

# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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More than anything you guard, protect your mind, for life  
flows from it. Proverbs 4:23 CEB

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# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

FOUNDED 1924

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

*"Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."* (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)

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Secretary & Treasurer: Nicholas Charcharos

## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (love). For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 1:5-8)

The brain is the most important part of the human body. It controls all of the activities in the body. The Oxford Dictionary defines the brain as a "convoluted mass of nervous tissue contained in skull, controlling processes of sensation, learning, and memory." But the word "brain" will not be found in a Bible concordance. The word "mind" is.

The mind is defined as the "seat of consciousness, thought, volition, and feeling; intellectual powers; memory; opinion." It is the place where our thoughts, words and actions are sourced and controlled. It is where our character is developed and refined that it may be conformed to the mind of Christ.

Faith is the bedrock of the Christian's life. Without it we would not have this life as a new creature in Christ Jesus. But this is not the moment to relax and get on with every-day life. It is a beginning to which we should add virtue (Greek *arete*) or fortitude as it is defined in modern translations as it strengthens the Christian to withstand trials. To that is added knowledge. Knowledge has many branches especially knowledge of the

Bible as well as other knowledge like geography and history and so on. Temperance or self-control are very important in the life of the Christian if we are to leave behind the standards of the world and reach for the standards in the Bible especially the New Testament. Otherwise we would be out of control which can lead to reckless words and actions. To that the Christian must add patience or patient-endurance as we deal with the experiences we have over the years of our walk. To that we must add godliness or piety. Our thoughts must be evermore heavenward rather than earthly. More in line with God's attributes especially wisdom and love. Then we must add brotherly-kindness; kindly in our words and actions as if they were a brother or sister. Without kindness in our words and actions we would lean towards cruelty. Finally we must add *agape* love.

These speak of the transformation which Paul addresses in Romans 12:2 "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

"What would Jesus do?" is a question to ask ourselves when considering what to do and say. We could even reverse the question to say what would Jesus not do?



## FULL CONSECRATION

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

And thus, while dead to human hopes I lie,  
Lost, and forever lost, to all but Thee,  
My happy soul, since it has learned to die,  
Has found new life in Thine infinity.

With joy we learn this lesson of the cross,  
And tread the toilsome way which Jesus trod;  
And counting present life and all things loss,  
We find in death to self the life of God.

*Poems of Dawn*

## TRANSFORMED

*Counsel for the Christian Life*

*“We all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” (2 Cor. 3:18 RV)*

Christians are not the only ones who would like to be better men and women. Prof. Huxley said, *“I protest that if some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of my being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning, I should instantly close with the offer.”* “Oh, that I could only think right and do right” has been the desire of great men right down the ages.

This is our inheritance if we are the Lord’s people. This is shown in the Word of God and can be obtained under the right conditions. It is as natural for the character to become beautiful as for flowers to become beautiful: the same Creator who instituted laws for the production of beautiful flowers instituted laws for the creation of beautiful characters.

Some claim that the only way to be transformed into the likeness of the Lord is to resolve by sheer willpower to overcome sin in our bodies and minds. There is nothing wrong in resolving to overcome sin, but that is not the vital point. Suppose we were on a ship which, when in the middle of the ocean refused to go, and those on deck tried by pushing at the masts to move it. It would not move, however much pressure they used; their strength would be used in the wrong way. They need to go down to the engine room, the real seat of power, and use every effort to put right what was wrong. Effort is useless unless exercised in the right direction. A drowning man cannot pull himself out of the water by his own hair.

Some say, *“Our idea is to tackle one sin at a time and thus eradicate sin from our hearts that good may work.”* That would be a very big task for any person, to get sins one by one out of their life. That is the wrong way; sin is only overcome by something taking its place. The evil spirit discharged from the person must be replaced by the Lord’s spirit or the last condition becomes worse than the first. The tackling of one sin at a time is therefore not the right method.

Still another method is to copy Christ’s virtues. The word “copy” suggests the thought of an artist in wax or paint trying to reproduce a beautiful flower. Many believe in Christ as the standard to be copied, but very few are able to copy him. The power that is used is a power of self—a power within themselves instead of a power from without.

Again, some say, "How about self-examination"? Setting up a code of rules to which we must keep! A watchmaker once made a present of the parts of a watch, but when they were put together the main spring was missing. The vital thing is the power, or main-spring.

The Scriptures give us a valuable formula for our sanctification. There are laws of science and art, and if we would produce anything correctly we must use a formula. We are told that God's thoughts are higher than man's, and if the wisdom of men sees the necessity for a formula, God has not left us without one. 2 Cor. 3:13-18 provides this formula, and in verse eighteen reveals three laws: 1, *reflection*; 2, *assimilation*; and 3, *influence*.

Notice that it does not say we are transforming ourselves into the same image from glory to glory. No, we do not transform ourselves, we are transformed or changed. The changing power is something that does not naturally belong to ourselves, it is a power that comes from without. Throughout the New Testament we find that the verbs used in connection with our sanctification are passive verbs, so far as the power of sanctification is concerned it is a power from without. We can come under the influence of his spirit and be transformed. The barometer is made to tell us the condition of the weather, but it does not itself consciously register the condition of the weather; the weather does that. The barometer responds to changes in the weather. So, our responsibility is to bring ourselves into the attitude of susceptibility in which God can work on our minds. That is our part of the work, to get our hearts into that attitude of full consecration: take out anything and everything that would hinder the working of His Spirit. The Word of God must be received into our prepared hearts and the whole being must be yielded as members of righteousness.

That is the thought in this text. We, beholding Christ with unveiled face, in our study of the Lord's Word and His example and teaching, see the glory of God. We see the beauty of God. He exemplifies to us the character of God, and as we set our affections on that lovely character, our love for God and our study of His Word is so close to our hearts, we cannot but be a reflection. A man is shaped and fashioned by that which he loves. We find two young people coming together; they see something they love in each other. They marry and live together for fifty years, and during that time a reflecting work is going on; one would speak as would the other; their very appearance becomes alike. If we are in love with the Lord, the things He says are the things we would say, the words He has given us are the words which express the sentiments of our hearts. We take them into our hearts and reflect them. Beholding Christ, we reflect

His image, and we are changed from glory to glory. This word “glory” is rather a crude word to express the thought here. The Psalmist says, “*The heavens declare the glory of God.*” (Psa. 19:1) There is a demonstration of the glory of God, His power, His wisdom and the grandeur of His mind. In other words, God’s glory is His character. So, we, beholding Christ, reflect His image and are transformed from character to character, from one character to a better character, then on to a still better one until we are ready for our final change. We are all mirrors, we cannot help it, and we are all reflecting, whether we know it or not.

Now, what is it we reflect? We reflect what we have gained from our environment. If we choose an environment that leads to a depraved life, we shall reflect that depravity. We shall also reflect if we have been reading uplifting books and have been in uplifting company. Are we living in an environment of the Spirit? Do we read the Word of God? If so, we shall reflect it. Do we keep the company of the brethren? Then we shall reflect the spiritual effect.

This reflection is not merely a matter of mind or memory. The impressions we have gained are made on our very beings, so much so that a person is shaped and fashioned like that with which he comes into contact. Where we cannot change our circumstances, we can use them. It will either be a matter of our circumstances using us or we using them. This is important. We may find one who goes through a trial and the result is a stronger faith in God than ever before, whilst another may pass through similar circumstances in a spirit of questioning, murmuring and complaint, producing a very different result. By taking Christ’s precepts, no matter what experiences we go through, they will all work out for our good; whether painful or pleasant, they can be used for our sanctification. We not only reflect what we receive from our environment and experience, but we receive these impressions into our own beings. This we have referred to as the *Law of Assimilation*.

Now, *influence*: our study of great people’s works, or our contact with individuals, has the effect of changing our lives. David and Jonathan had a great influence on each other. How about the influence of Christ? If the influence of good people is great, and yet they are only a very small part virtuous in comparison with Christ, what would be the influence of Christ on those who make him their companion? Some may say that there is a difference, that there is something tangible in a friend. But we do not love our friend because of their virtues. So, it is with Christ. It is his life and influence that does the work of transforming. It is by the begetting of the

Spirit of God that the Christian is in receipt of a power that the world cannot know or comprehend.

There are certain laws governing the Christian. “*Except a man be born from above.*” (John 3:3 margin) We must receive a power from above before we can be transformed. There are laws governing the material world, organic and inorganic. A mineral is inorganic and must remain so, for it cannot by any power from within itself cross into even the lowest form of life. Plants are also governed by laws of growth, which are peculiar to themselves. While the mineral cannot reach up into the organic, we find that a plant can reach down its roots into the mineral and by absorbing it, transforms it to part of itself. The mineral has been “born from above” and entered the kingdom just above it. No law governing the human can make the human spiritual by effort or power from within itself, but God can take hold of us if we yield ourselves to Him, and so we can be transformed into His image. The power is the power of life and we derive that life from the Word of God, for the Word of God is living, and we have been begotten of the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, and by imbibing that Word we are transformed. If we study His Word and character and take His Word into our hearts, we receive a power that changes us from glory to glory. AS

### NOTE ON ISAIAH 48:13

In some of those inspired moments when holy men of old were moved by the Holy Spirit to utter words the meaning of which they themselves could only dimly understand, or even not understand at all, there were occasional allusions intended to have significance for us in these latter days, and which, closely examined, do have meaning. Speaking of His almighty power and wisdom, God says through the prophet Isaiah “*Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned (Heb. stretched out) the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.*” (Isa. 48:13) Let the implication of those trenchant words sink in! Here is the creative power of God calling into existence the material substance of which this earth and all the heavenly bodies are composed, preparing the space in which they are to continue their existence and by one word (“*when I call unto them*”) setting the entire assembly in orderly array as we see it glistening above our heads every night. Says Wisdom, the *Logos*, the only begotten Son “*When he prepared (established) the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth...then I was by him, as a master workman*” (or architect—this is the meaning of the Hebrew. (Prov. 8:27-31 KJV/RV) This momentous passage depicts the speaker as the active agent of God in the work of creation as distinct from the creative force or power whom we call God the Creator and God the Father of all. AOH

*From “The Almighty—The Eternal”*

## SAGA OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

The story of the great awakening

Somewhere in the Book of Isaiah there is a passage that describes the spirit in which the Jewish exiles, returning from Babylon to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus king of Persia, journeyed across the desert and climbed the steep, ragged Judean hills to their ruined city. *“Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem...”* (Isa. 52:8-9) That deliverance from Babylonian captivity was a very different thing from the Exodus out of Egypt. Under Moses the earlier Israelites had gone out in haste and by flight, first eating the Passover girded as for a journey and with every evidence of urgency. They had gone out against the wishes of the Egypt that had held them captive for four generations. But this time things were different. *“Ye shall not go out with haste, nor yet by flight.”* (v.12) Cyrus had issued a decree encouraging them to go and given them necessities for the journey and the wherewithal to commence a new life in an empty and desolate land. He had restored to them the holy treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple and brought to Babylon fifty years previously, and had commanded them to build again the magnificent building that his predecessor had destroyed. No wonder they rejoiced! No wonder that, in the words of the Psalmist, singing of this very event, *“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen (nations), The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; ...we are glad.”* (Psa. 126:1-3)

It was in this spirit that fifty thousand immigrants came into the land and immediately set about raising the walls of the Temple. The enthusiasm was great at first, for the influence of Daniel, the man who had once been Nebuchadnezzar's Prime Minister, was still strong upon them. Daniel, too old now to come back to Judea, had blessed their going. Now in the seventh month, the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, that commemorated their journeying in the wilderness for forty years after their departure from Egypt, they were gathered together in Jerusalem. From all the villages and hamlets of Judea they had come to worship before God at the first ceremonial to be conducted on the sacred site since Nebuzar-adan the commander-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar's army had set fire to the Temple, and burned it to the ground. That had been a time of disaster and



sorrow; this was one of hope and expectation. The house of the Lord was to be rebuilt and the ancient ceremonies restored, and Israel would once more bear a name among the nations. This was the faith that burned brightly in every breast.

The little community had two leaders of sterling worth, Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest. Zerubbabel was of the kingly line; he traced his natural descent from Nathan the son of David. The royal pedigree from Solomon had become extinct in Jehoiachin, and the humbler line of Nathan took its place after the Captivity; thus, Zerubbabel was its present representative. Through him, though he knew it not, the royal line was to be carried on until of his descendants, one day, Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Joshua the son of Jehozadak was a High Priest for the times. Nothing is known of his father, who was Israel's High Priest during the Babylonian captivity. His grandfather, Seraiah, High Priest in the days of Zedekiah, was executed by the Babylonians at the capture of the city. Jeremiah's picture of the political intrigues of that period indicate that the priests were hand in glove with the king and very possibly Seraiah was entangled with politics more than he should have been and suffered a fate he might have avoided had he been more devoted to his own commission before God. Nebuchadnezzar had a shrewd insight into the honesty or otherwise of men and it is impossible not to notice the difference between the respective treatments he meted out to Seraiah and to Jeremiah, who had kept out of politics and maintained, very faithfully, his witness to God. (Jer. 39:11-14 and 52:24-27). But it is evident that Joshua was of sterling worth. The approving tone of Zechariah's third chapter shows that he was a man the Lord could use. Under these two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Israel could have risen very quickly to a place of honour and power among the nations.

The people failed them. The people, who had come back from Babylon with songs of praise on their lips for so great deliverance, in joy that the Lord had turned again their captivity, began to lose their first fine enthusiasm, began to care more for their own farms and gardens and houses than for the house of the Lord. The affairs of daily life loomed as of greater moment than the service of God, and when the adversaries of Judah began to put obstacles in the way of the restoration work Israel in the mass were not at all averse to letting the case go by default.

While Cyrus lived, the work went on, but not at the pace originally planned. The Samaritans, bitter enemies of Judah, hindered the work. It was not entirely stopped, but neither was it pressed ahead with zeal and

expedition. They made one great and grievous mistake.

If the Samaritan complaint to Cambyses II (Ahasuerus Ezra 4:6), the successor of Cyrus, recorded in Ezra 4, was true, and not a malicious misrepresentation on their part, then the Jews were at that time engaged in building, not only the Temple, but also the walls and foundations of the city. Now it is important to notice that the decree of Cyrus gave no mandate to build the city; it was to build the Temple only. There was a deep truth here for Israel to learn. Their Temple was to rise, undefended, in the midst of a hostile population. The Lord himself would defend both his Temple and his people—but they would not. They fell after the same example of unbelief that has been seen so often in world history—resource to material means of defence to defend Divine interests. They would not understand that God is able to defend his own.

That was a test on the people. Now, at all events, they could have said, as did Peter on a certain memorable occasion “*Whether it be right...to hearken unto you (men) rather than unto God, judge ye; for...*” (Acts 4:19-20 RV) They could have defied both the Samaritans and the king’s edict, and taken themselves in prayer to God for his leading and his protection, and gone forward in faith that his purposes would be accomplished. But they did not. Therefore, in consequence “*then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*” (Ezra 4:24).

So, the whole glorious dream faded and the golden hopes with which the exiles had set out to return to their own land were in less than a decade dashed to the ground. At the first breath of opposition the people had wilted and laid down their tools, and turned themselves to the secular pursuits of every day, tilling the land and gaining livelihoods, building houses and organising communal life, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, the while the deserted, half-finished house of God stood on Mount Moriah, a crumbling monument to the fickleness of man and the weakness of faith.

But in the second year of Darius, nineteen years after the exiles had returned from Babylon and ten years after work on the Temple had been completely stopped, something momentous happened. Two young men, Haggai and Zechariah, suddenly came into the public eye and commenced preaching in Jerusalem and Judea. Haggai started first; two months later he was joined by his fellow-prophet Zechariah. These two young men, without any material resources, accomplished in the short space of four

years what twenty years of time backed by all the material wealth of the thousands of Israel, the influence of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the authority of the decree of Cyrus, had failed to do. They achieved the rebuilding and the dedication of the Temple!

If the Zechariah and Iddo of Neh. 12 are the same as the prophet and his forebear of those names mentioned in Zech. 1:1, which is probable, then Zechariah must have been a very young man, certainly at most in his early twenties, for Iddo his grandfather would then have returned to Judea in the first year of Cyrus, probably an old man. On this assumption, it is likely that Haggai, about whose antecedents we know nothing, was a young man also. There is a freshness and vigour about both their prophecies that seems to suggest as much. Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest would by this time, twenty years after the Return, be getting on in years, at the very least in late middle-age; Neh. 12:16 indicates that later on Zechariah held office in the priesthood under Joiakim, the High Priest who succeeded Joshua. The two older men would probably be to some extent dispirited and discouraged at the failure of their high hopes, the adverse decision of Artaxerxes and the apathy of the people of Israel combining to dissuade them from any considerable activity in the direction of restoring the Temple. Then like a thunderbolt came the message, declaimed in the streets and squares of the city, told in the ears of shepherds and peasants in the countryside, brought to the notice of the prince and the High Priest, word that prophets were arisen again in Israel. A message for the times, a message that told with decision and conviction to what cause was due their unhappy condition and the failure of their one-time high ideals and hopes. *“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled (panelled) houses, and this house lie waste?”* demanded Haggai. *“Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways”!* (Hag. 1:4-5) Scarcely had the tones of his accusation died upon the air than the equally penetrating voice of his brother-prophet Zechariah commanded attention. *“The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore...thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me...and I will turn unto you.”* (Zech. 1:2-3) Then Haggai again *“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.”* (Hag. 1:8) To Joshua, the people’s High Priest, Zechariah addressed himself deliberately *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; if thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts”* (Zech. 3:7); with Haggai rejoining *“Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the High Priest, and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with*

you.” (Hag. 2:4)

Haggai and Zechariah had put their fingers upon the source of the trouble. Faith and zeal had sunk to a low ebb: there was no longer that heavenly vision which had inspired the first emigrants to wend their way across the desert with songs and thanksgiving on their lips, and their faces turned toward Zion. Because faith and zeal had waned, the enemies of Israel and of God had loomed nearer and more menacing, and in fear and doubt the work of God had been stopped.

Behold now the difference! The prohibition of the Persian king was still in force. “*Cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until commandment shall be given from me.*” (Ezra 4:21). The wrath of the king could still be backed by the military might of Persia if this handful of Jews dared to rebel against his express decree. The Samaritans, the ancient enemies at whose instigation the work had been stopped ten years previously, were still there, malignantly watchful, and would not hesitate to report any new activity to the king without delay. There was no change in the circumstances; no reason from the outward and material point of view why any fresh endeavour would not meet the same fate as past ones. And yet, most remarkable of happenings, the fervent preaching of these two youngsters so wrought upon the minds and hearts of the people that they forgot all their fears and apathy, regained their faith, and without so much as giving a thought to the king of Persia, rose up as one man to resume the building of their Temple. “*Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel...then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.*” (Ezra 5:1-2). That is only the bald historical note of the happening; let the books of Haggai and Zechariah tell the splendid story in their own way, how that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, and all the people, so that they came and did work in the house of the Lord (Hag. 1:14); how the Lord promised “*the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former*” (Hag. 2:9) and that wonderful award, set as a gem in this inspiring prophecy “*from the day that the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid...FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU.*” (Hag. 2:18-19). Let the splendid imagery of Zechariah’s visions illuminate those joyful days, the view of Jerusalem inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein, of the prosperity of Judah and the defeat of her enemies, and the

kingship of the Lord established over all the earth. The wonderful inspiration that we ourselves draw from this thrilling book we owe to the days when those two young men stood in the markets of Jerusalem and bade the people forget their fears, pay no heed to the mandates of the heathen king, and enter the service of the Lord God in the building of his sanctuary.

Of course, it was not long before the Samaritans were there again, taking particulars from the leaders, and sitting down to write another report to the Persian king—Darius this time—at Babylon. Note the difference in the spirit with which their questioning was met on this occasion. “*We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago...*” (Ezra 5:11) There was no fear and hesitation now; the same Zerubbabel and Joshua, the same builders and labourers, the same citizens, who ten years ago had laid down their tools at the king’s behest, now proudly declared their determination to continue. Last time they ran away from the lion; this time they faced the lion, and defied him in the strength of the Lord their God.

The sequel? Let Darius answer for himself, in his reply to the complainants “*Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree...*” (Ezra 6:7-8) and Darius went on to command that assistance be given to these Jews in their work, with materials and money, and offerings to be made to God on the king’s behalf; that any who hindered the work or violated the king’s word should himself be put to death. “*I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.*” (Ezra 6:12)

How often do we repeat to each other the old saying “Fear knocked at the door; faith opened it; *and no one was there!*” Here is an instance where that principle was put into practice and a whole people reaped the reward of faith. But there was much more involved than the building of a house of prayer for that generation. It was from this day, when the Temple began to be built, that there commenced the development of that Jewish people, with its distinctive worship, to which Jesus came nearly five centuries later. It was at this time that the Old Testament as we know it was completed, in the sayings and writings of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, to be welded into an authoritative canon of Scripture by Ezra the pious priest fifty years later. Those enthusiastic and zealous Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah, builded better than they knew when they defied the powers of this world and laid their hands to

the Lord's work. They brought the work and the story of the Old Testament to its consummation and prepared the way for the New.

*"This house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king."* (Ezra 6:15). Four short years. In that brief space of time they had built the sanctuary, erected the great altar, set the golden vessels of Solomon's Temple, brought back from Babylon, in place, and were ready to reinstate the ceremonial offerings that were commanded by Moses. It was nearly the season of the Passover. Nisan followed Adar, and from the third day of Adar there would only be some six weeks to the fourteenth day of Nisan and the celebration of Israel's most solemn feast.

Accomplishment, therefore, follows faith and zeal, never doubt and unbelief. We who have been set free from a great bondage are given the privilege of becoming Temple-builders. It is in the strength of God that we play our part in that work of building the Temple which is to be a house of prayer for all nations; as we share together in Passover let us remember that there was a time when the powers of this Age, the powers of evil, had to be defied before God's protection could be manifested and his work go forward. It may be so again. God grant that in such case we are found, not like those who weakly acquiesced in the command to stop work, but those who joyfully and zealously went forward to the execution of their Divine commission, trusting their God for defence while they laboured in the interests of his work in the earth.

AOH

### Peace like a River

In the midst of the storms through which we are passing we have peace, deep peace, too deep for any storms of earth to reach. In the world we have tribulation, but in Jesus we have peace. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." (John 14:27) Clouds overshadow us, but on every cloud we see calm sunshine resting. "O that thou hadst hearkened to my...righteousness as the waves of the sea." (Isa. 48:18). Those who hearken to the Lord, whose ears are attuned to His word will find their peace is like a river. It is not stagnant as a lake, nor tumultuous as the sea, but ever in calm motion, ever flowing on in its deep channel like a river. The course may sometimes be through rocks, sometimes through level plains, yet still it moves unhindered on. It may be night or day, it may be storm or calm, but it is there, flowing on till the embrace of the ocean receives it. Such is our peace, let us hold it fast.

*Bible Study Monthly, Dec 1945*

## TWO MEN WENT UP

*“Two men went up into the Temple to pray...”* (Luke 18:10) A story so well known that it needs no repetition. Yet how often do we stop to consider whether we ourselves are become like the man who, fasting twice in the week and giving tithes of all he possessed, found cause for glory, not in his separateness to God, but in his separateness from his fellowmen. *“I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.”* (Luke 18:11) What a miserable confession to make. In looking upon his fellows he saw nothing to emulate, no characteristics or virtues which he could desire for himself, but only the sordid evidence of evil. The reign of sin and death was a very real thing to this Pharisee; and with an exquisite nicety he carefully dissociated himself from it all and explained to the Almighty that, living perforce in an evil world and amidst sinful men, he was nevertheless, not of them nor with them, and that he at least was one to whom had come the superior inward knowledge which rendered him a fit companion for the One Who dwelt in the inner sanctuary.

We read the story, we smile pityingly at the vivid picture of this pompous Israelite, and mentally place ourselves with the publican standing afar off, as we continue our reading. But what of the lesson behind the parable? Is it not true that at times in the Christian life we find ourselves thanking God that we are not as other men. Does it not happen that this separateness to God which we call consecration can degenerate into a smug and self-satisfied separateness from the world. And worse still, at times the suggestion is made that in this latter day when the purpose of God in calling from the nations a people for his name seems to be on the brink of completion, a still more exclusive and narrow-minded outlook is called for: to wit, that our age-old mission as witnesses of Jesus and ministers one to the other must be abrogated in favour of an individual contemplation of the sacred mysteries and a refusal to extend the privilege of fellowship and the Word of Life to all but the favoured few who are accepted as being likewise the *“sealed of God.”* Alas: that the fruit of a one-time zealous response to be *“not conformed to this world”* (Rom. 12:2) should be, not a transforming by the renewing of the mind, with all the light of spiritual understanding that transformation can bring, but a gravitation to the lowest depths of bigotry, of self-delusion, of the spiritual blindness which separation from our fellows must mean when we are not separated to God.

No matter how discouraging our experiences with those to whom we bear the Word of Life—no matter how disappointing our efforts to serve and

strengthen our brethren—we must not become narrow or bigoted. We are exhorted to be sure of our foundation and to have a reason for the faith that is in us. We are expected to be rooted and grounded in the knowledge which has come our way and we are warned not to compromise our understanding of Divine Truth for the sake of outward harmony. But above all things we are impressed, time and again, with the necessity for continual progress and advancement in our personal understanding of Truth. There may be things upon which various disciples do not see eye to eye, and because of differences of thought there must upon occasion be a physical separation into groups for orderly worship and service. But that mystic common-union which binds together all who truly name the Name of Christ transcends such temporary divisions and triumphantly demonstrates the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer "*I will...that they may be one.*" Stand upon this sure foundation, and we shall have cause to rejoice, not in works of righteousness which we have done, but in that common standing in Christ which is our privilege and seal of Divine sonship.

*AOH*

## KINDNESS



Don't win the argument — win the person.

Helping others is visible love.

Kindness is the language the deaf can hear, the blind can read, and the forgotten can feel.

Few people ever get dizzy from doing too many good turns.

The more we give of kindness, the more we will receive in return;  
we'll never run out of it.

It is better to have a heart-to-heart talk, than a head-to-head talk.

The kind word that falls from your lips today may bear its fruit tomorrow.

A word spoken in kindness to a sad person is like a burst of sunshine from behind a cloud.

Loving-kindness is love translated into action.

Learn to say kind things; nobody resents them.

*Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook*



## BARNABAS

Barnabas comes into view soon after Pentecost. The newly born Christian Church was beginning to demonstrate the sincerity of its faith by practical measures for the relief of poverty and sickness in its own midst. He comes striding through the assembly of the brethren to add his offering to those already contributed to the furtherance of that work.

The senior disciples, Peter, John and James stood receiving the gifts; he walked up to them and laid down a bag of money, proceeds from the sale of land which he had owned in Jerusalem. There was a murmur of approbation from the spectators, for Barnabas was already known to them as one of the earliest converts to the faith, a man of integrity and generosity, one marked out for distinguished service in the cause of Christ. The history of later years confirmed that he was indeed a man of sterling worth.

Barnabas was not a native of Judea. He was what is called a Jew of the Dispersion, that is, a Jew born in some foreign country of Jewish parents who themselves or perhaps their ancestors had migrated from the land of Israel at some past time to make their home in foreign parts. There were many such; the strange circumstances of war and unrest had sent them into a form of exile and so then, as now, Jews were to be found in every part of the known world. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, not far from Judea but at the present time for a reason not stated he was living in Jerusalem. He had a sister, Mary, also living in Jerusalem with her young son, John Mark, who afterwards became famous as the writer of the Gospel according to Mark. As a Jew of the wider world, he was a more knowledgeable and open-hearted man than the rather parochially minded Jews of Jerusalem and this fact made him the man of the moment at a crucial point in the history of the Church.

Seven years after our Lord's death Saul of Tarsus was walking the streets of Jerusalem with a problem. Some three years earlier as a militant Pharisee intent on the persecution of the emerging Christian Church, he had experienced the vision on the Damascus road which had changed his life and made him a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ for ever. Now, for the first time since that conversion he was back in Jerusalem but the Christians would have nothing to do with him. They all knew him for what he had been, a relentless enemy of them all and they did not believe his story that he was now one of them. They suspected a trap. (Acts 9:26-27). His old colleagues among the Pharisees and priests had of course

washed their hands of him and now he was friendless and alone, uncertain what to do next. At this juncture he and Barnabas met. It is probable that they were old friends for Barnabas knew all about his experiences at Damascus and was able therefore to take him back to the brethren and vouch for his sincerity and trustworthiness. So for a short while Barnabas and Saul worked with the Jerusalem brethren in the proclamation of the Gospel. It was not long though before Saul's turbulent nature got him into trouble with the orthodox Jews. For his own safety and for theirs, the brethren shipped him off to his own native city of Tarsus, there to cool his heels awaiting some definite indication from his Master as to how his life's work was to develop.

Barnabas remained, sharing with Peter and the others in the work going on in Jerusalem, where the message of Christ was being preached mightily and finding a wide response. The Church was increasing in numbers and influence, although as yet it was not much more than a sect of Judaism. That the Gospel was intended for Gentiles as well as Jews had hardly begun to be realised until the news came that Christian churches were springing up outside Judea and that Gentiles as well as Jews were being accepted. Antioch of Syria was named as one notable example. The Church realised that authentic information about this development was necessary and a reliable man was needed to embark upon an investigating trip and come back with a full report. The man chosen was Barnabas.

*"A good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith"* is how he was described on this occasion. (Acts 11:22-24). In the upshot he is seen to have been resourceful and decisive also. He came to Antioch and threw himself into the fellowship and work of the Church there and speedily realised that a great and momentous opening for the work of the Faith was being done and needed the right man to take a lead. A lesser man might have been tempted to step into the vacant position as leader of the Church but not so Barnabas. He knew just who was the right man for this work and without delay he took a ship to cross the hundred miles of sea to Tarsus in Cilicia and sought out his old friend Saul (Acts 11:25-26).

For twelve months these two worked at Antioch building up the Church and making known the appeal of the Gospel throughout Syria. Antioch was at this time a magnificent city of half a million inhabitants, ranking politically next to Rome and Alexandria in importance. It was the official residence of the Roman governor of Syria and a busy commercial centre. It was adorned with many handsome buildings and public monuments and was in no respect inferior to Rome itself in splendour and luxury. The

growing Church therefore must have included many educated and wealthy men. Under the pastoral care of Barnabas and Saul all these, some Jews and some Greek and Roman pagans, became notable examples of the power of Christ to transform men from the power of darkness to the image of the living God.

Another deputation arrived from Jerusalem, with an intimation by the Holy Spirit, through a believer named Agabus that a time of great famine and scarcity was shortly to come upon the world (says Luke by way of comment "*which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar*" Acts 11:28, a fact testified by contemporary historians). The feeling of the Antioch Church was that in the light of this prediction they, with their wealth and resources ought to send a gift of money for the relief of the anticipated consequent suffering of the poorer Church in Jerusalem. "*Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*" (Acts 11:30). It is to be noted that at this time Barnabas is always mentioned before Saul. He was the senior partner of the two and although in later years this was to change, it is a tribute to the character and worth of Barnabas that at this earlier time he should be regarded as the leader. It seems as if the key disciple in the development of the great Church at Antioch was Barnabas.

The commission executed, the two returned to Antioch and to their pastoral duties bringing with them John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas. Mark would be twenty-two years of age at this time and apparently giving promise of becoming a useful worker for the Lord. It was evidently intended that he should play some part in the missionary outreach which was beginning to form an important part of the life and activities of the Antioch Church. It looks as if Barnabas was always looking for new promising material for the furtherance of the Gospel and now he felt he had found such in his young nephew. The later known history of Mark is evidence that his judgment was rightly founded.

The time for action came soon, perhaps not more than a year or so later. The Church now had a number of senior men, pastors and teachers well versed in the Gospel of Christ and well able to care for the flock. (Acts 13:1) Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, all are named in addition to the two original stalwarts. The Church decided, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, that two of their leaders could now be spared for an ambitious missionary trip into Roman Asia. The two selected, after much prayer and careful thought, were Barnabas and Saul, Barnabas again being alluded to as the leader. They were sent forth, together with Mark as their assistant,

with the prayers and exhortations of the home Church. With those words ringing in their ears they went down to Seleucia, the port of Antioch sixteen miles away and found a ship to take them to Cyprus, two days' sailing distant.

This is where Barnabas began, willingly, no doubt, to concede first place to Saul. It would seem that Saul was the more fluent speaker. It might be, and such evidence as there is seems to confirm the thought, that Barnabas excelled more in the field of pastoral care and exhortation than in that of public preaching of the faith. It is Saul who from now on does the speaking and the expression "Paul and Barnabas" replaces "Barnabas and Saul." At this point also Paul adopted the more familiar Roman form of his name in preference to the Hebrew "Saul." Barnabas has one more moment of precedence.

They crossed the sea again from Cyprus to Roman Asia at which point John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. The two older men continued on their way and eventually arrived at Lystra in the province of Lycaonia. It was here that Paul performed a notable miracle, the instantaneous healing of a man who had been hopelessly crippled from birth. (Acts 14:8-18). The reaction of the bystanders was unexpected. This miraculous healing caused them to jump to the conclusion that two of the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men. Paul, they reasoned, "because he was the chief speaker" (v.12) must be Hermes the messenger of the gods, whilst Barnabas could be no other than Zeus the supreme god of all (these are their Greek names; the A.V. has adopted their Latin equivalents, Mercurius and Jupiter). There is this indication that Barnabas was a tall and well-built man, for Zeus was always pictured as huge and overpowering. Without more ado the High Priest of Zeus set about acknowledging this signal honour conferred upon the city by collecting oxen and garlands and preparing to offer a sacrifice. His enthusiasm was probably considerably increased by the fact that, according to their historians, Zeus had once before, long ages previously visited the district in the guise of an old man and been treated rather unceremoniously by the citizens. Finding only one old couple who would give him hospitality, Zeus took his revenge in the fashion quite normal with the proverbially short-tempered god of Greece. The priests and people of Lystra were not going to be caught a second time, and Barnabas and Paul found to their dismay that they were being accorded full divine honours. The two missionaries hurriedly and vehemently repudiated the identification; as Jews, to be adored as gods must have sent a wave of revulsion through every fibre of their being. Before long they were on the road again to their

next stop and the brief moment of divinity was over. Eventually they completed the planned tour and returned to Antioch to report the results of their work to those who had sent them out.

There followed something like seven years of pastoral and evangelical ministry at Antioch with Barnabas and Paul the recognised leaders of the church in all its life and affairs. That phase was interrupted when a number of brethren from the Jerusalem Church arrived with the old insistence that the Gentile converts should conform to the Mosaic Law. The native Jewish converts to Christianity in Jerusalem never did fully realise that acceptance into Christ nullified all obligation to the covenant of Moses. The result of this was that Barnabas and Paul made another visit to Jerusalem to discuss and arrive at an agreement on this matter; the account of which appears in Acts 15.

Not long after that excursion Paul recommended another missionary journey to visit all the communities they had originally founded with the object of strengthening them in the faith. Barnabas willingly concurred and expected that his nephew John Mark would accompany them as he had done on the first journey. He met an unexpected objection. Paul remembered that Mark had left them halfway through the first tour and he was not willing to accept him again. Why Mark left them on that occasion is not stated and not known; it has been surmised that with the breaking out of persecution in Judea he felt he should return to be with his mother in Jerusalem. At any rate this apparently led to a strong disagreement. Barnabas insisted and Paul refused. The result was that for the first time in their long association, going back to the beginning of Paul's Christian life, they separated. Paul chose Silas, another leading figure in the Antioch Church and went off on the planned tour: now called his second missionary journey, whilst Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus where they had first planted the seed of the Word. (Acts 15:36-41). There is no record of his subsequent service, as there was with Paul by the ready pen of Luke. It is known that Barnabas went to Cyprus and that is all.

One wonders why his nephew Mark did not record the progress of that unknown missionary tour. Mark was a writer of no mean skill, as demonstrated by the Gospel that bears his name. He was only a boy of fourteen or so at the time of Jesus' life on earth but he bequeathed a vivid account of the things Jesus said and did. Why did he not do the same for his uncle? Mark himself disappeared from the Church's history for the next ten years. When he does reappear it is when Paul is in the condemned cell at Rome and Mark is one of his faithful companions. What happened

in the meantime?

The most likely hypothesis is that Barnabas was dead. He must have been about sixty years of age at the time of his separation from Paul. It is asserted by early Church historians of the first two centuries, relying upon beliefs handed down through the first six generations of Christians, that he was martyred at Salamis, the entry port of Cyprus, after he parted from Paul. The story is that while preaching in the synagogue he was set upon and murdered by Jews from Syria who resented the effect of his work in Antioch. That, if true, would at least explain why there is no further mention of him in the New Testament, and no inclusion of his name with those who send greetings or to whom greetings are sent. Paul, writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus about three years later spoke of Barnabas as though he was still alive (1 Cor. 9:6) but this could be explained by the fact that if Barnabas did meet his end in Cyprus there was no way that Paul could be apprised of the fact until he got back to Antioch later still, even if then. Only Mark was with his uncle and his absence from the history of the Church probably means that he went back to Jerusalem and only in after years became associated with the Antioch and Ephesus brethren again.

In Barnabas we are left with the picture of a generous, warm-hearted man who gave himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Christ as soon as he came into contact with it. One tradition says that he was originally one of the seventy evangelists whom Jesus sent forth to preach in the villages of Judea. (Luke 10:1). There is no New Testament evidence for this but he was certainly one of the believers immediately after Pentecost. His personality and character were that of a father in Israel, a pastor and a shepherd, able to comfort and encourage the believers in the life they should live and without doubt a tower of strength in times of stress and persecution. His real name was Joses, a Levite. Barnabas appears to be the name given him by the brethren, a name which means in Hebrew “son of exhortation” and this yields a strong clue to his character; (“consolation” in Acts 4:36 is not very accurate; the Greek word *parakleseos* means a comforting or stirring exhortation as in Heb. 12:5 and Acts 13:15). Theology as such was perhaps not his strong point, at least in the field of public oratory, which could explain why Paul superseded him in that field. As a minister and pastor in the assembly, Barnabas probably stood supreme and it may well be that to him, more than any other man, must be credited the rapid and stable growth of the Antioch Church. Of all the well-known Christian communities whose activities are recorded in the New Testament that at Antioch shows the best and happiest harmony between

Christian Jew and Christian Greek, between theology, devotional life and evangelism, between Church fellowship and missionary endeavour. The name “Christian” was first applied to believers at Antioch. (Acts 11:26) All the evidence goes to show that this was a remarkable Church founded upon a basis of sound Scriptural teaching in a spirit of mutual tolerance combined with certainty of personal conviction on matters concerning the faith. Barnabas went to his rest quietly to await his Lord. The Church he so valiantly helped to found and in whose founding he played so great a part lived on for centuries after his death, a bulwark of the Faith in a Church rapidly relapsing into formalism and unbelief.

AOH



### THREE WORDS OF COUNSEL

(1 Thess. 5:16, 17, 18)

*Be Joyful.* As later to the Philippians, so to these other Macedonians, Paul states the possibility of increasing joy, if it be centred in the Lord; “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” (Phil. 4:4). As Paul and Silas had set the example at singing songs at midnight (Acts 16:25), so now they teach their converts to learn the Nightingale’s note—“affliction with joy.”

“Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” (1 Thess. 1:6).

*Be Prayerful.* Constant intercourse with God is the next rule. “Without ceasing” (*adialeptos*) occurs four times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:9; 1 Thess. 1:3; 1 Thess. 2:13, and our verse 17) and usually in a context of prayer, usually intercession. Outside the New Testament use, it frequently qualifies military attack. The true weapons of our warfare are spiritual. Persistent prayer, like a continuous bombardment, destroys strongholds.

*Be thankful.* There is something to praise God for in every event of life, if we could only see the direction in which it is working. We cannot always see, but we can trust, because “WE KNOW.” (Rom. 8:28).

### JOURNEYING HOMEWARD

Nothing does so establish the mind amidst the rolling and turbulence of present things, as both a look above them, and a look beyond them—above them, to the steady and good Hand by which they are ruled; and beyond them, to the beautiful end to which by that Hand they will be brought.

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## PARADISE ON EARTH

### 3. Behold the King *Earth's coming glory*

Jesus told his countrymen, before his death, that they would not see him again until they were ready to cry "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" (Matt. 23:39). The world is not ready to say that yet; the many who do not believe will not have him because they do not know him; many who do believe have inherited so distorted a view from the general formal teachings of Christendom that they fear rather than joyfully anticipate the day when He fulfils his promise to "come again." The old medieval idea that He comes as a stern and wrathful Judge intent on punishing men for their sins and taking only a minority to Heaven before burning up the earth and all that is in it ought to have been banished from Christian teaching centuries ago; unhappily it persists, and its persistence creates a barrier to the full understanding of the glorious future awaiting humankind when his Return is fully revealed.

The coming of Christ is an event to be eagerly anticipated. Says the Psalmist, "*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad...let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: for He cometh...to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.*" (Psa. 96:11-13). An event which is depicted in such glowing terms can only be beneficial to those who experience it.

The general idea, inherited from the past, is that the Advent will be a sudden and unexpected event. The world will be going about its business, unsuspecting, when without warning Christ will appear in the sky with attendant angels, descending to earth, where He will immediately raise the dead from their graves and summon all, dead and living, before his throne for judgment. All this comes from the poetic imagery of the Bible, imagery which must be used in order to convey the spiritual truths involved to people of many different mental outlooks in many different generations. Now it is necessary to interpret the Scriptures in the light of our present understanding of the purposes of God and the nature of both the other world and this world.

The revelation of Christ to the world at his Second Advent is a progressive one, embracing a great many significant events, some in this world and perceived by individuals, some in the other world and therefore not perceived by individuals. This fact was understood by some Christian thinkers so far back as the second decade of the 19th century, when the



apparent imminence of the Advent began to be advocated. At a series of conferences organised by well-known British ministers and Church leaders from 1826 onward one of the theses, not universally accepted but finding definite support in many quarters, was that the Advent consists of two stages, a preliminary one in which the Lord would be present unknown to men in general for the purpose of gathering his Church to heavenly glory, followed by a second stage at which He would be revealed with his Church to the whole world. This view of the Advent, originating in England, was later taken up by some sections of the American Adventist movement and is now more fully developed. The modern view is that this unseen phase of the Advent embraces the whole of the last and this present century and that the returned Lord can be thought of as standing behind the scenes overruling and directing the course of world events so that the final disintegration of world power marking the actual end of the Age will come at the Divinely pre-ordained moment when Christ will be revealed to all in the glory of his Advent and take his place as earth's new universal ruler.

What is to be the nature of that revelation? How will men realise his coming and accept his rule when He thus appears? Is He to be manifested to the natural sight, or in the persons of some among men who are to be his representatives, or by the logic of events? We are dealing here with the impact of the spiritual world upon the material, the celestial upon the terrestrial, and so little is known about that celestial world. Modern knowledge makes it possible to think of that world and its occupants existing on a different wavelength, so to speak, so that whilst being a real world, a real environment constituting the home of real beings adapted to that environment, such beings and such environment are of necessity imperceptible to human senses. Our Lord after his resurrection did break through the barrier to manifest himself visibly to his followers, once as a gardener, again as a stranger, once to Thomas in his pre-crucifixion likeness—and yet on the other hand, to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road in an other-worldly glory so unendurable that Saul fell to the ground, temporarily blinded. It may be discreet to say that it is not possible to be dogmatic as to the means by which our Lord will be manifest to humanity at his revealing, only that it will be completely satisfactory and conclusive to the observers. It may well be that the most telling evidence will be the increasingly obvious fact that the evil and disruptive forces and institutions of the world are being progressively curbed and eliminated by a power which men can neither understand nor withstand. There will not be wanting, at any time during this transition period between this world and the next, men and women who know what these things mean, have been

expecting and awaiting them, and will proclaim their significance in no uncertain voice.

Speaking of this time, Jesus declared (Matt. 24:30) that following the “tribulation of those days” (v.29)—the catalogue of world troubles which leads up to the end of the Age, “*then shall appear*”—a word meaning to make evident, manifest, not necessarily by physical sight, literally “to bring to light”—“*the sign of the Son of Man in heaven:...and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven...*” Just what is meant by the “sign of the Son of Man” has given rise to a variety of opinions; the structure of the sentence demands that it be something in the nature of a preliminary spectacle or happening which indicates the imminence of the actual revelation of Christ to the waiting world, something which people can see or appreciate as the evidence of that which is to follow. If one tries to visualise the point in history at which this world has all but reached its end, when society as we know it is on the brink of final disruption, when the world’s politicians are on the point of giving up, then what is the outward evidence then being displayed before men that a great change is imminent? All Bible prediction in the Old Testament, as well as much Apostolic teaching in the New, conspire together to indicate the completion of a process which has an integral place in the events of the Time of the End but has not yet attained its zenith. That process is the resurgence of Israel.

Of all the strange events of the last century, the appearance and continuity of the sovereign state of Israel is the most inexplicable. Occupying a territory only the size of Wales, it has become a power to be reckoned with in the counsels of the largest nations. In a world of super-powers armed to the teeth, it is classed by the world’s strategists as the fourth strongest military power. When Britain relinquished its Mandate over Palestine in 1948, the world waited to see the handful of Israelis pushed into the sea by an overwhelming flood of Arabs. Instead, they saw ten million Arabs defeated by two million Israelis and the new State proclaimed in defiance of the whole world. No one has been able to do anything about it. Several wars have waged against these tenacious fighters and they are still there. More than two millennia ago the Lord said through the prophet Zechariah that He would make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all the world (Zech. 12:3); that prediction has come true. And the question has to be faced; what is the secret of the apparently miraculous survival of these people? What is the power that sustains them? What is to be the outcome?

The Scriptures are positive. Israel is to be a converted and holy people appointed to introduce the Divine Kingdom on earth and engage in a world-wide missionary work among all nations under the guidance and leadership of the Lord Christ and his Church from heaven. They are not, as a nation, converted and holy at present, but that will come. Their present politicians and leaders, with all their good qualities and skilled administration, are politicians of this world. Before Israel becomes the converted and holy people the Lord intends, they will need new leaders, stalwart men of God, inflexibly set for righteousness, men of vision and character, turning the nation away from its reliance upon the policies and practices of this world, taking to themselves the practices of the world to come. With such men at the helm Israel will be invincible.

Is this the “sign of the Son of Man in Heaven,” the immediate precursor of his revelation to the world, this unexpected and unexplainable phenomenon, the emergence of a righteous nation, led by righteous men, eschewing all human means of offence and defence, and relying in complete faith upon the power of God to protect and deliver them from all enemies? In the days of the Ten Plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh’s magicians were able to reproduce the first two plagues and so Pharaoh took no notice of Moses, but when Moses called down the third plague the magicians found themselves powerless. So, they said to Pharaoh “*This is the finger of God.*” (Exod. 8:19). So will it be at this end of the Age: the rulers of this world, taking “counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed (Christ)” (Psa. 2:2) will find themselves faced with a mysterious power they can neither understand nor withstand, and they will have to say to each other “*this is the finger of God.*”

For when Israel can be seen in the eyes of the world to stand in this position before God, the full end has indeed come and the Lord Christ almost immediately to be revealed. Other Scriptures indicate that this is when the institutions and powers of this world realise at last that the true threat to each is not from one another, but from Heaven’s forces of righteousness, and they will forget their internecine quarrels in the attempt to join in a common resistance to this power, the nature of which they understand so little, but sense it threatens their own selfish interests. John the Revelator saw in vision this event, under symbol of a Rider on a White Horse with his followers, the Lord Jesus Christ and the armies of heaven, coming forth to do battle with “*the kings of the earth, and their armies*” (Rev. 19:19) and overthrowing them so that his beneficent Millennial kingdom can be established. (Rev. 19:11-21) The prophet Ezekiel at a much earlier time saw the same thing as it will affect the

converted nation of Israel in their own land, with the world gathered against them, and the Lord coming to their aid and establishing them for ever as his earthly missionary nation with every opponent rendered powerless. (Ezek. 38 & 39)

All this is going to take a long time, it may be said. It is not necessarily so. The forces that are going to bring about this great change can be gathering strength behind the scenes, unsuspected and unobserved by men, to be revealed suddenly when the time is ripe. There were two notable examples in the last century. The rule of the Czars endured in Imperialist Russia for four centuries and no one in 1917 dreamed that its day was done. Rumours reached Britain that some kind of insurrection was afoot but the British Ambassador in Moscow assured his Government at home that there was nothing in it: a rising was unlikely and if there was it would be easily suppressed. The next that anybody knew was that the Czar and his family had been apprehended, the Government overthrown and scattered, and Russia was a Socialist State. For twenty years Vladimir Lenin had been sitting in the British Museum library studying and preparing the constitution of the new republic; when all was ready that republic was proclaimed and set up in power as it were in a moment. The other instance is that of the State of Israel itself. When Britain renounced the Mandate and moved out of Palestine in 1948 it was expected by the nations that the Arab world would move in and after a certain amount of resistance organise the whole area as an Arab state. Instead of that, as the Union Jack came down the Israeli flag went up and the modern State of Israel was born. A lot of preparation had been going on for a long time under cover and when the critical time had arrived the event happened.

So with this great change which is due to occur at this end of the Age. Jesus likened it to the days of Noah, people going about their normal occupations and interests, eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, heedless of the signs which indicate to the watchful that the Lord Christ is about to be revealed taking his great power and commencing his reign. And this raises the obvious question, who will be the visible leaders who will pick up the reins of government as they are relinquished by people who, however well-meaning and sincere, find themselves powerless to cope with the problem created by a world that is falling to pieces?

That there will be such men, strong and resolute, champions of righteousness and justice, is implicit in the Holy scriptures. Isaiah, the prophet, in his early vision of the dawning Millennial Age, cried out "*Out of Zion*

*shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”* (Isa. 2:3) A rather enigmatic passage in the Book of Micah tells of the Lord raising up shepherds and princes under whose leadership Israel shall become both a destructive force, evidently toward those whose instincts are to do evil, and a benevolent and life-giving force, evidently to those whose impulses and motives are good and right. Perhaps the most positive pointer to the nature of these men who will stand up to direct the policies and practices of the Millennial world is contained in the foresight of the prophet Zechariah, who, having already described the bewilderment of men faced with this phenomenon of a developing righteous nation governing itself in accordance with the laws of God, goes on to say “*the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God.*” (Zech. 12:5) Where these men come from no man will know, only that they are possessed of a strong grasp and understanding of earth’s problems, and the ability to enforce their dictates and execute their plans. When men realise that although firm, they are just, incorruptible and benevolent, there will most assuredly be a reaction in favour of the new order of things. This, however, cannot become real until these same men have led their people Israel in the supreme trial of faith when the powers of this world make their final effort to withstand the Kingdom of God.

This final effort is what the Book of Revelation calls Armageddon—a word which in popular parlance evokes feelings of dread and apprehension. In Scripture the word is associated with the events of the end of the Age, and because in popular theology that end is visualised in terms of violence and destruction, a “Last Day” in which a wrathful Christ is expected to consign trembling sinners to their doom and destroy the earth and all that is in it in a holocaust of blood and fire, the general reaction at the mention of the word is one of fear. For a word which occurs only once in the whole of the Bible it may be that its import has been exaggerated beyond its reality. Armageddon is the name given to the final battle between good and evil which brings this Age to an end and ushers in the Millennial reign of Christ. Were it a battle between two contending earthly super-powers the resulting carnage may well justify the horrific descriptions of its nature penned by some zealous Christian students, but it is not. It is a conflict between the forces of evil of this world struggling to maintain their supremacy and the heavenly forces of the coming Christ, and because these latter are heavenly forces they will accomplish their object with weapons totally dissimilar to those of earth and without the carnage. Jesus said once that He came not to destroy men’s lives but to save them, and there is no conceivable logic in supposing He can only

achieve his object of taking over the rulership of the world by wrecking the earth and destroying most of the men upon it.

There is to be a final conflict; let there be no doubt about that. The Scriptures depict it in various ways in the guise of warfare as waged in Bible times, but those are only to illustrate the principles involved. What does emerge from these pen-pictures is that at the last the converted Holy Nation in the Holy Land will take a stand for unreserved faith in the power of God and will prosper in material things on that account—Israel’s covenant with God at Sinai provided that such prosperity would always be theirs in such case and that promise still holds—and this prosperity, together with a dawning realisation that there is some mysterious power behind this people and their leaders which is inimical to the evil forces in the world, will lead the world to take action against them. “*Then shall the LORD go forth*” says Zechariah of this event “*and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle.*” (Zech. 14:3). How does He fight? Let Zechariah continue the story. (14:12-15). “*Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes (sockets), and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth...and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour; and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour...and so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents.*” One does not expect to find such assemblage of domestic animals in the accoutrements of modern warfare; neither should one expect to read verse 12 literally. Applied to the technology of modern warfare, one can see in this description the nature of the weapons of heaven. More potent by far than man’s instruments of warfare are those of God, the powers of Nature, always under his control. It only needs an unprecedented fog, spread over a vast area, enduring not for days, but weeks, and not one plane could take off, not one tank move forward, not one warship steer a course “*their eyes consumed in their sockets.*” It only needs an electro-magnetic storm of charged particles emanating from the sun, similar to everyday experience but of unprecedented intensity, to block every form of satellite and radio communication and control upon earth—as it does to a much more limited extent now—and everything has to stop; “*their tongue consumed in their mouths.*” It only needs the Lord to send snow, not just a few feet for a few days, but many feet for many weeks or months, and all the armies of men will be lost to each other and immobilised; “*their flesh consumed while they stand upon their feet.*” The whole modern paraphernalia of human warlike power rendered useless like the beasts of burden of ancient warfare described in v.15. The entire power of man trusting in material

weapons revealed impotent against the all-superior power of God, and that if God so decrees, without the loss of a single life. It would seem that something like this will be the outcome, for according to Isaiah (66:19) the very next thing to happen will be the sending of missionaries from delivered Israel to those same would-be enemies to convert them to the reverence and worship of God.

This is the beginning of the Millennium. The power of man to resist God will be broken and the fact that Jesus Christ has now the active rulership of the world will be universally recognised and accepted. Whether He in his glory will or will not be perceptible to man's literal sight will be irrelevant; his ambassadors will be in positions of administration upon earth, ruling from Jerusalem. His holy nation of Israel will be active in missionary work—and so will many Christians of all nations who have readily grasped the significance of these events. This is the point in history when it will be literally true that *“the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”* (Rev. 11:15).

AOH

*To be continued*

## CHRIST, ALL IN ALL

IN Christ all fulness dwells: from Him proceeds  
 All that fall'n man, poor, wretched, guilty, needs.  
 In Him the contrite, bruised in spirit, find  
 Whate'er can heal the sorrows of the mind—  
 Forgiving love, that saves from blank despair,  
 Rich grace, that banishes each anxious care,  
 Soft pity, that relieves the bursting sigh,  
 And truth, revealing joys that never die.  
 Thrice happy they, who to His word attend,  
 His favour seek, and on His strength depend.  
 'Tis theirs to know His heart-consoling voice,  
 To share His smile, and in His name rejoice.  
 To them, reclaimed in mercy from the fall  
 And heav'nward marching, Christ is all in all:  
 In want, their treasure—in distress, their stay—  
 In gloom, their day-spring—vigour, in decay—  
 'Mid foes, their guard—in solitude, their guest—  
 In storms, their hiding place—in toils, their rest—  
 In bonds, their freedom—their relief, in pain—  
 In life, their glory—and in all things, gain.

*Poems of Dawn*

## IN SEARCH OF A CITY

All references NASB 1995 unless otherwise stated

*“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (Hebrews 11:8,10)*

### The Call

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing;’” (Gen. 12:1-2)

In the twelfth chapter of Genesis the Bible shifts from a commentary on the history of the human race to a man called Abram. He lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldees and was the first person to be called a Hebrew in scripture. The word “Hebrew” is interesting meaning “one from beyond”, no doubt referring to the fact that he had come from beyond the river Euphrates.

Ur once was a bustling port on the Euphrates River laced with canals with merchant ships and warehouses. It was the centre of a wealthy empire that drew traders from as far away as the Mediterranean Sea, 750 miles to the west.

### Why call Abram? What made him special?

It seems that Abram’s family worshipped pagan gods like everyone else in the land of Ur, who were known for worshipping Nanna, the moon god. This is supported by Joshua saying to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.’” (Josh. 24:2-3) However, it appears that Abram, like Noah before him, was a faithful follower of the Almighty God.

No particular reason seems to be given for God to call him. In his journey he shows his human short comings, he lies about his wife twice, does not wait for God to provide the promised seed having a child with Hagar, Sarah’s handmaiden and later drives Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness. (Gen. 21:8-21)



What makes Abraham so special is God's election, God choosing on who to bestow a special grace. Grace that would not just bless Abraham but would at the right time bless the whole world through his seed. It is very difficult to understand the foreknowledge of our Heavenly Father and how He uses this to fulfil his purposes. The Apostle Paul gives the following example "And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, *the older will serve the younger*' Just as it is written, '*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated* (loved less).'" (Rom. 9:10-13)

God knew that Jacob would be far more interested in his father's inheritance, the spiritual blessing, than Esau. Esau should not be considered as evil, but he was far more interested in worldly possessions shown by his first two marriages to Hittite women, giving him access to trade with their families.

### **Abraham did not know his destination**

Another aspect of Abraham's call was that it required faith and his reliance on God to provide what He had promised. God told him to "Go forth from your country" from a city that was secure, with good prospects to make a living for Abram's family, in order to follow God's instructions into the unknown. He was just told "Go to the land I will show you." We can imagine those who knew Abram in Ur questioning his mind to uproot his family, father, servants, and his livestock to head out into the unknown. He was leaving for a land that God would show him, and this required his faith in the God, a life of depending upon God.

### **A Parallel lesson for Christians**

Our life of faith begins when we accept Christ, to solely trust in Christ's finished work. Through the acceptance of Christ, we are saved. The Jews saw their salvation as coming from obedience to the law, that is through works of the flesh. The problem was they could not keep the law as James states "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." (James 2:10) We still do good works as a result of our salvation—not for salvation. Also, as Christians following God's call, the Lord continually teaches us of our insufficiency and his sufficiency. Essentially, he teaches us how to depend on him and live the life of faith. James brings out the point "that faith without works is useless." (v.20) Earlier in the chapter James gives us an example of faith

without works. “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:15-16)

### **Abraham’s Journey**

What was the need for Abraham to start this journey from his birthplace to a land chosen by God? There are clues in the history of the human race.

- In the days of Noah evil was prevalent amongst the people. This was 1656 years after Adam was driven from the Garden “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.’” (Gen. 6:5-7) Only Noah found favour with God.
- In the days of Nimrod, the lessons of the flood had been lost and men’s hearts were once again turning against God. “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’” (Gen. 11:4) It appears that it was only 339 years before once again God had to intervene. “The LORD said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.” (Gen. 11:6-8)
- God’s decision to have Abraham to leave Ur was no doubt to protect him from the influences of the people around who were idol worshippers. Abraham’s journey was not straight forward to the promised land, he would be a sojourner and an alien in a foreign land.

### **Ur of the Chaldees**

This was the birth place of Abraham and it was from here that his father Terah took the family north to Haran “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and

settled there. The days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.” (Gen. 11:31-32) Terah and his family followed the River Euphrates upstream for about 600 kilometres [in a straight line] to the city of Haran.

### **Haran in Mesopotamia**

Haran was a large city and possibly Terah had moved there for business reasons. Some claim that he renamed the city Haran after his brother. It appears that they may have been in the city for about 5 years before Terah died; that God waited till this time as Abraham would have had to leave his father behind, and this was no longer the case. “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.’ So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” (Gen. 12:1-4)

### **Haran to Shechem**

The journey to reach Shechem was approximately 500 miles, travelling through Damascus, the city which Eliezer had come from. (Gen. 15:2) “Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land.” (Gen. 12:5-6) The last part of the verse concerning the land is interesting when considering the promise from God. “The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.” (Gen. 12:7) God did not tell Abram how he would possess the land and yet Abram built an altar to the Lord. By this solemn act of devotion Abram made an open profession of his religion, established the worship of the true God, and declared his faith in the promise.

### **Shechem to Bethel**

Abram’s journeys continue about 30 miles south towards Bethel. “Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.” (Gen.

12:8) Bethel was the first place that we are told that Abram pitched his tent indicating his intent to settle there. This is the second record of him building an altar to the LORD. The name Bethel means “house of God” and it is quite possible that it was Abram that named the place.

### **Bethel to Egypt**

Abram continued south from Bethel towards Negeb (aka Negev), that is the southern part of Judah near to the area known today in part as Gaza. No doubt in search for pasture and water for his stock. He had to continue further south as we are told “Now there was a famine in the land; so, Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.” (Gen. 12:10) It was here that Abram’s faith was tested. Sarai was very beautiful and thus desirable and Pharaoh’s officials mentioned this to Pharaoh. Sarai was taken to Pharaoh’s house. Abram was concerned that if they knew she was his wife they may have killed him and so he tried to pass her off as his sister. God struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues for taking Sarai. “Then Pharaoh called Abram and said, ‘What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?’” (Gen. 12:18) Abram was free to leave.

### **Return to Bethel**

“So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, he and his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot with him. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.” (Gen. 13:1-4) It was at Bethel that a dispute arose between Abram’s and Lot’s herdsmen over pasture rights. This resulted in Abram settling in the land of Canaan and Lot settling in the cities of the valley as far as Sodom. Lot’s choice would have consequences. “Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD.” (Gen. 13:13)

### **Bethel to Hebron**

This was about 7 miles to the northeast of Bethel. Before departing Bethel for the oaks of Mamre in Hebron Abram was given more details of God’s plan. “The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk

about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.” (Gen. 13:14-17)

### **Dan and Hobah**

The events that took place at these locations are recorded in Genesis 14. “This chapter presents Abram in the unexpected character of a warrior. The occasion was this: the king of Sodom and the kings of the adjoining cities, after having been tributaries for twelve years to the king of Elam, combined to throw off his yoke. To chastise their rebellion, as he deemed it, Chedorlaomer, with the aid of three allies, invaded the territories of the refractory princes, defeated them in a pitched battle where the nature of the ground favoured his army (‘Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country’ Gen. 14:10), and hastened in triumph on his homeward march, with a large number of captives and booty.” (JFB) “They also took Lot, Abram’s nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.” (Gen. 14:12)

It is at this time that Abram became aware of the situation as “a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.” (Gen. 14:13-14)

### **Shaveh “the King’s Valley”**

This appears to be close to Salem. It was there that Abram met Melchizedek. “Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ He gave him a tenth of all.” (Gen. 14:18-20) Abram had won the war and was thus able to take the spoils of war from the King of Sodom who offered Abram the spoils of war. Abram’s answer shows his character. “Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the LORD God Most High... that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, “I have made Abram rich.”’” (Gen. 14:22-23)

### **Hebron**

Upon Abram’s return to Hebron the Lord God makes many promises, reaffirming his promise of an heir, and speaks of the fact that his descendants will be strangers and would be enslaved and oppressed for

four hundred years. (Gen. 15:1-21) Sarai still being childless offers Hagar to bear a child. Hagar bares a son which causes troubles between the women. Hagar is driven from the camp, but the angel of the Lord tells her to return. She bore a son and called him Ishmael. (Gen. 16:1-16) This was 11 years after Abram had departed Haran.

The next event was when Abram was ninety-nine years old. His name was changed from Abram (*exalted father*) to Abraham (*father of a multitude*). “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.” (Gen. 17:5-7) It was now that the circumcision of the flesh of the foreskin was commanded. (Gen. 17:10-14)

During Abraham’s sojourn in Hebron “God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.’” (Gen. 17:15-16) Abraham’s and Sarah’s age meant that this promise seemed impossible. God stated “Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” (Gen. 18:14)

### **Gerar**

Gerar was in the land of the Philistines and Abimelech was the king. The king took Sarah because again Abraham had declared that she was his sister. (Actually, she was a half-sister. (Gen. 20:12)) God intervened in a dream to the king, stating that Sarah was married, and he would die. Abimelech answered “Lord, I am innocent! Would you destroy me and my people? Abraham himself said that she was his sister, and she said the same thing. I did this with a clear conscience, and I have done no wrong.” (Gen. 20:4-5 GNT) Sarah was returned to Abraham with Abimelech giving Sarah gifts either as an atoning gift or a testimony of her innocence in the sight of all.

### **Beersheba**

Abraham settled in Beersheba and Sarah conceived and gave birth here, to Isaac, who was circumcised on the eighth day. It was during this time that Ishmael was driven out. Sarah stated “Send this slave and her son away.

**NOTICES**

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Topics: Jonah, Nahum

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**Gone from us**

Irene Webb (West Wickham)

The son of this woman must not get any part of your wealth, which my son Isaac should inherit.” (Gen. 21:10 GNT) God made promises to Hagar “I will make a great nation out of his descendants.” (Gen. 17:20 GNT) It was here that Abraham and Abimelech made an agreement over the well and Abraham remained here for many days.

**Mount Moriah**

“Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’” (Gen. 22:1-2)

This was the most extraordinary test of Abraham’s faith and obedience in

offering his long-awaited son to the Heavenly Father. He arose early in the morning and took the three-day journey to the mountain chosen by God. Isaac asked “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (v.7) and Abraham replied, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” (v.8) The willingness of Isaac to follow the instructions cannot be overlooked; a lad of sixteen could easily overpower his ageing father. Just as Abraham was about to kill Isaac the angel of the Lord intervened “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Abraham’s faithfulness was rewarded. “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Gen. 22:16-18)

### **Hebron—The end of the Journey**

It was here that Abraham bought land so that he could bury Sarah who dies at one hundred and twenty-seven years. Although all the land he had travelled through was promised to him by God he insisted on paying for the cave of Machpelah to provide a sepulchre for his family. (Gen. 23) Abraham died at one hundred and seventy-five after one-hundred-years sojourning in the promised land and yet never receiving the promised inheritance. He was buried with Sarah.

RC



*I COUNT not his the happiest life,  
To whom the fates are kind;  
Who wins, but wins without the strife  
That tests the noble mind.*

*Poems of Dawn*

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