministry and the witness to the world which was in every part faultless.

As the natural man develops he is anxious to prove himself, to shew that he is not only a good fellow at heart, but also an individual, with a personality. Through his personality his life finds expression. To a greater or lesser extent he is resentful of any restraint or over-riding of his personal actions and reactions, his life's expression. There is even a fear of



losing identity, of becoming a complete non-entity among men. When he hears the Gospel and comes to Christ Jesus he sheds some of his resentment and makes an effort towards greater forbearance and tolerance toward his fellow-creatures. He begins to feel that he has found the secret of living. The effects of his Christian efforts bring encouraging responses from others; where they reveal un-Christian responses he is still able to console himself in his faith. Perhaps at this point he may say "God is working in me, and I am working with Him". He may then spoil it all by saying "He chose me because He knew my heart condition was right. Many are called, but they have not all got the right heart condition". Back again to self assertion! Are the foolish, weak, ignoble things of this world the only ones who are in the right heart condition? "For behold your invitation, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many noble—but GOD SELECTED the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world, that He may shame the powerful and the ignoble things of the world, and the things despised, God selected . . ." (1 Cor. 1. 27-28). This selection is as "foolishness" as "weakness" (1 Cor. 1. 25) but in it lies the greatest vindication of God's name and power, the greatest witness of Jesus being "all in all" with the Father. These, having the Father's love set upon them, and accepted by Christ, are through the Lord being made "New Creatures", not men—a new creation—to be with Christ where He is, in due time, and be made like Him, a cross section, as it were, of mankind, transferred to the highest position of all God's creatures. What "heart condition" ever merited that? This is God's work, a witness to both men and angels. There are three passages setting out God's purposes in the Church . . . "in order that we might be to the praise of His glory, who had a prior hope in the Anointed One" (Eph. 1. 12). " . . . in order that he might exhibit in those ages which are approaching, the surpassing wealth of His favour by kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2. 7). " . . . in order that NOW may be made known to the governments and authorities in the heavens, the much diversified wisdom of God" (Eph. 3. 10).

So the Christian must go farther; sink a little more of his personality in the purposes of God. Maybe he will begin to wonder whether there will be anything left after God has "pruned" him! Yet going on, he sees "still more beauties" in God's word and "still

increasing light". The more he sees, the more he realises there is to see. Awed, by the magnitude of the work of God, always so exact and completely comprehensive in every part and purpose, lost in wonder, love and praise, his concern for himself is left behind, unnoticed—like a sloughed skin. Now he is anxious to be part of that great plan. He waits upon the Lord, bringing all his life to the Master in prayer. He grows in grace and knowledge; his personality loses its complications and becomes simpler, more sincere, as that of a child. He finds that the Lord's yoke is easy and His burden, light. So many things, cumbersome things, he has lost. He has learned in looking to Jesus to reflect the Word of Truth himself, as far as he has attained and to leave the responsibility for the work of salvation to God, Who gives the increase. He is giving out the message with all the wisdom he can command, and all the love and patience too, but he is not bringing in the Church, nor converting the world; he is merely keeping himself in the love of Christ.

In earthly matters also he "seeketh not his own" but "doing all things as unto the Lord" he gives a practical witness to others and loses the desire for many things after which he once hankered. Learning that "godliness with contentment is great gain" the "wants" he had drop off like the sloughed skin and he rejoices with his brethren in St. Paul's assurance "*my God will fully supply all your need according to His glorious wealth by Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 4. 19). He is a son of God, on the way home, the home he has never seen, but about which he has learned. There, Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power in righteousness exist, and no bad thing. He knows that when the time comes he will be ready to go in. That is part of the Father's promise. He will be "changed" into Christ's glorious likeness. The wonder of this thought makes him lift up his head—there is already a likeness—he has the "*same mind that is in Christ Jesus*" (1 Cor. 2. 16). He yearns for a fuller obedience—a more complete identification with God. The teaching of the Holy Spirit, lighting up so many Scriptures and continuing so to do changes his heart and mind. Each verse and each chapter that springs to light and life within him strengthens and confirms his likeness to the Master. He longs to have done with the shadows, with dealing with the imperfect, impermanent things. He longs to go where he truly belongs, to be with the Lord, and with his brethren. The work of the Holy Spirit has made him "all glorious within"; now with all



the church he waits for the completion, the fulfilling of that one hope, the "change", presenting him with all his brethren as a finished work. This is a New Creation indeed, without spot or blemish or any such thing, complete, all in all with God. Thus he is ready to bless the world with the same guidance, correction and healing that he has so well learned, yet,

The wise steward will seek always to cultivate along the lines of his natural abilities, and not expect the Lord to work a miracle for his advancement, and so waste valuable time seeking to develop that which he does not by nature possess.

in that time, unhindered by the spiritual forces of wickedness, the usurpers of God's world, now existing. Those forces will be bound, and their place taken by that wonderful, miraculous vindication of God's name, the first fruits, His New Creation, changed into His likeness.

Brighter than the equatorial noon-day sun, purer than the polar virgin snow, hotter than the mercury or oxygen-fed flame is Divine jealousy for the right, the good, the true, and its zeal against sin and wrong and evil in every form.

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