



AS YE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to “take stock” of where one is, from both a personal perspective and a global perspective.

From a personal perspective it is good to consider the year just past, and to recall the blessings one has received—in the very least the blessings of the physical strength and health that have enabled one to survive the last twelve months, and the spiritual faith and strength that have enabled one to continue to rejoice in the knowledge of God’s plan of salvation.

From a global perspective, reflection on the events of the past year, and their correlation with Bible prophecy, strengthens one’s faith, as Jesus told His disciples: *“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh”* (Luke 21:28). Jesus’ statement would be meaningful to them only if they observed the events He had told them about and they recognized them as being those events.

Likewise with Hebrews 10:25: the verse is meaningful only to those who are aware of world events and who recognize them as signs that “the day” is “approaching”.

However two questions arise: to which day does Hebrews 10:25 refer, and what were the Hebrews to see that would tell them the day was approaching?

The day

The Scriptures refer to several days (or periods of time), some of which are:

- The day of the Lord (Ezek. 30:3; Joel 3:14; Obadiah 1:15; Zeph. 1:14);
- The day of the Lord’s anger (Zeph. 2:3);
- The day of judgment (Matt. 10:15);
- The day of wrath (Rom. 2:5);
- The day of trouble (Psa. 50:15; Jer. 51:2; Ezek. 7:7; Nahum 1:7; Hab. 3:16);

- The day of darkness (Joel 2:2);
- The day of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7);
- The day of mourning (Zech. 12:11).

The importance of identifying which day the writer to the Hebrews had in mind is emphasized by the fact that the adjective “the” is the definite article, that is, it refers to a specific day, and hence the reference was not merely a general expression.

Periods of time

The Greek word translated “day” does not always mean a period of 24 hours, although that is its primary meaning. Dr. Strong defines “hemera” (#G2250) as meaning “tame, that is, gentle; day, that is, (literally) the time space between dawn and dark, or the whole 24 hours (but several days were usually reckoned by the Jews as inclusive of the parts of both extremes); figuratively a period (always defined more or less clearly by the context)”. It is variously translated by the English words “day”, “judgment”, “time”, “while” and “years”.

The first of Dr. Strong’s definitions of “hemera” is that it refers to the time interval between dawn and

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dark, and that is its meaning in Matthew 4:2: “*And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred*”. Jesus had fasted for 40 time periods between dawn and dark and 40 time periods between dark and dawn—40 days (of daylight) and 40 nights (of darkness).

Likewise Jonah was in the whale’s belly for 3 time periods between dawn and dark, and 3 time periods between dark and dawn: “*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly...*” (Matt. 12:40). Jonah was not ejected from the whale’s belly each night, so the term “day” applies to the period between dawn and dark only—a part of 24 hours.

Another example is in John 11:9: “*Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day?*”—12 hours is only part of 24 hours.

Whole 24 hours

The second definition of “*hemera*” given by Dr. Strong is “the whole 24 hours”. Matthew 6:34 justifies that meaning: “*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*”. The comparison in this verse is between the day when Jesus spoke and the following day, the morrow—each was a period of 24 hours.

Likewise Lazarus was in the grave for four days—four periods of 24 hours: “*Jesus said, ‘Take ye away the stone’. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, ‘Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days’*” (John 11:39).

Greater than 24 hours

Finally “*hemera*” is used to refer to a period of time greater than 24 hours: “*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king...*” (Matt. 2:1). The word “days” is from the same Greek “*hemera*” without any indication that it is plural. Herod was not king for just one day—one 24 hour period—and so in this verse “*hemera*” refers to the period of Herod’s reign—more than 24 hours.

Likewise in Luke 1:7 and 18 “*hemera*” is translated as “years”, and in Luke 23:7 and Acts 8:1 it is translated “time”, both of which refer to periods of time greater than 24 hours.

In his definition of the meaning of “*hemera*” (when it applies to periods of time greater than 24 hours), Dr. Strong puts the onus on the reader to decide for themselves the meaning of “*hemera*” (that is, the length of the day), based on the context. However there is no clue in the context of Hebrews 10:25 that gives any indication of the length of “the day”, hence it may be understood to mean any of length of time.

However, regardless of the duration of the time period ascribed to the term “day”, the events which the Hebrews were to “see” were future from when the book of Hebrews was written—but just how far into the future those events were is not clearly stated: the record simply states the day was “*approaching*”.

Approaching

The Greek word translated “approaching” is “*eggizo*” (Strong’s #G1448) which Dr. Strong defines (in its simplest sense) as “to make near”. In the King James Version it is translated by several different expressions:

- “*Sell that ye have... provide yourselves bags which wax not old... that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth*” (Luke 12:33);
- “*And saying, ‘repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’*” (Matt. 3:2);
- “*And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh*” (Luke 21:20);
- “*And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him*” (Luke 18:40);
- “*And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives...*” (Luke 19:29);
- “*Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him*” (Luke 15:1);
- “*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you...*” (James 4:8).

The above examples illustrate that the Greek word “*eggizo*” is descriptive and not definitive, that is, it does not specify how much time would elapse before the day would arrive.

The Gospel Age

The book of Hebrews was written at the beginning of the period of time commonly referred to as the Gospel Age, that title being derived from the message of the angels when Jesus was born: “*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:8-11). The news of Jesus’ birth was “*good tidings of great joy*” because it was He who would save the people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and give them the opportunity of life after death: “*... I am come that they might have life...*” (John 10:10).

And so Mark wrote: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*” (Mark 1:1). Mark goes

on to recount the circumstances of Jesus' birth and to record Jesus' early ministry: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the **gospel of the kingdom** of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God is at hand**: repent ye, and believe **the gospel**" (Mark 1:14-15).

Thus the Gospel Age was "at hand" when the book of Hebrews was written, and so the Hebrews were to be aware of it, just as Paul wrote to the Romans: "And that, **knowing the time**, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep... the night is far spent, **the day is at hand**..." (Rom. 13:11-12).

The evidences that were available to the Hebrews were different from those presented to those who were in personal contact with Jesus, as Jesus conveyed to John the Baptist: "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:2-5). Jesus declared that the miracles He performed were a sign that His day had come, and just as John the Baptist was to be aware of the significance of the events of his day, so the Hebrews were to be aware of the events that were occurring and would occur during "their time".

The day of Christ

While the miracles Jesus did were a sign that the world's redeemer had come, it was also necessary for the believers to realize it was not yet "the times of restitution of all things spoken of by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). In similar vein Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ... that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, **as that the day of Christ is at hand**. Let no man deceive you by any means: for **that day** shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (2 Thess. 2:1-7). Paul introduced them to the reality that several events were to transpire before the "**day of Christ**"; as he had previously told them.

The day of Christ

One yearning of Jesus' disciples was the restoration of Israel's glorious kingdom: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost (Spirit) is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus told His disciples that it would be some time before He would restore the kingdom to Israel—sufficient time for them to be witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth.

2013

The year 2013 A.D., as notated by the Gregorian calendar, is approximately 1950 years after the book of Hebrews was written, and there are numerous signs in the world today that indicate that the times of restitution—the day of Christ—is near.

One sign is that the Jews are being gathered into their own land: "... Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land" (Ezek. 37:21). Israel's gathering from among the heathen does not refer to their re-gathering after their bondage in Egypt, nor their captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar—both of those events were past: "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that **it shall no more be said**, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers" (Jer. 16:14-15).

There are several characteristics of Western Societies today that indicate the day of Christ is at hand: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4). To those characteristics may be added the derision of the scoffers regarding the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ—indeed, "when the Son of Man cometh will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Thus it is incumbent on all Christians in 2014 to not forsake assembling together **as they see the day approaching**, regardless of how they individually understand the words and context of Hebrews 10:25.■

THREE AMAZING PROPHECIES

The article below is published with the kind permission of Rev. Gerald Rowlands, O.A.M. the author of several books. In giving permission, Rev. Rowlands asked that the address of his internet website be published. The address is:

<http://www.israelspropheticfuture.org/>

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* * *

Zechariah 12 contains three amazing prophecies whose fulfillment is imminent, and whose fulfillment will transform the world forever. It predicts events that will happen in the Last Days, approximately 2,400 years after the prophecies were given.

The predicted time of their fulfillment, which the Bible calls “The Day of the Lord” (Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), is evident today: Israel is surrounded by would be conquerors.

The absolute accuracy of these events predicted in Psalm 83 and Zechariah 12 is vital for the validation of the accuracy of the Bible and the righteous truthfulness of God Himself. If the enemies of Israel were successful, the Bible would be seen to be inaccurate and totally unreliable.

The battle prophesied in Zechariah 12 will constitute a great overt demonstration of the power of Yahweh and that of His enemies. How amazing and challenging is the possibility that these powerful prophecies could well be fulfilled very soon in this, the generation now living. Once the predicted attack is launched, the further prophecies concerning Israel's victory and the Holy Spirit's visitation to the nation will also happen. We need to prayerfully prepare ourselves for these ultra-important events.

Prophecy Number One - The Attack On Israel

“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:2).

In the "Last Days" all the nations surrounding Israel will attack (lay siege against) Israel. The nations surrounding Israel today on all her borders are Islamic

nations with a deep, long standing, bitter hatred of Israel and a determination to conquer and subjugate it for the honour of Allah. They seriously plan to form a new international Caliphate with Jerusalem as its capital city. Their plans and preparations have been in progress for many years now. This has been true particularly since the formation of the Jewish State in 1948. Several attempts have been miraculously defeated by Israel but now, with access to many weapons of mass destruction, the Muslim nations are growing in confidence that they can finally achieve their goal of conquering the Jewish State.

The present threats of destruction are being fostered by Iran and also aided by Russia. The preparations are daily in the International news media.

Syria and events there are a vital indicator of what could easily erupt any time. When threatened attacks are launched, Israel will be forced to take strong retaliatory action which will cause a severe international reaction affecting every nation. At the time that these prophecies were given, Jerusalem was like a tiny village compared with the cities of this present day. The fact that one day this very city and the land on which it stands would become the focus of world attention seemed highly unlikely if not impossible. But in this 21st century the ears and eyes of the whole world are focussed upon this tiny strip of land. Events transpiring there threaten the destabilisation of the whole world. Most people are beginning to realise that what happens there will certainly affect every nation on earth. However, the nations do not yet realise exactly all that will happen as a result of this devastating attack.

Prophecy Number Two - Israel's Amazing Victory

“And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors (Alluphim, that is, Military Generals) of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem. The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (Zech. 12:5-9).

Although Israel has one of the smallest armies in the world, yet it has proven to be one of the most effective. However, the broad and intense ferocity of the attack from every border may prove too great for Israel to cope with alone. Basically the whole world is against Israel, blaming it for all the troubles in the Middle East. Israel will realise their desperate need for divine intervention.

In the face of such potentially powerful enemies, from a “natural” viewpoint, a huge devastation appears inevitable. Israel will be forced to call on their God Yahweh to come to their rescue. If the Muslim intention was realised and Israel was no longer the homeland of the Jewish people, the Bible would become obsolete, together with the validity of all its predictions and prophecies. If Israel could be destroyed, vast sections of the Middle East could also be destroyed during the conflict.

Zechariah predicts that the Lord Himself, through the power of “the Angel of the Lord”—the promised Messiah—will personally intervene, leading Israel to an amazing supernatural victory.

Prophecy Number Three - Outpouring of the Holy Spirit On Israel

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart...” (Zech. 12:10-12).

This part of the prophecy is possibly the hardest one to believe. It predicts that following the amazing victory that God achieves for Israel, God will pour out the Holy Spirit of grace and supplication upon the whole nation. The recipients of this outpouring will respond in repentance, recognizing their deliverer as the One who once was pierced in the city of Jerusalem. This amazing event will completely transform the nation spiritually. The transformation will not happen in one literal day, but probably over a relatively short period of time.

Of these three predictions, the first one describing the attack on Israel is the easiest one to believe. Intense preparations and bold declarations are happening right now before the eyes and ears of the world and hence the possibility of such an attack upon Israel is

highly feasible and possible. Fanatical religious fervour is obviously capable of launching this predicted attack. Weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Israel's fanatical satanically driven enemies, obviously affords great confidence that tiny Israel can finally be conquered.

The second prophecy, that Israel will achieve an amazing victory over their vicious enemies, requires a greater measure of faith. The idea of God personally intervening so powerfully in this conflict will test the faith of many. The possibility of such direct supernatural intervention into this situation will astound many people, including many Bible believing Christians. The whole world population will stand amazed to witness this overtly supernatural intervention by the God who calls himself “The Holy One of Israel.”

However it will be the fulfillment of the third prophecy that will be the most amazing of all, when the whole nation of Israel recognises their Jewish Messiah. The spiritual transformation of the whole nation is predicted in Romans 11:25-27: *“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins”.*

The Jews, as God's chosen people, have suffered so much throughout their long turbulent history but they have remained largely true to their unique ancient identity. Despite all their many trials many of them have remained faithful to the commandments that God gave them so many centuries ago.

However the suffering, discrimination and hurt they have sustained, often at the hands of so called Christians, has confirmed their reluctance to believe in Yeshua. When finally the whole nation sees and recognizes the true identity of their nation's Deliverer—as the One who saved them from total destruction—is also the very One who died in ancient Jerusalem, how glorious that recognition will be!

The big picture

Zechariah 12 must be recognized as one event in three stages. The first of these stages—the predicted attack on Israel—appears to be inevitable in the very near future. It could explode at any time. Once this happens, it will culminate with the fulfillment of the second stage, an astounding supernatural victory for Israel. We can be sure that this dramatic victory will shock the whole world, clearly revealing the reality

and omnipotence of Yahweh, the true God of the universe. Of the three stages, in one sense the most difficult to imagine or believe may be the prediction of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel and the subsequent recognition of the true identity of their deliverer. Israel will actually look upon their Messiah: *“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation”* (Isa. 25:9).

It is also interesting to read from whence the deliverer will come.

It is possible He will come out of Jerusalem as indicated in Romans 11:26: *“And so all Israel shall*

be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob”.

At this time, in response to supplications made to Him, the Messiah will *“take away all their sins”* (Rom. 11:27). The people of Israel will be transformed into a Messianic nation and together with Gentile believers will then constitute the One New Man that Paul predicted in Ephesians 2:15. This will be a remarkable proof of the validity and authenticity of the Bible and the plan of God to establish an earthly Kingdom with Yeshua HaMashiach as the King, ruling the nations from the throne of David in Jerusalem. How glorious will the world become under the righteous rule of the Messiah!■

WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”*.

The first part of the definition is that faith is the “substance”, or underlying principle, of hope. In other words, faith is dependent on hope—if one does not have any hope, one cannot have faith; there is nothing in which one can exercise faith. However the question arises: are their hopes assured or are they merely wishful thinking?

Faith is also the *“evidence of things not seen”*. “Evidence” means conviction, that is, being fully convinced that one’s hopes will be realized, even though, as yet, such events have not been seen.

Hence faith applies only if one hopes for something and is convinced their hopes will be realised.

Abraham exemplified faith on two special occasions, firstly when God told him Sarah would have a son: *“And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her”* (Gen 17:15-16). No woman had previously conceived a child when she was 90 years old, but Abraham *“staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Rom. 4:20-21).

Abraham’s faith was demonstrated again when God told him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham’s conviction

that God would honour His promise and Sarah would be *“a mother of nations”* was so strong that he reasoned God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promise: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”* (Heb. 11:17-19). In that context it is understandable why God counted Abraham’s faith for righteousness.

The Christian faith

The “Christian faith” is comprised of those same two components: for a Christian to have faith they must have a hope for things to come in the future, and not only have hope but be fully persuaded that what God has promised He will perform.

When seen in that light it is apparent that the Christian must be aware of what God has promised, and be convinced that God will fulfill His promises. However many of God’s promises are very different from what mankind has historically experienced so that many regard the promises as “pie in the sky”.

Wars to cease

One of God’s most remarkable promises is that He will *“make wars to cease”* (Psa. 46:9). And not only will He stop wars but the nations will destroy their weapons: *“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:4). When viewed in the light of history this

promise seems implausible—impossible—and so to believe the promise requires total conviction that He will bring it about.

Consistent with God stopping all war is the promise that no nation will plunder another, and specifically that the nation of Israel will not be plundered: *“And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands”* (Isa. 65:21-22). This promise is challenging because Israel has disobeyed God many times, has been captured and bound in slavery, so that many have lost faith (conviction) that God will yet establish Israel as He has promised.

Going even further, the promise is that, at some time in the future, nothing shall hurt nor destroy any other creature. So comprehensive will the implementation of that promise be that there will be complete harmony between all the animals and between mankind and all animals: *“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa. 11:6-9). In view of the “law of the jungle” that now exists, it requires great faith to believe this promise. The Christian must be convicted.

World conversion

Isaiah 11:9, just quoted above, also promises that all mankind will know the Lord, *“for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”*. That situation will be in stark contrast to the situation that prevails today when only those whom God has chosen are able to understand the mysteries of His will, *“... as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: **neither can he know them,***

because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:9-14). When one considers the diligent but largely unsuccessful efforts of so many evangelists throughout the centuries since Christianity was born, it is a test of faith that God will bring about such a universal covering of faith in the earth.

Of particular note is that all in Israel will be included—indeed, from the least to the greatest: *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jer. 31:31-34). Yes indeed, what a change: *“The earth shall be filled with a knowledge of the Lord”* (Hab. 2:14). Who can believe it?

No more sadness

Consistent with the glorious conditions that will then prevail on the earth, there will not be any sorrow, sighing, crying, sickness or death; on the contrary *“the lame man shall leap as an hart”, “the eyes of the blind shall be opened”, “the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped”* (Isa. 35:5-6); and *“death shall be swallowed up in victory”* (1 Cor. 15:54).

Prosperity

God has promised there will not be any droughts, but that *“... he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody”* (Isa. 51:3). Yes, *“the earth shall yield her increase”* (Psa. 67:6) and *“the desert shall blossom as the rose”* (Isa. 35:1). In view of the history of the climatic conditions that have existed in the earth for so many centuries, beginning in the days of Abram when drought (famine) caused him to continue to Egypt (Gen. 12:10), it is a test of faith to believe these promises will be fulfilled.

Nevertheless there is no doubt these promises will be fulfilled because God is all-powerful: nothing is too hard for Him, and *“He is faithful that promised”* (Heb. 10:23)—*“there is no variableness nor shadow of turning with Him”* (James 1:17). ■

BE THOU AN EXAMPLE

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Examples are a powerful teaching medium in all fields of learning. The ability of students to copy, create or reach a defined standard is enhanced if they can see an example of whatever it is they are trying to achieve. The principle is applicable to Christians also: they are aided and encouraged by the example of those who display the characteristics of Christian maturity. Thus Paul encouraged Timothy to display the qualities of a mature Christian, so that he could better nurture those to whom he ministered.

Paul encouraged Timothy to also *“preach the word... reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (2 Tim. 4:2). However before he could do so with authority he needed to be an example to those to whom he preached, otherwise he would be a hypocrite, as Jesus deemed the scribes and Pharisees: *“He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”* (Mark 7:6). The scribes and Pharisees did not practise what they preached and so it was essential that Timothy practise what he preached, that is, he was to be one who demonstrated his faith by his works, as James also exhorted his readers: *“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works”* (Jas. 2:18).

As well as not being a hypocrite, being an example also provided his hearers with someone whom they could imitate, and it was in that vein that Paul exhorted his readers to follow him: *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ”* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Christ our example

In exhorting the Corinthians to follow him, Paul was not setting a new standard but merely giving them a model of someone who followed the supreme example of Jesus Christ. God did not provide Christians with a book of instructions only, specifying how they should live, but He also gave them an example to follow: that of His own beloved Son, as Peter wrote: *“Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (1 Pet. 2:21).

Obedience

Obedience was the greatest example of Christ's perfect life—obedience to God, His Heavenly Father. Had He not obeyed God's will, all God's plans for salvation of the human race and the restitution of all things would have come to naught. As recorded in

John 6:38, Jesus said, *“I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me”*.

Likewise the Christian must be obedient to God's word: *“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord... If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them”* (John 13:15-17)

Jesus' learning

One might think that, being God's accomplice in the creation of the world, Jesus would know about every characteristic of the human race. However Hebrews 5:8 reads: *“Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered”*. The concept of Jesus learning obedience by the things He experienced is valid in that it was not for His sake alone, but for the benefit of His followers as Hebrews 4:14-16 explains: *“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”*. Jesus experienced all the temptations that befall the human race and consequently He is an “inspiration” to all who follow in His footsteps.

Resistance

As well as providing His followers with an example of obedience and experience, Jesus also provided an example of resistance to temptation. God saw fit to test Jesus' obedience by allowing Satan to tempt Him in the wilderness. But the tempter's efforts were to no avail—Jesus had come to do His Father's will, and all that it involved, including persecution, loneliness, weariness, enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and finally the cruel death on the cross. His resistance to the wiles of the Devil was comprehensive and victorious—and reflection upon His example should provide the Christian with renewed determination not to yield to the devil's temptations. Such resolve is particularly necessary in these last days because *“... your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8).

One tangible antidote for the devil's assaults is to realize *“that the same afflictions are accomplished in*

your brethren that are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:9). In other words the support of other brethren can assist in overcoming the assaults of the devil.

Compassion

One consequence of realizing that other brethren are experiencing the same temptations should be greater compassion for each other, as Peter exhorted: *"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous"* (1 Pet. 3:8).

Again Jesus left a perfect example of compassion for His followers to copy: *"Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother"* (Luke 7:12-15). Jesus emphasized with the grieving mother to the extent of performing a miracle.

Likewise the early church exercised the same compassion: *"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance"* (Heb. 10:34). Their compassion was not in word only but was demonstrated by self sacrifice.

Humility

Jesus also exemplified humility. Perhaps there is no greater test upon the Lord's people than the test of humility. Maybe one consideration that will aid the Christian to develop humility is to recall who Jesus was before He came to earth and the mocking and ridicule He endured during His ministry: *"Who, being in the form of God... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil. 2:6-8). There is no greater humility than for the One who was with God during the creation of the universe to come to earth and suffer despite from those whom He had created.

Forgiveness

There are many exhortations for Christians to be forgiving, and what greater example could there be than Christ's words just prior to His death, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). As Paul exhorted the Ephesians: *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* (Eph. 4:32). Indeed forgiveness is part of the prayer Jesus' taught His disciples: *"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"* (Matt. 6:12).

Surely there is no greater example for the Lord's people to follow than that of Jesus, and brethren everywhere do well to strive to emulate it just as Paul exhorted Timothy. ■

HORNETS

Arutz Sheva (www.IsraelNationalNews.com) reported on 10 April 2013 that hornets have killed dozens of people in China and injured more than 1,500 with their powerful venomous sting. The Asian giant hornet, known scientifically as *Vespa mandarinia*, carries a venom that destroys red blood cells, which can result in kidney failure and death.

Hornets are mentioned three times in Scripture:

- Exodus 23:27-28: *"I will send forth My terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you. I will send hornet ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites".*
- Deuteronomy 7:20: *"The Lord your God will also send a hornet against them, until those who are left in hiding perish before you."*
- Joshua 24:12: *"I sent a hornet ahead of you, and it drove them out before you".*

Insects generally do not discriminate between different races of humans—if they attack one they attack all—and so several Jewish Rabbis have pondered which physical criterion God used to cause the hornets to attack only Israel's enemies.

The fact that they cannot identify the physical criterion is another example of God's miraculous power and of Him using seemingly "natural forces" to accomplish His plan.

The miraculous nature of this event is emphasized by the fact that when God used the plague of locusts to "persuade" Pharaoh to release the Israelites (Exod. 10), God used the seemingly natural resource of an east wind to bring them (verse 13) and a west wind to disperse them (verse 19). However He does not seem to have used any such "natural" medium to bring the hornets. As creator of the universe God has all the "powers of nature" at His disposal. ■

THREE TEMPTATIONS

There is a sense of urgency in Jude's letter "to them that are sanctified" (verse 1): "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (verses 3-4). Jude's motivation stemmed from his awareness that "certain men crept in unawares", had perverted the gospel, and as such presented a danger to his brethren.

He also reminded them the "faith was once delivered unto the saints", which implies there were some who wished to vary the simple message, perhaps by what Peter calls "cunningly devised fables" (2 Pet. 1:16). Today additional doctrines have been added in such a way as to not be noticeable to many—hence they also are unaware—to which may be added the deceptions which Paul calls "oppositions of science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20). Such deceptions are particularly powerful at this time because "science" occupies a prominent place in Western (developed) societies, affording many benefits such as medical care, many labour saving devices and convenient means of transport.

Jude's exhortation to "earnestly contend for the faith" is particularly relevant also because science appeals to the intellect, and hence there is a temptation to regard the simple gospel as antiquated and erroneous. Hence the challenge to the Christian is to hold firm to the faith that was delivered to the saints, and to resist the attraction of the man-made doctrines as being elements of progress in the faith.

Jude stresses the importance of his message by referring to several events recorded in the Old Testament, and relating how those events should forewarn Christians of the temptations which challenge their sanctification.

The exodus

The first example Jude quotes is the loss of conviction by the nation of Israel after they were freed from Egyptian bondage: "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not" (verse 5). The loss of conviction by the Israelites was in spite of their nation having been in slavery for more than 400 years, having been required

to make bricks without straw, and their deliverance coming only after the Egyptians had been afflicted with several plagues, culminating in what, to the natural man, might have seemed highly improbable—that the blood of an animal on the door posts and lintel of their houses would protect their first born from the angel of death. Added to that was God's miraculous action in providing a way for them to cross "the sea" when they seemed to be trapped between the sea and the Egyptian army (Exod. 14). Yet it was only "the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exod. 16:2-3).

Jude's reminder of Israel's loss of faith during their exodus from Egypt was an exhortation to Jewish Christians who were living in his day, not in terms of their physical deliverance but of their deliverance from the yoke of bondage of the Law Covenant: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

His exhortation is relevant to Christians living in the 21st century because of the loss of faith arising from the seeming delay in the establishment of the kingdom, and hence the temptation to return to the flesh pots of the world. However the Christian is not to be surprised at the lack of faith: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:3-4). The situation is indeed as Jesus told His disciples: "...when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Nevertheless the Christian must not lose faith that the promises will be fulfilled: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. 2:3).

Another factor which might be exacerbating the loss of faith is the "success" of many scientific inventions, such inventions giving the impression that mankind is master of his environment. It cannot be denied that many inventions have greatly eased the blight of the

condemnation inherited from Adam—developments in the fields of medicine, transport and many labour saving devices—nevertheless the Christian’s faith must not be based in such uncertain riches: “*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God...*” (1 Tim. 6:17).

The way of Cain

Jude also reminds his readers of the way of Cain (verse 11). The lesson to be learned from Cain’s example is explained in Hebrews 11: 4 and 1 John 3:12: “*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous...*”. The preference God gave to Abel’s sacrifice led Cain to slay Abel, and John explains that the Christian must develop love to the extent that it will overcome such jealousy: “*For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous*” (1 John 3:11-12). One antidote for jealousy is to remember that it is “*God (who has) set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him*” (1 Cor. 12:18), and thus it is not for the individual to be jealous of the position to which God has appointed another: “*for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:8-10). It is not the Christian’s province to dictate to God who should have pre-eminence.

The error of Balaam

Jude also reminds his readers to be aware of the error of Balaam. The account of Balaam’s misdemeanour is recorded in Numbers chapters 22 to 24.

Firstly he was confronted with a bribe from Balak—“*rewards of divination*”—which he did not reject immediately, but “*extended hospitality*” to Balak’s messengers and invited them to stay overnight (Num. 22:7-8). It seems Balaam should have known better because when God came to Balaam He asked: “*what men are these with thee*” (Num. 22:9). It is apparent God’s question was rhetorical because God would have known who they were, and hence asking that question implies Balaam had erred.

Although it is not stated in the book of Numbers, the Apostle Peter declares that Balaam’s love of riches was a powerful factor in the temptation: “*Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who*

loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). Jude expresses this temptation as “*the error of Balaam for reward*” (Jude 11). The lesson is that Balaam should have immediately rejected the messengers’ bribe and sent them away. The lesson for the Christian is that they must not be led astray by the temptation of wealth, which is a powerful temptation in these latter days of materialism.

The second temptation presented to Balaam was a position of prominence: “*And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people*” (Num. 22:16-17).

Although Balaam refused the bribes of money and prominence, he did invite Balak’s messengers to stay another night: “*And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more*” (Num. 22:18-19). Again Balaam’s offer to provide accommodation for the messengers could be interpreted as a praiseworthy gesture, but Balaam should have recognized their source and the dangers of accommodating them. In other words, the Christian’s prayer must not be one of words only, but they must demonstrate the sincerity of their prayer: “*Lead us not into temptation...*” (Matt. 6:13).

It was not until God opened Balaam’s eyes that he realized his ass’ obstinacy was the Lord’s direction: “*Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way... and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times... And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me...*” (Num. 22:31-34). The Christian must never forget the great blessing it is for God to have opened their eyes.

It was not until the third temptation that Balaam rejected the bribe outright: “*And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness*” (Num. 24:1). May the Christian be more aware of the Lord’s leading in all the affairs of their life and respond promptly and immediately to the Lord’s leading. ■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 1)

“He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night. The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant. And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people; That they might observe his statutes, and keep his laws. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 105:37-45).

I'm beginning to feel my age a bit. I had my 110th birthday last week, and my old joints are beginning to feel the strain! I've led a pretty active life, and I've been greatly privileged to work for the good Lord since I was quite a young man, and to witness – and take some part in – many of His mighty works amongst my people. There have been good times, and there have been not-so-good times, of course. But now, I sense that He'll be coming to take me home, quite soon; and I'll be ready for Him.

I've been asked to tell you something about my life-story, and I'll do my best, though I may be a bit pushed to compress it all into a few pages! I'm not promising to cover all the details, but I think I can give you a general flavour of what I've experienced, and I hope it'll prove helpful to all you young people who read my story!

Joshua is my name, son of Nun – 'Yehoshua', really, or sometimes 'Hoshea'. The name means 'God saves', or something like that – and that's a pretty important name to carry around with you for a century and more! But there were plenty of other young 'Joshuas' and 'Hosheas' around when I was growing up, so, in order to avoid confusion, I always seemed to be known as 'Joshua, the son of Nun'.

Some of the kids liked to pretend that 'Nun' was spelled 'n-o-n-e' – that I was 'the son of none', implying that I had no parents! I guess they were trying to suggest that I was illegitimate, but I would have been much too young to have understood the implications of that! Some of the other lads liked to spell it the correct way – 'N-u-n' – but then they would tease me by saying that 'Nuns shouldn't really have children, you know!' Anyway, I used to laugh it all off; and it's all a very long time ago, now.

My Dad, Nun – he was a fine man, but he and my dear mother both died when I was quite young, and I'm afraid you won't find anything about either of them in the Books of Moses, except, of course, where Nun is mentioned as being my father!

His father – my grandfather – was called Elishama, and – if you ask me really nicely – I could quote you

the names of all my ancestors, all the way back! All Israelite children are taught to recite their family genealogies, you know. My Dad came from the tribe of Ephraim, which – along with its fraternal tribe, Manasseh – sprang from Joseph, who had been the saviour of the Children of Israel when they had been starving, during the Great Famine; I'm sure you remember the tale of how Jacob's sons travelled down to Egypt to buy grain, without realising that the important man who was selling that grain to them was actually their brother Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery so many years before! That's a wonderful story in itself; but ultimately, of course, it led to the Israelites becoming enslaved in Egypt themselves for some 400 years, until God sent Moses to us, to bring us out into freedom.

I was born while my people were still in Egypt, and after the death of my parents I was brought up by uncles and aunts – the concept of 'family' is terribly important to us Israelites! I was in my early 'twenties' when the great 'Exodus' took place.

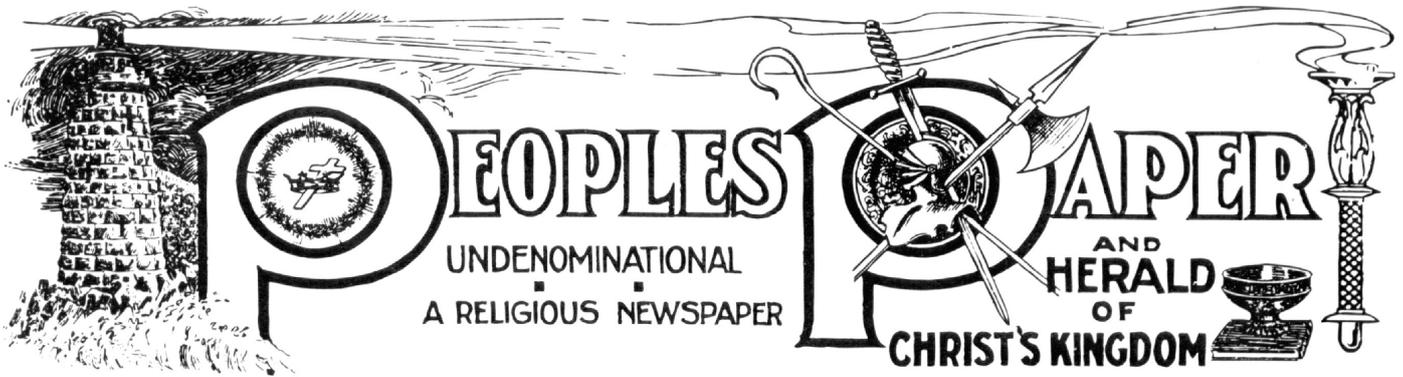
In the years leading up to it, times had been terribly hard for us. The Egyptians had embarked upon a massive building programme – temples for their gods, tombs and pyramids for their Pharaohs, plus major civil engineering projects of all sorts. They had some wonderful architects and engineers, but they wanted someone else to do all the hard work! – so we Israelites, who had entered their country as shepherds and farmers, soon found ourselves being recruited into their labour force, and terribly hard labour it proved to be. 'Make bricks without straw', they told us, at one stage – I'm sure you've heard all about that! (To be continued)■

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THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Easter is a significant time of the year for Christians. And not for Christians only: the Roman King Herod acknowledged it was a time of significance to the Jewish people: *“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church... And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people” (Acts 12:1-4).*

The Easter that Herod acknowledged was the *“days of unleavened bread”*; the days during which the Jews were not allowed, under the terms of the Law Covenant received at the time of their exodus from Egypt, to eat leavened bread: *“And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house... And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening... And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and **unleavened bread**; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it... and ye shall eat it in haste: **it is the Lord’s Passover**... And **this day shall be unto you for a memorial**; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. **Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread**; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel... And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread... by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at*

*even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel... Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations **shall ye eat unleavened bread**” (Exodus 12:1-20).*

Jesus kept the Passover

In keeping with God’s ordinance, Jesus kept the Passover, firstly with His parents (Luke 2:41-43), and later of His own accord: *“And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem... Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day... the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?” (John 2:13, 23; Matt. 26:17).* It was at that feast that Jesus introduced them to a new feast: *“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of*

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sins” (Matt. 26:26-28). Jesus related the bread of the Passover memorial feast to His body and the cup to His blood.

The Christian observance

Jesus also changed the focus of the bread and cup from a memorial of their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:24-27) to a memorial of Him: “*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: **this do in remembrance of me***” (Luke 22:19).

The Apostle Paul explains that remembering Jesus in that way is the Christian’s Passover: “... *Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Cor. 5:7-8); and hence for centuries Christians the world over have remembered Him at this season of the year.

When

However there are several opinions and practices amongst Christians regarding the details of Jesus’ request to remember Him.

Since Jesus instituted the feast to remember Him during the Passover feast, many conclude the appropriate time to remember Him in this way is at the time of the Jewish Passover feast—that is, once a year, and on precisely the same day of the year as the Jewish Passover is celebrated.

Further, some believe that, since the Passover feast was eaten after sunset, Christians should also conduct the memorial service after sunset, the precise hour varying with their location around the world.

However other Christians believe Paul’s later words give more liberty: “*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: **this do in remembrance of me.** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: **this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come***” (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The phrase “*as oft as ye drink it*” is taken to mean not necessarily annually and so they celebrate Jesus’ death more than once a year.

The Greek word from which “*as oft as*” is translated is “*hosakis*” which occurs only three times in the Bible. Hence little guidance regarding its meaning can be gleaned from other verses. Dr. Strong (#3740)

defines it as “*how many times as*”, whereas Young’s Concordance and *Vines’ Dictionary of New Testament Words* do not expand on its meaning. However perhaps some guidance regarding its meaning is given by the fact that other Greek words are used when frequent repetition is meant:

- “*polla*”: “*Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast **oft**, but thy disciples fast not?*” (Matt. 9:14—refer Luke 18:12);
- “*pollakis*”: “*Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for **ofttimes** he falleth into the fire, and **oft** into the water*” (Mat 17:15);
- “*pukna*”: “*And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast **often**, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?*” (Luke 5:33).

Consequently, although the evidence is not conclusive, there is some evidence that suggests the appropriate frequency implied by the Greek *hosakis* is less often than that which other Greek words imply, and hence the appropriate frequency of the feast to remember Jesus in this way is once every year, as was the case with the Passover memorial.

However, on the other hand, the last occurrence of “*hosakis*”, in Revelation 11:6, does not seem to restrict the frequency of the referenced action to once a year: “*These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, **as often as they will***”.

Who may celebrate

Another aspect of fulfilling Jesus’ request to remember Him is who may eat. The question was addressed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: “*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup*” (1 Cor. 11:26-28). The responsibility accrued by eating is solely that of the individual.

The responsibility

In order to appreciate the responsibility which attends partaking of the memorial emblems, it is necessary to understand the symbolism of the emblems and the meaning of eating and drinking them.

There are at least three different concepts amongst Christians of the significance of the bread and cup.

Perhaps the simplest concept is derived from Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:26: “*ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come*”. The word “*shew*” is translated

from the Greek *kataggellō* (Strong #G2605) which he defines as “to *proclaim, promulgate*”. In the King James Version it is variously translated as “declare”, “preach”, “shew”, “speak of” and “teach”. Hence Paul told the Corinthians that those who partook of the bread and wine were witnessing that they believed Jesus gave His life for the world.

Koinonia

The other two meanings that may be given to eating and drinking may be derived from 1 Corinthians 10:16 where Paul used another Greek word to convey the significance of the bread and the cup. The word is *koinōnia* which Dr. Strong (#G2842) defines as “*partnership, that is, (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction*”.

Young’s Concordance defines *koinōnia* as “using a thing as common”.

Vines’ Expository Dictionary defines *koinōnia* (in the section headed “fellowship”) as “communion”, “fellowship”, “sharing in common”; “that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution”.

In the King James Version, *koinōnia* is translated “communicate”, “communication”, “communion”, “contribution”, “distribution” and “fellowship”.

The definitions of *koinōnia* and the various English words used to translate it allow a wide range of understanding of the meaning of the word and hence of the meaning of “*the communion of the body*” in 1 Corinthians 10:16. However in essence they distil to only two meanings.

Benefactor

Perhaps the simplest meaning is that of benefactor, that is, one who benefits from the sustenance provided without making any contribution to it. In that vein the concept of communion may be interpreted to mean that all those who partake of the emblems share the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice. Three texts that support this meaning are:

- Philippians 2:1: “*If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship (koinōnia) of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies*”. All Christians are benefactors of the Holy Spirit; they do not contribute towards it;
- 2 Corinthians 13:14: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (koinōnia) of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), be with you all. Amen*”. Again all are benefactors of the Holy Spirit, that is, profit from it without adding to its substance;
- 2 Corinthians 6:14: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion (koinōnia) hath light with darkness?*”.

This argument is in the negative—in other words, light does not, indeed cannot, share any space with darkness—light destroys darkness.

Contributor

The third meaning that may be ascribed to *koinonia* is that of communion **by way of contribution**, in contrast to taking part by availing oneself of the benefits without making a contribution.

Two texts which exemplify this meaning are:

- “*Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship (koinōnia) of the ministering to the saints*” (2 Cor. 8:4). Fellowship of their ministry required them to contribute to the relationship;
- 1 John 1:7: “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship (koinōnia) one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*”—the exhortation is for each one to contribute—a two-way relationship.

Both of those verses imply that *koinomia* has a sense of contribution, and if that meaning is adopted in 1 Corinthians 10:16, it means Christians contribute to the body and blood of Christ—a concept sometimes termed the “sin offering”.

Jesus’ unique role

Any consideration of the meaning of “*communion of the body of Christ*” should take into account Jesus’ references to the relationship between Himself and mankind and His use of the picture of bread as it applies in that relationship.

John 6:32-35 reads (in part): “*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life...*” (John 6:32-35).

And John 6:41-58 which reads: “*The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven... I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso*

eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever”.

Jesus declared that He alone was the bread of life, and that He gives life to the world (the *kosmos*—the world, note not only to His followers). The question must be asked whether Paul was referring to those words of Jesus in his letter to the Corinthians.

The context

Finally a consideration of the context.

In 1 Corinthians 10:14 Paul exhorted the Corinthians to flee from idolatry, and immediately he followed that with the exhortation not to wittingly eat the sacrifices that had been offered to idols: *“Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question*

for conscience sake... If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof” (1 Cor. 10:25-28).

In the context of the chapter it seems Paul was reminding the Corinthians they could not partake of idolatrous sacrifices and also profess to be followers of Jesus, and further that Paul was diligent to ensure he did not give any reason to anyone to doubt his allegiance to God—his rebuke of Peter being evidence of that endeavour (Gal. 2:11-14).

When seen in that light, the thrust of Paul's message to the Corinthians was to remind them that they were all partakers of the same bread of heaven—all of them were to “eat” of it as Paul was eating of it, just as he exhorted them to be followers of him just as he was of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). All Christians receive their sustenance from the same source—in other words, it was (and is) a common loaf.■

NOW CONCERNING THE THINGS...

Jesus' coming to earth brought many changes for the Jewish people. Matthew 5 records Jesus explaining six of those changes to His disciples. In each case He introduced them to a higher standard than was applicable under the Law Covenant. The changes related to:

- Murder (verses 21-26);
- Adultery (verses 27-30);
- Divorce (verses 31-32);
- Swearing (that is, oaths) (verses 33-37);
- Justice and forgiveness (verses 38-42);
- Brotherly love (verses 43-48).

Consequently it is not surprising there were other changes about which the brethren were undecided, as evidenced by Paul's instructions to the Romans: *“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations”* (Rom. 14:1). Some of the issues about which the Romans were unsure were:

- what they were permitted to eat (Rom. 14:2-3);
- their attitude towards servants (verse 4);
- the day of the week when they were to worship (verses 5-6).

Consequently the general principles they were to apply were not to put a *“stumblingblock in their brother's way”* (Rom. 14:13), and to *“follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another”* (Rom. 14:19).

Hence it should not be surprising that the brethren in Corinth had several issues about which they were uncertain, and so they wrote to Paul about them. He responded: *“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me...”* (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul gave comprehensive answers to their questions as shown by verse 1 in each of the chapters 7, 8, 12 and 16:

- Chapter 7 relates to marriage;
- Chapters 8-11 relate to *“things offered to idols”*;
- Chapters 12-15 relate to spiritual gifts;
- Chapter 16 relates to collections for the saints.

When viewed in this context, idolatry takes on a wide perspective, embracing the seeking of esteem in the church, seeking material goods, and the disregard of God's order in the ecclesia.

Likewise chapters 12-15 illuminate the diversity of the body and how various members have different abilities and characteristics; the relative offices in the church; and how the truth concerning the resurrection renders null and void all speculation about other sources of spiritual insight.

Finally (and appropriately after all the previous matters), he gives instructions regarding contributions to the welfare of the saints. It is not until the previous matters are understood and applied that the matter of contributions can be properly considered.■

WITH ONE MIND

Unity of the believers was always in the forefront of the Apostle Paul's mind:

- To the Romans he wrote: "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6);
- To the Corinthians he wrote: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (1 Cor. 12:25);
- To the Galatians he wrote: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. 5:13-14);
- To the Ephesians he wrote: "I therefore... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called... Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3);
- To the Philippians he wrote: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2);
- To the Colossians he wrote: "And above all these things put on charity... And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body..." (Col. 3:14-15)

The Apostle's words were not just nice words for them to read—he also gave them detailed guidance regarding how to achieve unity amongst themselves.

Bearing infirmities

One of the first things Christians must exercise in order to promote unity amongst themselves is to bear the infirmities of the other (Rom. 15:1). The Christian is helped in this regard by remembering that all are weak in some respect, if for no other reason than everyone is of the flesh: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). And so every one will, at some point, be confronted by "the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh or the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Disunity is thwarted to a large extent when each one appreciates that each other is striving against the weaknesses of the flesh. Indeed, as Paul wrote: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

One pointed application of bearing another's burdens is accommodating their weakness in understanding. Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 8 regarding which foods the Christian may eat. He summed up his argument in verses 8-12: "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better;

neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And **through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ**". The challenge is to always do those things that will "please his neighbor to his good to edification" (Rom. 15:2). Indeed, as Paul wrote: "let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. 14:26).

Not pleasing oneself

Bearing another's burden with the objective of edifying them might require one to deny oneself—that is, not pleasing oneself (Rom. 15:1)—just as Paul taught regarding which foods one may eat.

The same principle of denying oneself applies to seeking prominence, regarding which Paul wrote: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). In this vein Paul also wrote: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3).

Likeminded

Finally it must be noted that unity of the brethren is not achieved by the actions of only some—it is incumbent on all to develop the same attitude of mind towards each other: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:5-7). In common language, unity of the brethren may be achieved only if each one realizes it is a "two-way street".

Such unity might be regarded as being beyond human capacity, especially when one considers the diverse characteristics of the believers, but that in itself is testimony that the body is not of Man's doing but the Lord's. And so the Apostle concludes: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).■

THE LAST WORD

In the ages before Jesus came to earth, God spoke to His people through the prophets, but when Jesus came to earth that was changed—“*God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds*” (Heb. 1:1-2). The implication is that Jesus’ message was superior to that of the prophets, and the principal theme of the book of Hebrews is to explain the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ pre-eminence

Jesus said: “*He who has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9), which means that Jesus, as God’s only begotten Son, is the complete embodiment and expression of God’s character, and that, in turn, is consistent with there not being anyone coming after Christ who is superior to Christ, who can supplant and more accurately express God’s nature and His plan for the world—Jesus is the “last word” concerning God’s plan for the earth and mankind; He is the pre-eminent One.

One factor which contributes to the establishment of Jesus’ superiority over all God’s creation is that He existed with God in the heavens before He came to earth: “*And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*” (John 17:5).

Another factor which established His superiority was His knowledge. At age 12 He confounded the doctors of the Law: “*And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*” (Matt. 13:54-56).

His pre-eminence was exemplified also by the miracles He performed: “*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did*” (John 2:23). They could not imagine anyone having greater powers: “*And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*” (John 7:31). However not all were convinced He was the Messiah: “*But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him*” (John 12:37).

It was not their fault that they did not recognise who He was: “*Jesus asked his disciples, saying, who do men say I am? and they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But who say you that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God! Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee but my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt.16:13-16). It was only by the grace of God that Peter believed that Jesus was the Christ.

The Holy Spirit

Jesus’ followers have been blessed with a knowledge of God’s plan ever since Jesus came to earth: “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:31-32). The medium by which they would know the truth is the Holy Spirit: “*And I will pray the Father and He give you another comforter that it may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, but the comforter, which is Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, it shall teach you all things*” (John 14:16-17). Just as it was in Jesus’ day, the Holy Spirit is the means by which Christians are able to understand “all things”.

However the Apostle John explains that the Holy Spirit was not given until Jesus “*was glorified*” (John 7:39), and the Apostle Paul explains that if Jesus had not been resurrected there would not be any hope of a future life for the world of mankind: “*And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*” (1 Cor. 15:14). Jesus was resurrected and ascended to His father in heaven (Acts 1:9-10), and consequently the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost: “*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...*” (Acts 2:1-4).

Peter explained that the giving of the Holy Spirit was testimony that God had glorified Jesus: “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know... Whom God hath raised up... This Jesus hath God raised up,*

whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:22-36).

The effect of the Holy Spirit included gifts that were attractive to the natural man—wisdom, knowledge, healing, prophecy (1 Cor. 12:1-10)—and consequently were sought by many: “And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost (Spirit) was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost (Spirit) (Acts 8:18-19). Simon’s understanding was in error because it was God’s prerogative to give the Holy Spirit to whomsoever He wished and it was not the province of any human being to buy it.

As well as the Holy Spirit, there were also spirits preaching falsehoods, and hence the need arose for the believers in Jesus to test the message they received: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Such false spirits have continued to this day, in fact they have become worse, as Paul warned Timothy: “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Tim. 3:13-14). And that is the challenge that faces Christians in 2014.

Pastors and teachers

It’s nice to have teachers whose books and magazines one can read, and which may help one to better understand the truth. Ephesians 4:11-12 makes it clear that there has always been different ministers to expound the Word: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

However no teacher must ever supplant the necessity for conviction from the Bible itself. The value of any teacher is limited to pointing one to the real source of truth—God’s Word: “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). No one obtains the truth simply because of the efforts of any man.

The example of the Bereans should encourage every individual to pursue the truth for themselves. Regarding Paul’s ministry it is recorded that “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and

searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so” (Acts 17:10-11). In spite of the fact that it was an Apostle who had preached to them they did not relax their examination of what they had been told. And the same challenge faces every Christian—regardless of the temporal status of their teacher, all must always remember it is the Lord’s Word that is the last word.

Searching out whether what one has been told is true is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed it is what the Spirit of Truth is all about; it is God exercising His power, in ways natural human beings cannot fathom, to enlighten their minds for the truth about Jesus Christ. Just as it was true of Peter that flesh and blood did not reveal it to him, so it is true of all Christians. Let no one ever think flesh and blood is the means through which anyone learns the truth. God uses teachers and instrumentalities to expound His words to those whom He has called, but ultimately it is not the expositors and it is not through them that anyone learns the truth—it is the gift of God: “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but **God gave the increase**” (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

There has been a multitude of books, literature, television presentations, internet websites, and publications that have gone throughout the world, but only a handful of people respond—only those whom God has called. Let it not be ascribed to human instrumentality that which God has accomplished through the enlightening power of His Spirit, lest that human instrumentality is accredited with an exclusivity regarding truth that prevents one from taking the journey with God’s Holy Spirit which Jesus said would guide into all truth.

The path of the just

The fact that the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost does not mean there has not been an increase in knowledge of God’s plan since that time. Jesus said: “... when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors” (Mark 13:29). The implication is that knowledge of the details of God’s kingdom would become clearer as time progressed, as Solomon also wrote: “the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18).

For those who recognise Christ as the pre-eminent source of truth—the Word of God—their journey into the mysteries of God’s plan never ends because no one has learned all mankind can from Jesus Christ. Indeed such a contention would be the Laodicean spirit: “We are rich, we are increased with goods, and have need of nothing”. ■

THE CITIES OF REFUGE

Numbers chapter 35 records God's instructions to Moses, and through him to Israel, regarding the provision of cities of refuge when Israel came into the land of Canaan, and Joshua chapters 20 and 21 record God repeating those instructions to Joshua after they entered the land. The purpose of the cities was to provide a safe haven for those who had unintentionally killed a person.

The fact that three chapters of Holy Writ are dedicated to these cities suggests there is some benefit to the Christian in being aware of them, as Paul reminded the Romans: "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...*" (Rom. 15:4). However the Scriptures do not contain explicit explanations of the benefit to be gained from a knowledge of the cities of refuge, and so research is necessary to ascertain God's purpose for the record.

Numbers 35 verses 2 - 12 reads (in part): "*Command the children of Israel that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in... And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities. So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities... And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel... And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person unawares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment*".

The Levites

The six cities of refuge were part of forty-eight cities the children of Israel gave to the Levites, and so perhaps the place to begin a search for the significance of the cities is to establish the significance of the Levites.

There are 265 references to the Levites in the Bible, only one of which is in the New Testament: "*And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?*" (John 1:19). There is little to be gained from this reference except that in Jesus' day the Levites were still identified as a group separate from both the other Israelites and the priests.

Their father Levi was Jacob's third son by his first wife Leah (Gen. 39:16-34; 35:23), so the Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 32:28).

Status

The Levites were given a unique role amongst the Israelites:

- they were not numbered with the other tribes (Num. 1:47-49);
- God selected them to replace the firstborn of Israel (Num. 3:11-13; 8:18);
- they attended the tabernacle (Num. 1:50-54);
- they were not given any inheritance in the land (Num. 18: 20-24).

In the absence of any Scriptural statements regarding the symbolism of the Levites, one can only speculate regarding any symbolic significance.

One possibility is that they picture the Gospel Age church, which symbolism is "supported" by the fact that they were separated from the rest of Israel, as is the church separate from the rest of the world of mankind: "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*" (2 Cor. 6:17).

To that argument may be added that, just as God chose the Levites to replace the firstborn of Israel, so He has chosen the church to be His firstborn: "*But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God... To the general assembly and church of the firstborn...*" (Heb. 12:22-23).

The high priest of the earthly tabernacle was the man Aaron, in contrast to Jesus who is the High Priest of "*the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man*" (Heb.8:1-2). The symbolism is strengthened by the fact that the Levites **served** the earthly tabernacle, whereas the church of God **is the spiritual temple**: "*... for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them...*" (2 Cor. 6:16).

Finally, the church does not have any inheritance in the earth just as the Levites did not receive any inheritance in the land: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope... To an inheritance incorruptible... reserved in heaven for you*" (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

However the symbolism cannot be adopted in every detail because the Levites were not tasked with serving in the tabernacle until they were 25 years of

age and they ceased active service in the tabernacle when they reached 50 years: “*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more: But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge*” (Num. 8:23-26). There is no restriction of either the minimum age or maximum age at which the “spiritual Levites” may serve the temple of the Living God.

Names of the cities

Coming now to the cities of the Levites, and particularly the cities of refuge, the first characteristic investigated in an endeavour to establish the benefit to the Christian of a knowledge of the cities of refuge was the meaning of their names:

- Hebron (Josh. 21:13)—association (Strong #H2275);
- Shechem (Josh. 21:21)—ridge (Strong #H7927);
- Gezer (Josh. 21:21; 1 Chron. 6:67)—a place in Palestine (Strong #H1507);
- Golan (Josh. 21:27)—captive (Strong #H1474);
- Kedesh (Josh. 21:32)—a sanctum (Strong #H6943);
- Ramoth (Josh. 21:38)—heights (Strong #H7216).

The meaning of each of the names can be symbolized, however in the absence of Scriptural interpretation, all such meanings are arbitrary.

One arbitrary symbolic meaning that has been ascribed to the cities of refuge is that the cities represent Jesus Christ, He being the only safe refuge for the Christian after they leave the world. Further arguments are that those who seek refuge in the city,

but leave before the high priest has died, are liable to be killed by the “avenger” (Num. 35:26-28), the “spiritual symbolism” being that they are in danger of losing their spiritual life. However such a construction must take into account that the danger ceases after the high priest died, and while some ascriptions that accommodate that provision have been formulated, they are arbitrary and without Scriptural support.

Other features of the cities which may be interpreted as having spiritual significance for the Christian are:

- there were six cities out of a total of 48 (Num. 35:6-7);
- the cities were provided by the whole nation of Israel;
- The cities were part of the cities of the Levites;
- After the death of the high priest the offender had to return to this original city (Josh. 20:6);
- the distance of the boundary from the city—2000 cubits (Num. 35:5);
- those who had sought refuge in a city had to appear before the congregation in judgment (Num. 35:12);
- That the cities were available for anyone, not just Levites or Israelites, but also to strangers (Num. 35:15);
- Refuge was available only to those who unintentionally killed another person (Josh. 20:3);
- There were 3 cities on each side of the Jordan River (Num. 35:14);

Summary

After summing up all the arguments for a symbolical meaning to be ascribed to the cities of refuge, it seems the lesson for the Christian to learn from the cities of refuge is to profit from the various features of the Old Testament arrangement without being constrained by the necessity to apply every feature to the spiritual church. ■

ALIYAH

Aruz Sheva (www.IsraelNationalNews) reported that tears flowed freely on 27 December 2013 as a group of 38 Bnei Menashe arrived in Israel after making Aliyah from India. The Bnei Menashe are descendants of the tribe of Menashe (or Manasseh), one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel which were exiled by the Assyrian empire after the death of King Solomon more than 2,700 years ago.

Shavei Israel Chairman Michael Freund, who accompanied the group of immigrants on the flight from India, called it “an historic moment”. The immigrants, who hail from the northeastern Indian

state of Mizoram, were brought to Israel by the organization, which recently received permission from the Israeli government to bring 900 Bnei Menashe to the Jewish state over the next 15 months.

“This is the beginning of Operation Menashe, the return of this Lost Tribe back to our people and our Land. The Bnei Menashe braved 27 centuries of exile, and just as the Prophets of Israel foretold, they are now coming home,” he said.

[*Aliyah* is the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael). It is also defined as “the act of going up”.] ■

THOUGH IT TARRY

“I will ... watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Habakkuk 2:1-3).

The Apostles longed for the the Kingdom of God. They had been with Jesus as He travelled through Galilee preaching: *“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).* One aspect of their hope was the blessings the kingdom would bring to Israel: *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).*

Jesus' followers were confident God would fulfil His promise of the kingdom: *“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom” (Matt. 20:20-21).*

Expectation

As well as Jesus' disciples being confident God would fulfil His promise, the people also were confident the kingdom would come soon, to the extent they thought John the Baptist might be the Messiah: *“And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15).*

The reason for their expectation that the kingdom was near is not given in the Scriptures, but it might have stemmed from Daniel's prophecy: *“And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding... I am come to shew thee... therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. **Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (Dan. 9:22-25).*** The prophecy included prosperity for Israel—that Jerusalem would be rebuilt even though it would be in difficult times.

However the people's suspicion that John the Baptist was the Messiah is evidence they overlooked Isaiah's prophecy that He would come as a child: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever...” (Isa. 9:6-7).*

However the priests and scribes were aware not only that He would come as a child, but also of Micah's prophecy regarding where the Messiah would be born: *“When Herod the king had... gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel” (Matt. 2:3-6; Micah 5:2).*

The Jews' hope that Jesus was their Messiah who would deliver them from the Roman yoke and give them temporal power and wealth is manifest by the welcome they gave Him when He entered Jerusalem: *“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord” (John 12:12-13).* However again, in accordance with God's plan, the people were unaware Jesus would first suffer the ignominy that awaited Him: *“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?... He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:1, 3-4).* It was after His suffering that He would be God's agent and bring prosperity: *“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied... for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto*

death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:11-12).

The Jew’s hope that Jesus was their Messiah was finally manifest by His two disciples after His resurrection: “*And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done*” (Luke 24:13-21).

Jesus’ second coming

A similar situation existed some 1800 years later, when some thought the time had come for the Deliverer to release mankind from the tyranny of sin and death. Students of the Bible were starting to understand the prophecies that had been hidden: “*But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased... Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end... the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the*

thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days” (Dan. 12:4-13).

In September 1822 William Miller stated “I believe that the second coming of Jesus Christ is near, even at the door, even within twenty-one years,—on or before 1843”. Later he revised the date to 1844 and when that date passed he wrote “I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door”.

There were many who were sceptical of Miller’s predictions, as He wrote: “To my astonishment, I found very few who listened with any interest. Occasionally, one would see the force of the evidence, but the great majority passed it by as an idle tale”.

Such an attitude reflects the relevance of the Apostle Peter’s warning: “*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*” (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Nelson Barber was another who predicted dates of Jesus’ return. Firstly he predicted 1873, revised it to 1874, then in 1875 declared that Christ had returned invisibly, that 1881 would see the return of the Jews to Palestine and 1914 would see the installation of God’s kingdom on earth.

The outbreak of World War in 1914 certainly gave credence that the year was a dramatic date in God’s Plan. However 2014 is 100 years later—a whole century—and mankind is still afflicted with sickness, death, hunger and war. The time has not yet come for the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy: “*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*” (Isa. 2:2-4).

There are many signs in the world today that many Bible prophecies are currently being fulfilled. However the full manifestation of Isaiah’s prophecy is not yet manifest, and so in 2014 the Christian is urged to hold fast to Habakkuk’s prophecy: “*though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*” (Habakkuk 2:1-3).■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 2)

The story so far: Joshua has described his heritage and the plight of the Israelites immediately prior to their exodus from Egypt.

Then, one day, I heard someone say, ‘Moses is back!’ Moses? – I’d heard the name mentioned, and I did vaguely remember some story about this Jewish baby who had been brought up by Pharaoh’s daughter, had tried to help his Israelite compatriots, but then had been forced to flee from Egypt under some sort of a cloud. But all that had happened some forty years before, so it seemed to me like ancient history! True, Moses’ elder brother, Aaron, he was still around – an impressive figure with a long white beard, in his mid-eighties – but I think everyone had assumed that Moses was long dead.

Anyway, next thing we knew, Moses was very much ‘around’ – eighty he may have been, but you would never have guessed it – so vigorous, so authoritative! It seems that God spoke to him, out in the Sinai Desert, where he was working as a shepherd for his Kenite father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and told him that he was to lead us all out of Egypt. Amazing!

Later, we began to hear rumours about the way in which Moses and Aaron went, time after time, to tell the Pharaoh to ‘Let my people go’, and we heard how stubborn and obstinate the Pharaoh was. We heard all about those terrible Plagues of Egypt which resulted, and we saw their effects on the Egyptians at first-hand, though – remarkably! – we weren’t affected by them at all, ourselves.

We experienced that first Passover, and we witnessed how God spared our people when he destroyed all the first-born in Egypt; then we had the unspeakable joy of leaving our long captivity, and walking out into the desert as free men and women! My family knew some of the Egyptian families quite well, and some of them brought us valuable gifts, to see us on our way. They were all much distressed by the death of the first-born in their families, of course, and we felt genuinely sorry for them; I mean – you wouldn’t wish that on anyone, would you!

It took us all day to pack and get ready for the long march ahead, but eventually word came through that we were to set out. We had no idea where we were heading, but that soon became clear – God appeared, in the form of a swirling pillar of cloud (during the daylight hours) and as a huge pillar of fire (at night). Pretty impressive, and big enough for us all to see. When the pillar moved on, we moved on; when it stopped, we made camp.

I’m sure you’ve heard about how we crossed our first barrier – The Sea of Reeds. Even at that late stage, Pharaoh had changed his mind about letting his main work-force go, so he sent his army after us – highly-trained professional soldiers, with fast chariots; they didn’t want to destroy us, of course – they just wanted to round us up and herd us back, so that we might resume our lives of slavery in Egypt.

Seeing where we were heading, they must have thought that we had – as they say – ‘painted ourselves into a corner’, with the sea in front of us and the Egyptian army behind us – and I must admit, that’s what most of us thought too, at the time! But – although the Egyptians ought to have learned their lesson by now, after all those plagues, they had reckoned without Moses, and they’d reckoned without God! Word came to us from Moses: ‘Stand firm, and you will see the deliverance that the Lord has planned for you today’.

The pillar of fire moved around behind us, and kept the Egyptians at bay, all night. On their side of the pillar, it was pitch black, but on our side it was just like daylight. Sounds impossible, doesn’t it, but – believe me! – that’s how things were! In the morning, Moses stretched out his staff over the water and it parted left and right, leaving a wide, dry pathway in between, through which we all marched over to the other side – a huge company of people, with our flocks and herds. Absolutely amazing!

As soon as we were all safely across, the pillar moved again, to our side of the water. The Egyptian charioteers saw what had been happening, spurred up their horses and charged into the dry roadway; but suddenly, it all became muddy and the wheels of their chariots began to bog down; Moses dropped the staff he had been holding out, and the waters came rushing back over the Egyptians, drowning them all instantly. Wow! (To be continued)■.

PEOPLES PAPER

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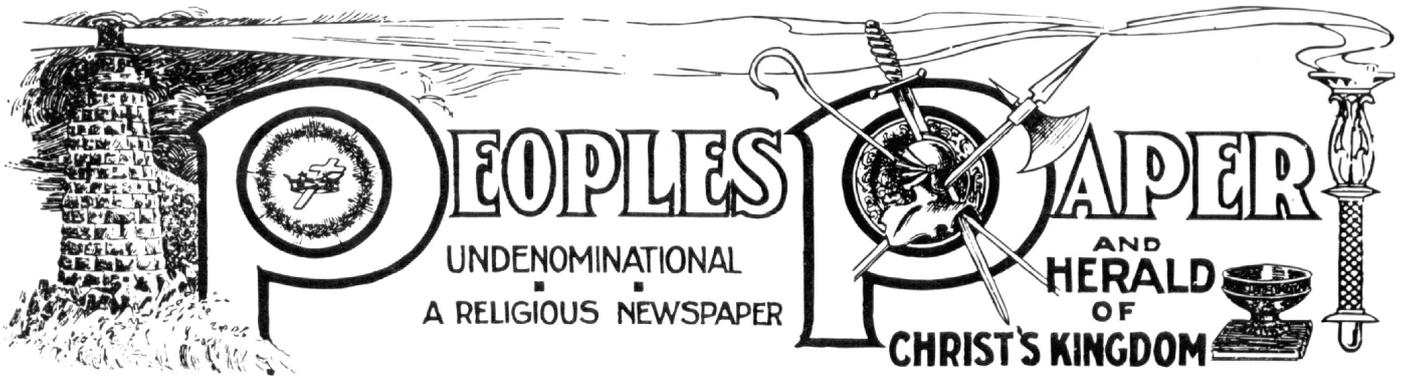
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While it is our intention that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord’s Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used, either in the correspondence or in the sermons reported



THE MITZVAH OF JEWISH SOVEREIGNTY

May 14 is the anniversary of the establishment in 1948 of the modern State of Israel.

The article below contains excerpts from articles published on May 5, 2014 by Israel National News (www.IsraelNationalNews.com) and on December 10, 2013 by “Jerusalem On Line” (<http://www.jerusalemonline.com/news>). The first article was published under the title “The Mitzvah of Jewish Sovereignty”. The basic meaning of the term “Mitzvah” is “commandment”, and hence the title “Mitzvah of Jewish Sovereignty” implies the author believes God has commanded the State of Israel to fulfill certain obligations.

The excerpts also give some insight into how Israel views its future destiny, including their leadership of the world. The emphases have been added.

* * *

One of the major reasons for the celebration of Yom Haatzmaut (Independence Day) is to rejoice in the restoration of Hebrew independence in the Land of Israel following a long and bitter exile of the majority of Jews from our soil. Yom Haatzmaut celebrates the liberation of the land of Eretz Yisrael from British rule and the re-establishment of Jewish political sovereignty over our country.

In his supplement to the Rambam’s Sefer Hamitzvot (book of commandments), the Ramban teaches that it is a Torah commandment in every generation that the Nation of Israel take control of and inhabit the entire Land of Israel.

“This (a war to liberate Eretz Yisrael) is what our Sages call milchemet mitzvah (obligatory war). In the Talmud (the “Jewish Rule Book”) Rava said, ‘Yehoshua’s (Joshua’s) war of liberation was an obligatory duty according to all opinions.’ And do not err and say that this precept is the commandment to vanquish the seven nations... this is not so. We were commanded to destroy those nations when they fought against us and had they wished to make peace we could have done so under specific conditions. Yet we cannot leave the land in their control or in the

control of any other nation in any generation... Behold, we are commanded with conquest in every generation... this is a positive commandment which applies for all time... And the proof that this is a commandment is this: ‘They were told to go up in the matter of the Spies: ‘Go up and conquer as Hashem, G-D of your fathers, has spoken to you (Hashem and G-D are Hebrew expressions for God). Do not fear and do not be discouraged.’ And it further says: ‘And when Hashem sent you from Kadesh Barnea saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you.’ And when they did not go up, the Torah says: ‘And you rebelled against the Word of G-D, and you did not listen to this command.’” (Positive Commandment 4 of the Ramban’s supplement to the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvot)

The Nation of Israel is eternally commanded to conquer and implement Jewish sovereignty over our country.

“Yom Haatzmaut is the most significant world event to take place in nearly two thousand years. It was on this day that Hashem returned the Israeli Nation to the stage of history so that we may lead mankind towards a world of total blessing. It is the goal of Creation that G-d’s Ideal be fully expressed through Israel bringing humanity to an awareness of Hashem as the timeless ultimate Reality without end that creates all, sustains all, empowers all and loves all...

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Only by establishing the Kingdom of Israel in the whole of our land can we bring mankind towards a universal blessing through illuminating the world with the light of Torah.

The modern State of Israel – the foundation of G-d's Throne in this world – **must be understood** not only as the handiwork of Hashem but also **as an early stage in the development of universal redemption** – a process that unfolds through a series of natural historic events.

While the current Jewish state has not yet reached the greatness for which it is destined, it must be recognized that the physical vessel is once again in our world and will eventually grow to reveal its exalted inner potential”.

Comment

Ascribing the words recorded in Deuteronomy 1:8—*“go in and possess the land”*—to be a commandment to them today, and to **regard not doing so as rebellion against God** (Deut. 1.26), testifies to Israel's conviction that they believe they are still God's chosen people: *“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt”* (Deut. 7:6-8).

The statement that Israel will lead the world to **“an awareness of Hashem as the timeless ultimate Reality”** asserts that eventually the nations will recognize and acknowledge Israel as God's agent, as Ezekiel 39:22-23 declares: *“So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies...”*.

The further claim of **prominence** in God's work of blessing all nations reflects Isaiah 2:2-4: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will*

walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”. Israel will be the sole distribution point of God's instruction.

Failure to acknowledge Israel's status will incur sanctions: *“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain”* (Zech. 14:16-17). The nations will be required to come to Jerusalem!

But the time has come not yet

However the time when the nations will beat their swords into plowshares has not yet come. Indeed Israel is continuing to enhance its material defences, as shown by the report below from *Jerusalem Online*.

“After dozens of years of border breaches, the last section of the border fence between Israel and the Sinai has been completed. The length of the fence is 245 kilometers long (sic), from Rafah to Eilat, and costs 1,600,000,000 NIS (500,000,000 AUD). It was one of Israel's largest projects in recent years.

After three and a half years of construction, the building of the border fence with Egypt has been completed. For two and a half years, the building of the first 230 kilometers of the fence took place. It took another year and a half to build the remaining 15 kilometers along the south-western border with Israel. The last section is characterized by deep and steep valleys, as well as hard rocks...”

“The next step is a fence on the Jordanian border”.

The fence will not prevent the firing of grad rockets from the Sinai, but it will make it very difficult to wage terrorist attacks from within Israeli territory... Part of the land border is very close to Eilat and there is a sea boundary that meets it. The border fence comes with an under-water component. The Israeli Defense Ministry is planning to build an additional sea fence and meanwhile, Israeli naval ships are dispatched to divide this section of the border.

Brigadier-General Eran Ofir worked on the fence for three years as the commander of the complex project. Now with its completion, he is not sure that this

southern fence is the last one that Israel will build and already in recent days has discussed a fence along the Jordanian border that is in the planning phases”.

Comment

The report brings into focus the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 regarding Gog of the land of Magog: “*Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land*” (Ezek. 38:10-12).

The prophecy that the villages will not have walls represents a different situation from times past and present—from time immemorial a wall has been an integral part of an Israeli city, including the cities of refuge: “*And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about*” (Num. 35:4). Likewise when the Israelis began to rebuild their cities in the days of Cyrus king of Persia, the walls were their first consideration: “*Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem... and have set up the walls thereof...*” (Ezra 4:12).

In Israel today there are only two widely known cities with walls—the old city of Jerusalem, and Bethlehem. Hence, if Ezekiel’s prophecy relates to individual cities, that part of the prophecy might well be considered to be fulfilled. However, if that is considered to be the case, where do the recently built walls on its national borders (and also those currently being planned), fit into the prophecy?

Safely

Another consideration is that, at the time of the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy, Israel will be dwelling safely without walls. The precise meaning of “*dwelling safely without walls*” is unclear: Strong’s Concordance defines “*safely*” (#983—“betach”) as “*properly a place of refuge; abstractly safety, both the fact (security) and the feeling (trust)*”. Hence the meaning of “betach” is ambivalent and has to be determined from the context of each occurrence.

Young’s Concordance defines “betach” as “*confidence, trust*”, which also may be interpreted to mean either a feeling of safety based on physical resources or trust in another power to protect them.

Leviticus 26:4-5 is one passage which implies that Israel will be living in conditions of physical “factual” safety: “*Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely (betach)*”. The meaning of “betach” in this instance is factual safety because their crops could not yield their fruitage if they were plundered.

On the other hand Judges 8:11 is a verse in which the meaning of “betach” is one of feeling and not of fact: “*And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure (betach)*”. Their feeling of safety was not based on physical safety because if it had been so Gideon would not have been able to gain access to slay them.

Hence a feeling of safety may be due to either substantial physical barricades (walls or gates), or a high level of trust in a third party who will protect them. Zechariah 2:4-5 describes such a “third party”: “*And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her*”—Jerusalem would be as a city that did not have physical walls, and would not require them because the Lord would protect her as would a physical wall of fire. Consequently the “safety” in Ezekiel 38 seems to be one of feeling rather than of fact because Israel will be dwelling without walls or gates.

Another aspect is that a feeling of safety spawns confidence, and so it may be that Israel will be living so confidently that their villages will not have physical walls or gates when Gog comes to take a spoil. Thus the Christian is exhorted to watch!■

e-PP

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HANNAH

The life story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, provides several examples of faithfulness to God that may be held up as examples for the Christian to copy. Her faithfulness did not relate to the out-working of God's plan for the nations, but rather to His care for His people—how God hears prayers.

Hannah was barren in an age in which conception was seen as a sign of God's blessing. Not long after Hannah's time, Solomon wrote: "*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth*" (Psa. 127:3-4). A lack of offspring was considered to be an indication that the Lord had withheld His blessing.

Hannah's failure to provide offspring was even more painful because her husband Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who reminded her she was barren: "*And he (Elkanah) had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children but Hannah had no children. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat*" (1 Sam. 1:3-7).

A worthy portion

Elkanah gave portions to Peninnah and her children but he gave Hannah a worthy portion. The meaning of "worthy" is somewhat unclear: Strong's Concordance defines it (#639) as "properly the nose or nostril", and hence it could mean the first (or front) portion. However, of the 276 times "*aph*" occurs it is translated "anger" 171 times; anger involves emotion, hence it may be concluded that, although she was barren, Elkanah gave her a portion because he loved her. Both meanings of "worthy" would have provided Peninnah with a reason to rail Hannah, either because she received the first portion or because she received a portion even though she was barren, whereas Peninnah's family received several portions because of their number. Whichever meaning is correct, Peninnah did not relent, but chided Hannah "year by year", to the extent that Hannah did not eat.

Elkanah's response

Elkanah did not understand the cause of Hannah's grief: "*Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?*" (1 Sam. 1:8). Although Elkanah was trying to be helpful, and his questions stemmed from his love for Hannah, his questions failed to comfort Hannah: "*And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore*" (1 Sam. 1:10).

Hannah could have been discouraged by God's apparent disregard for her prayers, compounded by her husband failing to understand her grief. However she was not discouraged; indeed her faith was strengthened such that she made a vow: "*And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head*" (1 Sam. 1:11).

Numbers 6:1-21 prescribes the details of Nazarite vows. Essentially a Nazarite vow was a declaration of separation from the world and devotion to the Lord. Some of the conditions to be observed were abstinence from wine and all fruitage of the vine; no razor may be used on the head (the hair must be allowed to grow) and a person under a vow must not go near a dead body. In essence it was a formal consecration to the Lord; an expression of complete devotion to Him.

Hannah's prayer

1 Samuel 1:12-16 records Hannah's intensity in prayer: "*And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto*".

Hannah's sincerity and devotion were manifest by her silence—her prayer was from her heart, which is in sharp contrast to the prayers of the hypocrites in Jesus' day: "*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that*

they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:5-6). Hannah’s prayer did not require audible expression, neither does the Christian’s prayer, for God “... knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psa. 44:21).

Hannah’s persistence

Hannah was persistent and completely honest in expressing her desire to have a son. She did not cease her prayers until she was certain God had heard them, the priest Eli had understood her situation, and had assured her that her prayers would be answered: “Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. (1 Sam. 1:17-18).

So here is the second mark of Hannah’s faith. The turnabout of her countenance occurred only after she was confident that God had heard her prayers.

However it must be remembered that the Christian should not expect God will necessarily answer their prayers in the way they ask—the Apostle Paul’s experience is an example: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Nevertheless the Christian can be assured that God hears their every prayer: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15). The question then for all Christians is to exercise the same kind of persistence as did Hannah, and have faith that God hears their prayers.

Peace

Once Hannah had made her vow, and been assured God heard her prayers, she was no longer sad. Having made her vow—her solemn commitment—she gained peace of mind, even before God had provided her with a son. In one sense her vow may be equated to the Christian’s consecration—it arose from her lack of fulfilment with life as she then knew it, she consciously devoted herself to God, and was prepared to endure the restrictions that applied to her conduct while under the vow. Her devotion was not an outward show of piety but her prayers were from her heart and without audible expression. She experienced peace when she was assured God had heard her prayers.

So the Christian must also be “rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12), and “be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).■

BECOMING ONE

Marriage is the ultimate expression of unity between two human beings: a man and a woman becoming one in purpose and sympathy until their objective is achieved. From a human perspective it is an amazing concept: in spite of all that his father and mother have done for him—by providing, as a minimum, sustenance and shelter—a man leaves them and cleaves to his wife and becomes one with her: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

The mystery of marriage is somewhat dispelled by the fact that it is an integral part of God’s creation: “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man

should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; **but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.** And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called

Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen 2:18-23). God made Eve because in all the brute creation there was not "*an help meet for him* (Adam)"; thus woman is the personage God provided to be man's helper and comforter.

Spiritual counterpart

The concept of marriage is a fundamental part of God's plan on the spiritual plane also, being used in the Scriptures to convey the association of the church with His Son Jesus Christ: "*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church*" (Eph. 5:29-32).

The marriage of Christ and the church is not an "after thought" on God's part—the selection of a bride for His Son was part of God's plan from before the foundation of the world, as explained by the Apostle Paul: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world...*" (Eph. 1:3-4).

Jewish marriage procedure

"*Two individuals becoming one flesh*" is a process, and was reflected to some extent in the traditional Jewish wedding procedure. There were three stages in the traditional Jewish wedding: the contract, the consummation and the celebration. The picture is not applicable in every detail but overall its components reflect the commitment required by the Christian for them to be part of Christ's bride.

The contract

In the Jewish wedding ceremony, both parties had to agree upon a binding document called the *ketubah*—they both had to be clear about and agree upon their mutual objectives and expectations. Likewise the Christian must be aware of and agree to their obligations before they enter into a contract to be Christ's bride. Thus the initial introduction to the *ketubah* may be regarded as the individual's calling—becoming familiar with the purpose of their calling, which is a process that is worked out over time.

At this stage the individuals were not necessarily aware of every experience that would be befall them in their future life, but the principles of their commitment had to be clearly understood, including there might be a price to be paid, just as Jacob "paid" Laban a total of fourteen years' labor for Rachel (Gen. 29:18-28).

The cost to the Christian might include forsaking activities previously enjoyed, which in turn might lead to the loss of previous friendships: "*Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind... That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*" (1 Peter 4:1-4). Peter simply reinforced what Jesus had said: "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*" (John 15:18-19).

The signing

When the man and woman understood their obligations they were ready for the next step: the signing of the *ketubah*. The signing signified both parties were committed to the marriage.

Regarding the bride of Christ, this step may be regarded as the Christian's consecration—the moment when they decide to commit themselves to be part of the bride of the World's Saviour. From that point on there must not be any looking back: "*And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:62).

Preparation

When the *ketubah* was signed, the groom went to prepare a home for their new life together. The groom would not return to receive his bride until this new home was finished. This gives a new depth of meaning to John 14:2, 3: "*In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*".

While the new home was being prepared, the bride would prepare herself and wait expectantly but patiently for the return of her husband-to-be, not knowing precisely when he would come. She would keep a lamp burning in her window so that, when he came, he would know she was ready. In some respects this tradition may be regarded as picturing the importance of the Lord's followers keeping their lamps "*trimmed and burning*" (Matt. 25:1-13). It may also picture the fact that the Christian does not know precisely when their bridegroom will return to

take them from their earthly home: *“Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not”* (Luke 12:40).

While waiting for her bridegroom to return the bride had to keep herself pure. In those early times virginity was of paramount importance, and Paul used this feature to exhort the Corinthians to their sole allegiance to God: *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul wanted God to see His church as pure. Every man who cherishes his bride and esteems her above all others likes to see her as pure and perfect, as expressed in Psalm 45: *“King’s daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him”* (Psa. 45:9-11).

Consummation and celebration

When the new home was ready and the bride’s preparations complete, the next stage of the Jewish wedding—the consummation—was initiated. It preceded a time of much celebration. Likewise the marriage of God’s Son with His bride will precede a time of great celebration: *“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God”* (Rev. 19:7-9).

Another aspect of the wedding is that the bride would leave her father’s house to be with her husband in a new location. In the spiritual marriage, it means the bride of Christ will leave her earthly home to be with her Husband in heaven: *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Submission

The Scriptures provide admonition for both the earthly husband and wife during their future life together, based on the relationship which the church has with her Husband: *“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves*

unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph. 5:20-30).

The husband’s headship is not a tyranny. In the original Greek, the word “submit” is translated from the Greek “*hupotasso*”, which is a compound word: “*hupo*” implies “under” and “*tasso*” means to arrange or to put in order. So the implication is to place oneself under, so that the order in God’s creation will be upheld.

The responsibility for husbands is to “*love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it*”. This love must be enduring, as exemplified in Hosea 2:19: *“And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy”*. “Steadfast love” is translated from the Hebrew “*chesed*”; it is the kind of love that will not let go, and hence defines a love that will not forsake—a constant, unwavering love, a relentless devotion to those in a covenant relationship, whether it is between God and Israel, Christ and the Church or a husband and wife.

These are precious concepts showing how Divine love will become the ultimate reality for all mankind, and are examples of the love and dedication which all followers of the Lord are to develop now: *“And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices”* (Mark 12:29-33).■

GOD'S JUDGMENTS

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17)

Perhaps two of the most basic questions human beings can ask are: where did God come from; and what is the purpose of life?

For some minds the first question begs the issue, that is, it assumes what has to be proved: that there is a Supreme Power. Those who deny the existence of a Supreme Power are titled atheists (a'-theist: no god). Such a position is attractive to those who believe their innate power is sufficient to accomplish all things. However, in spite of concerted intellectual endeavour by scientists of every faculty—physical, emotional, philosophical, spiritual, religious—no one has yet provided an unequivocal answer to the question. Indeed the Bible itself does not provide a direct answer, but starts from the basis that there is a God: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6)—belief that God exists is a prerequisite of pleasing God.

Perhaps the most persuasive argument is that of David: *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Psa. 8:3-4). Pensive consideration of the grandeur of the heavens, the relative insignificance of mankind in general and of one's own fragile frame in particular, cannot fail to instill a spirit of wonder and subordination, which leads to an acknowledgment of the existence of a Supreme Power.

One consequence of denying the existence of a Supreme Being is hopelessness; as Paul explained regarding the Gentiles: *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope, and without God in the world**"* (Eph. 2:12).

Atheism

One of the functions of a Supreme Being is to set Rules to govern its subjects, and not acknowledging the existence of a Supreme Power leads to a disregard for law and order. Such a lack of governance has applied to Israel at various times: *"Now for a long season Israel hath been **without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law**... And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were*

upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity" (2 Chron. 15:3-6).

Judgment

On the other hand, one consequence of a Supreme Power having prescribed Rules is that there will be a judgment regarding compliance with those Rules, hence the question when will mankind be judged?

The Biblical answer to that question is two-fold, and requires an understanding of God's program. John 12:47-48 reads: *"And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"* (John 12:47-48). That verse states there will be a judgment for those who did not believe what Jesus said, and that that judgment would be in *"the last day"*.

Acts 17:31 explains *"the last day"* and the judgment process: *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will **judge the world in righteousness** by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead"* (Acts 17:30-31).

However the theme text for this article (1 Peter 4:17) states that the time has come now for judgment to begin at the house of God. Thus there are two judgments to be conducted at different times—one beginning now and one to come in a future time—in *"the last day"*.

Mankind's death sentence

Romans 5:12-14 reads: *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come".* Those verses imply that there has already been a judgment passed on mankind—all have sinned (*"transgressed the law"*—1 John 3:4) and been sentenced to death, even those who have not sinned in the same way as Adam transgressed.

The verses also state that there is no sin if there is no law, which is consistent with Jesus' statement that He is not judging those who have not "heard" His words. However His word will judge them in "the last day"; at that time all will know Him: "... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). The prophet Habakkuk confirms Isaiah's prophecy: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

Jesus' coming to earth

Having reached this point, the question to be addressed now is why did Jesus' come to earth more than 2000 years ago?

Paul answered that question in his letter to Timothy: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul continues and states that Jesus' mission was to be a ransom price, to pay the price so that all mankind may be released from the condemnation inherited from Adam: "... God our Saviour... will have all men to be saved... For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:3-6). An important element in Paul's explanation is the implication that the ransom has been paid but mankind has not yet been released—the fact that the ransom has been paid will be testified (that is, shown to be true) in due time, and that will be in the time explained by John: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). Thus the fact that Jesus has paid the ransom price will be testified as prophesied by Hosea many centuries ago: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death..." (Hosea 13:14)

The Apostle Paul explained to the Thessalonians that all this will happen when Jesus comes to earth again: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).

The church's judgment

However 1 Peter 4:7 states that the judgment of the "house of God" began in his day, and so the question may be asked for how long will their judgment last? The answer is that it will continue until the church is complete—until all those whom God has called to be members of the bride of Christ have successfully completed their course, the Apostle Paul being one of the first: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good

fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

A further aspect of the church's judgment is the manner in which it is being conducted. A judgment involves more than just the pronouncement of a verdict: there's a long process—due process—to bring in or gather evidence to determine the character of what has happened. The Christian's trial continues throughout their life as Peter explains: "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7). The Christian's trial is a trial of faith, that is, a trial of "patient continuance in well doing" (Rom. 2:7) which must be practised until their life's end if they are to gain the prize for which they have been called: "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). Hence the Christian should "... think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you" (1 Pet. 4:12), because Jesus told His disciples: "... ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved... The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord" (Matt. 10:22-24). The ultimate goal is given by John in Revelation 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life".

Rewards

God's standard for judging Christians is the development of love—love for Him and love for others, including their opponents. Jesus said: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

Trial and testing are part of that judgment, but their purpose is also to develop character. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the experiences that befall the Christian, but God knows what is best for them. God puts them in circumstances that develop their weaknesses—Job 23:8 reads: "Behold, I go forward but he is not there; backward but I cannot perceive him; when he acts on the left I cannot behold him; he turns on the right, I cannot see him. He knows the way I take, and when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold". God's oversight everyday of the Christian's path is how He directs them even though they may not understand. In the end they will see Him, and rejoice in the their glorious reward—a reward that will never pass away .■

THE BLESSING OF ALL NATIONS

“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 26:4).

God’s promise to Abraham, that it would be through his seed that all the families of the earth would be blessed, is a centre-piece of the Christian faith. It is the hope of a better time for the whole world of mankind that makes the Christian faith reasonable and sensible. If the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice were limited to those who profess to be Christian, in 2014 only about one third of the world’s population of 6,900,000,000 would benefit.

However, to make God’s promise to Abraham meaningful, several aspects of the promise require clarification (definition). Some are:

- identification of the “seed”;
- the nature of the blessing;
- who is included in “all nations”; and
- when they will be blessed.

The concept ascribed to any one of the above aspects directly affects the concepts that may be logically ascribed to the other aspects. For example, if the blessing is understood to be restitution to conditions such as existed in the Garden of Eden, the time of the blessing has not yet come, which in turn poses the question who or what constitutes the “seed”? On the other hand, if the seed is deemed to be Jesus Christ, the blessing may be some other facet of God’s plan, such as life in heaven. Consequently the meaning ascribed to any one facet of the promise is critical in understanding the other aspects.

In that light the first issue addressed in this article is who or what is the agent through whom the nations will be blessed. However it is acknowledged that adopting that starting point might lead to prejudiced conclusions regarding the other aspects of the promise. Diligent study is required.

Through Abraham

There are at least three possibilities regarding through whom the blessings will flow.

In the King James Version, Genesis 28:14 reads: *“And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: **and in thee** and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed”*. The words *“in thee”* imply the blessing will come, at least in part, through Abraham himself.

However it seems likely the expression *“in thee”* is supplied by the translators, because the words are not

referenced in either Strong’s Concordance or Young’s Concordance. It has not been possible to establish whether they are implied by the idiom of the Hebrew language, but the fact that they are included in the Revised Version and the New International Version adds weight to that understanding.

Following that line of reasoning, the next question may be what blessing will Abraham personally impart? One verse of Scripture that may be considered to describe a blessing imparted directly by Abraham is Matthew 8:11: *“And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven”*. In one sense it will be a blessing to sit down with Abraham in person, however whether that will be a fulfillment of the promise that the blessing will be to all nations depends on who is considered to come from the east and the west, and whether that privilege comprises the blessing.

The only nation named in the Scriptures as coming from the east and west is the re-gathered Israelites, prophesied in Isaiah 43:5 and Zechariah 8:7-8: *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness”* (Zech. 8:7-8). Consequently, it might be difficult to accept that Abraham personally will be an agent through whom the promise *“to all nations”* will be fulfilled, even in part.

The nation of Israel

Referring back to Genesis 28:14, Abraham’s seed is described in terms that may be applied to the nation of Israel—*“thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth”*, and Isaiah 41:8-9 supports that understanding: *“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, **the seed of Abraham** my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away”*. Verse 9 refers to events after Abraham’s day, and therefore applies to the **nation** of Israel and not just to the individual named Jacob (Israel).

That the nation of Israel will be a channel through which the other nations of the earth will be blessed is well supported in Scripture: Zechariah 8:20-23 reads:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you”. The nations coming to Jerusalem to learn of the Lord’s ways means the nation of Israel will be a channel through which the Lord’s blessings will flow.

That Israel will be an instrument which God will use to bless all the nations is exemplified by Israel being a link between Egypt and Assyria (Mesopotamia, or Iraq): *“In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance”* (Isa. 19:23-25). Israel will have a pivotal role in the blessing of those nations.

When the blessings will flow

If the seed is the nation of Israel it seems reasonable to conclude the blessings would not, indeed could not, flow until the nation of Israel is sufficiently established to enable the blessing to flow through them. And that proposition calls into question the status of the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel already is a world leader in several fields of scientific endeavour—more than 80 nations went to Israel in November 2011 to learn about water conservation and usage techniques, which means that, in some respects at least, Israel could already be deemed to be sufficiently well established for God to distribute blessings through them. That is not to say technology is the nature of the blessing the Lord is going to shower upon the nations, but merely that Israel is already sufficiently established for the Lord to use it should the other factors be in place. And there are other factors.

One of the other factors might be the heart condition of the nations, which in turn calls up the demise of the present political and social orders. Ezekiel 38 is a chapter which contains several details regarding the demise of Gog, two of which are:

- verses 5-6 which list several other nations who will come with Gog, which may indicate there will be an alliance of those nations; an alliance that might take

some time to formalize, and so the time has not yet come for the nations to be blessed;

- as mentioned earlier in this issue, verse 11 states that Israel will be dwelling safely without walls, again indicating that the time of blessing is still future.

Thus if the nation of Israel is the seed to which the prophecy refers, there are some developments yet to occur before the prophecy will be fulfilled, and hence the prophecy refers to a time future from 2014.

Christ as the seed

Another plausible understanding of the seed is that it is Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:14-16 reads: *“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith... Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ”.*

As well as identifying the seed as Christ, in those verses Paul states that the blessing will *“come on the Gentiles”* and that the blessing is *“the promise of the Spirit”*. Paul’s explanation confirms that one aspect of the blessing is the giving of the Holy Spirit, and that the expression *“all nations”* means the Gentiles.

The blessing of faith

Paul’s line of reasoning is consistent—in verses 8-9 he explained: *“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then **they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham**”.* Thus those to whom God has given His Holy Spirit **are blessed in the current time**. Such an assertion is in accord with Jesus’ words: *“But **blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear**”* (Matt. 13:16).

Understanding (believing; having faith) that Jesus is the Messiah, and understanding how God is working out His plan through Him is indeed a blessing: *“But God... for his great love wherewith he loved us... hath raised us up together... That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God...”* (Eph. 2:4-10).

Summary

Thus there are various justifiable interpretations of the promise to Abraham, but all of them are made possible because of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ: *“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ... was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us”* (2 Cor. 1:19-20).■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 3)

The story so far: The Israelites have left Egypt and crossed the Sea of Reeds.

Miriam, the elder sister of Moses and Aaron, led the Israelites in a wonderful song of triumph; although she was aged about 90 at the time, she led the dancing, too, and there was a great celebration.

I said earlier that when we set out, we had no idea where we were headed, but we soon learned from Moses that we did have an ultimate goal, which was to reach what he called ‘The Promised Land’: the Land of Canaan, which had been promised to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so long before – a land which God had said would be ‘flowing with milk and honey’. It was an exciting prospect!

Now, had we taken the quickest route north, following the old coast road which hugs the Mediterranean coast (known as ‘The Way of the Philistines’, or ‘The Way of the Sea’), we could, in theory at least, have reached the Promised Land in a week or two. There were a couple of other good north-easterly routes we could have used too, but Moses knew very well that Egyptian military patrols would be using those roads all the time, and we would have been just walking into trouble.

So, when we set out from the far side of The Sea of Reeds on the next stage of our journey, we found ourselves heading in a south-easterly direction, using the far less frequented path which led towards Mount Sinai, through difficult desert terrain – a route used mainly by shepherds with their flocks, by a few merchants heading towards Midian and by the camel trains which traveled to and from the ancient marble quarries and copper-mines, of which there are several in the Sinai area.

We may have got away from the Egyptian army, but we weren’t out of trouble yet, by a very long chalk! The first problem about moving a very large number of people through the desert, together with all their flocks and herds, is always going to be finding enough fresh water for them. But of course Moses was a vastly experienced desert traveler – after all, he’d spent forty years moving around the Sinai Desert, shepherding Jethro’s flocks, so he knew better than any of us where the best oases could be found; even so sometimes those oases were simply too far apart, and that’s when the trouble would start.

The first leg of our journey took us through what’s called ‘The Desert of Shur’ with not an oasis in sight. Each family carried its own supply of water, of course, in skin bags, but after a few days, we needed

to find somewhere to re-fill them, and somewhere for the animals to drink.

Three days on, we came across an oasis, but the water there proved to be bitter – people called it ‘Marah’, which means just that! – and there was a lot of grumbling. They aimed their spite mainly at Moses, but he took their complaints straight to God, who showed him a special piece of wood; Moses threw it into the water, which immediately became sweet to drink. Quite remarkable!

Next stop: Elim, a really beautiful oasis, near the Red Sea, with twelve separate pools of fresh water and seventy big palm-trees; we camped nearby, and for once there was general satisfaction in the camp.

We moved on from there, some six weeks after we had left Egypt, but now things got really tough. No water in sight, and precious little food, either – just miles of barren desert. Once again, there was grumbling, still mainly aimed against Moses and Aaron. People were saying to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There, we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert, in order to starve this entire assembly to death”.

Now it is perfectly true that – although the Egyptians used us as slave-labour – the Land of Goshen, where we had all lived, was one of the most beautiful and fertile parts of the Nile Delta, so we had never been short of food or fresh water, and there had been plenty of rich pasture for our flocks and herds.

But now, there was absolutely no need for the people to be grumbling so much at Moses and Aaron, who I felt were doing a great job for us all, under very difficult circumstances. I said as much, and I heard later that what I had been saying did in fact reach the ears of Moses.

(To be continued)■

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WHO MAKETH THEE TO DIFFER?

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

Conflict has assaulted mankind since the very early days of human history. Indeed it was the eldest son—Cain—of the first human parents—Adam and Eve—who committed the first murder when he killed his younger brother Abel (Gen. 4:8).

Actions to harm another spread from that time until, in the days of Noah, “... *the earth was filled with violence*” (Gen. 6:11).

The violence soon developed into warfare: “*And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar... Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan... And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar. And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim...*” (Gen 14:1-8).

The brute creation

Conflict is not limited to the human species but assaults the brute creation also: one animal species devouring another is regarded as being a natural part of the “food chain”. For example, lions are regarded as the king of the jungle because they devour several other species of land animals.

Also mankind is in conflict with many animal species, eating them for food or classifying them

either as vermin or pests and consequentially taking measures to exterminate them.

Sacrifices

Another aspect of the conflict between the brute kingdom and human beings is that God has required mankind to kill animals as a sacrifice to honour Him. Although the text in Genesis 4:4 does not detail what Abel intended to do to the firstlings of his flock (*and the fat thereof*) in order to sacrifice them to the Lord, subsequent practices have led to the assumption that he was going to kill the lamb.

The situation is clearer regarding Noah—he killed the animals and offered them as a burnt offering on the altar: “*And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar*” (Gen. 8:18-20).

The kingdom arrangement

Thus the stark contrast between the situation that exists today and the arrangement that will prevail in

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God's kingdom—the new heavens and new earth—is brought into sharp focus as recorded in several prophecies in the Old Testament: *“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:4); *“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD”* (Isa. 65:25). Both of these prophecies tell of a time when there will not be animosity of any kind: not between the nations of human beings, not amongst the brute creation, and not between man and beast.

The present day

Thus the prophecy is that the situation in the new earth will be vastly different from the situation that exists today. In spite of concerted efforts by the nations, particularly since World War 2, to promote peace through such agencies as the approximately 193 member United Nations, the 28 member North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO—now defunct; it disbanded in 1976 after 22 years), there is much strife and war in the world. However the current situation should not perplex the Christian: the widespread conflict and turmoil is at least a partial fulfillment of what Jesus told His disciples would eventuate before the new heaven and new earth would be established: *“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows”* (Matt. 24:6-8).

The Christians' challenge

And so it is that the Christian today is confronted with animosity and conflict all around them, and hence the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians is of particular moment: *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:3).

Every word in that verse makes its own contribution to Paul's message.

In common speech, “endeavouring” implies effort has been expended, but not necessarily that success has been achieved. The Greek word from which “endeavouring” is translated (*spoudazō*) supports the idea that unity might not always be achieved, and observation confirms that is the case. Nevertheless the Christian must continue to endeavour to achieve unity of the spirit.

The onus on the Christian is made more pointed by the word “keep”: *“keep the unity of the spirit”*. The significance of “keep” is that it implies unity has previously existed, and so the Christian must do all in their power not to destroy it; that is, to not cause division or unrest amongst the brethren. Such an exhortation is in accord with Paul's words to the Romans: *“But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another... It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak”* (Rom. 14:15-21).

Of the Spirit

A further point is that the unity which Christians are to keep is the unity of the spirit. “Spirit” is translated from the Greek *“pneuma”* for which one meaning is “mental disposition”. In other words the Christian's principal objective must be to cultivate a love of the Lord and His plan and purpose, regardless of any differences in opinion amongst the brethren regarding the technical details of the outworking of that plan; any differences of opinion regarding God's ways of working out His plan should not destroy the mental disposition of love for the Lord and His people.

Tolerating differences

Tolerance of differing views and aptitudes might be deemed to present a threat of “liberalism”—not purity of truth—and therefore might be considered to obscure the truth and therefore be contrary to James' exhortation: *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy”* (James 3:17). However the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to accommodate differences amongst the brethren. His argument is based on the similarity of the members of the human body and the body of Christ: *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation*

of tongues: *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (1Cor. 12:4-25).*

There are numerous points in Paul’s explanation that warrant emphasis.

Firstly, the differences are ordained by One Lord; the same God: *“But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him”*. Recalling that God has placed all members in the body provides considerable tolerance of differences.

A second point that deserves emphasis, additional to the fact that all members are placed by the same Lord, is that He has given them different aptitudes: *“For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit...”*. Calling that fact to mind on every occasion when differences between brethren are apparent should promote consideration of the other’s disposition.

Thirdly, members have need of every other member, in spite of the fact they are different—different personality, different understanding of some doctrinal points, different aptitude to witness to others, different ability to express their thoughts.

Other causes of differences

As well as understanding, and applying, the lessons to

be learnt from a recognition of the authority by which each member is placed in the body, it is helpful, in maintaining harmony in the body, to acknowledge the causes of differences that arise from the weakness of human nature. There are several characteristics that must be overcome but two that merit particular mention are egotism and jealousy.

Whereas all aspects of the previous exhortation are derived from a consideration of the body as a whole, egotism and jealousy relate to looking inwards at oneself, and hence the Apostle’s exhortation: *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Jealousy stems from covetousness—wanting something possessed by someone else. Jealousy is a powerful enemy, hence Paul exhorted each church to be wary of it:

- To the Philippians he wrote: *“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Phil. 4:11). Paul’s example presents all Christians with a challenge—to be content in each and every state in which they find themselves: in hunger, in poverty, in abundance, in comfort, in labour. Paul wrote that he had to learn to be content, which implies development of his disposition is a process, so the Christian must strive to develop an attitude of contentment.
- To Timothy, Paul wrote: *“But godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Tim. 6:6). In the preceding verses he warned about those who, *“doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness...”*, and simply advised Timothy: *“from such withdraw thyself”* (1 Tim. 6:4-5). Consequently it is manifest that jealousy arises not only from coveting material things but also intellectual agility and the ability to argue. Again the Christian is to be content with the intellectual powers the Lord has given them.

In the succeeding verses Paul warned Timothy of the danger of covetousness for material goods, just as he did to the Philippians: *“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Tim. 6:6-10). Observation confirms the accuracy of Paul’s warning.

Egotism

Egotism presents yet another foe for the Christian. In essence, egotism causes division amongst the brethren by one member claiming to have superior knowledge or ability, and consequently imposing their thoughts and understandings on everyone else. The feeling of superiority may not be limited to doctrinal understanding but might also be related to the organization of their (or other's) ecclesia, or indeed any other aspect of another's life. Paul exhorted the Philippians to be aware of this temptation also: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (Phil. 2:3-4).

The failure to suppress egotism may arise from one's failure to examine themselves and to esteem others, which in turn stems from a failure to remember that whatever knowledge one has is a gift from God, as Paul wrote: *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

Once again the Apostle Paul is an example the Christian may follow, just as he followed Christ: *"Be*

ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). From a human perspective the revelations Paul received at his conversion authorized him to claim superiority above his fellows. However his response was: *"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord... Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me"* (2 Cor. 12:6). The bottom line is that egotism inflates, whereas ultimately observers will see the man for what he is.

The whole question of egotism may be corrected by observing the words of Peter: *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Summary

If we differ from another, it is the Lord's doing: He has given us the knowledge we treasure, and He is moulding our characters to fit in to the body He is forming, all to His praise and glory!■

CHRISTIAN CONSTANCY

The article below is based on an address given at a Melbourne Convention in 1944. The speaker had consciously experienced World War 1 and was now experiencing World War 2. The year 2014 A.D. is 70 years after the address was given, and the world is again in turmoil, not globally as it was in 1944, but nevertheless there is much unrest among the nations. Additionally the speaker referred to the lawlessness of that generation—one may wonder what he would say if he were alive in 2014. It might also be encouraging to reflect on the challenge that faced the brethren in 1944, and to note the similarity with 2014.

* * * * *

Churchill promised the British race "blood and tears", and what followed was such that it was necessary to adopt all sorts of expedients to try to maintain the people's morale.

I was one of those who used to count the days until October 1914. It is now 30 years since then. As we begin to wonder how long things will last, there is some excuse for a topic like Christian Constancy. We are not under any illusions, regarding the future, no matter how long the present things continue—our consecration is not until any date we have derived or concluded from our Bible Study, but until death.

Constancy is not to be demonstrated only in places that are in the public eye—to be seen of men—but also in lonely outposts; some places unseen. It is helpful to remember it is not public witness, nor demonstration, nor show that will win us the prize, but the development of character.

The challenge

Hebrews 3:6 reads: *"But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end"*. Holding fast is constancy. And the Christian must hold their confidence fast unto the end—until their warfare is over.

The challenge is more pronounced when it is recalled that the number of the elect is 144,000. Spread over 2000 years, it is not many, which means a severe test of character is justified. The severity is justified by the privilege of being one of a small number, by the glorious work to be accomplished, and by the magnitude of the task of changing the character of every human being.

The magnitude of the task to be accomplished during the 1000 years is brought into focus by pondering the

range of dispositions, habits, preferences, perversities, weaknesses, ignorance and superstitions that permeate the world of mankind. Consequently, those who are going to be instrumental in blessing all the members of the fallen race—the groaning creation—have to be tried to the utmost.

The architect of the Federal Capital said the data he was supplied for the construction of the city was perfect in every detail, but was lacking in two most important things. One was the beauty of the gum trees and the other was the rarity of the atmosphere at that altitude. I quote that to prove the point that familiarity breeds contempt; the compilers of the data did not mention those two facts because they were so familiar with them that they had lost their impact. The same principle applies to the weaknesses of the human race—we are so familiar with them that we do not always appreciate the size of the task it will be to change them.

The task is made more daunting by the attitude of many. We see a great deal of misery and suffering around us and want of respect for law. Even the children want to please themselves. Such an attitude can affect us and that is why we must be on the alert to preserve our loyalty, our constancy and our firmness of mind.

Faithfulness to the Lord

A well known expression is: “I will be faithful to the Lord, to the truth, to the brethren and with all with whom I have to do”.

Faithfulness to the Lord requires one to love the Lord with ALL their heart and mind (Matt. 22:37-39). Constancy may be added to the list. Just as God is unwavering in His love towards mankind, so also human beings must be unwavering in their love and loyalty to Him: “Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:16-17).

The truth

The challenge of faithfulness to the truth is not only in the fundamental doctrines, but also in the small things. Just as a small leakage will empty a vessel, so also will our loyalty to the truth be emptied if we allow elements of the truth to escape.

The fundamentals of the truth are simple, and are frequently summed up in the three “Rs”: Ransom, Resurrection, Restitution. To them may be added the secret of the high calling, which, to the uninitiated, is a mystery. One argument that is used against God calling out a few for His Name is that such

“favouritism” would be unfair. However Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Cor. 11:2-4). Being regarded as a virgin bride implies favouritism; the privilege of being called to be part of the “chaste virgin” must not be over-looked.

Loyalty to the truth requires unwavering adherence to the doctrines each one has established as truth. Paul was aware of the challenge Timothy faced, and he exhorted him to constancy: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16). Timothy was to take heed unto himself and continue in the doctrine—continue to preach a consistent message.

Later, Paul reinforced his exhortation to Timothy to hold to the truths he had learnt, and particularly in view of the changes that would eventuate. Paul encouraged him to not deviate from what he had learnt: “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:13-15). Timothy was to continue in the things he had learned; Paul exhorted Timothy to constancy.

Timothy was not only to remain constant within himself but he was also to ensure constancy in his ministry to others: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Increasing light

There is always a temptation to investigate other ideas and doctrines. It is a dubious undertaking;

curiosity might get the better of us. Paul wrote: “*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*” (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Paul kept the simplicity that is in Christ. However the spirit searches all things and that aspect of God’s dealing with His chosen ones—those to whom He has given His Holy Spirit—has not changed: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*” (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Thus faithfulness to the truth requires each one to search the Scriptures daily and to be fully persuaded in their own mind (Rom. 14:5).

Additionally the Lord has revealed more of His plan as time has progressed: “*But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*” (Proverbs 4:18). The thrust of the verse is not that Christians should increase the light, but that they should walk in the increased light that God has provided. Luke 21:31 reads: “*So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand*”. It was not until they saw the things about which the Lord told them that they would know the kingdom was nigh.

The matter of increasing light is particularly relevant today. Were it not for increased light regarding the meaning of many Greek and Hebrew words, many today would be laboring under fears of hell fire and eternal torment. Consequently it is helpful to remember the example of the Bereans of old: “*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Bearing in mind that God has given different gifts to various ones, it is imperative that every disciple—every student of God’s word—be fully persuaded in their own mind regarding what they believe is truth, and more so as the complexity of the philosophies in the world continues to increase, with less and less faith in God or that the Bible is His Word.

Faithfulness to the brethren

The Christian is to be faithful to the brethren. One aspect of being faithful to the brethren is to abide by

the exhortation in Hebrews 10:25: “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together... exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*” (Heb. 10:23-25)

Exhorting one another involves, firstly, meeting together, communicating one with the other, because it is impossible to encourage one another without communicating with them.

Another aspect of faithfulness to the brethren is to accommodate their weaknesses: “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*” (Eph. 4:1-2). Being ever ready to point out another’s faults is not edifying and is not being faithful to a recognition that they are also striving against the weaknesses of the flesh. Faithfulness to the brethren requires encouragement, not discouragement—forbearing one another in love. However “agreeing with everything” is not always the most beneficial course.

Faithfulness to the brethren requires honesty and honesty might involve acknowledging differences: “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another*” (Eph. 4:25). However being “brutally frank” might be discouraging and so the Christian is to be tactful, one of the first principles of which is to “*tell him his fault between he and thee alone*” (Matt. 18:15). As Paul exhorted Timothy, be first pure then peaceable, but the Christian should always aim to create peace consistent with holding the truth high: “*But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*” (James 3:17-18).

And now I want to conclude by reminding you of the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: “*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 15:57-58). May God help us all to remain constant to our Lord, to His truth, and to the brethren with whom He has blessed us. ■

God makes a promise; faith believes it, hope anticipates it, and patience quietly awaits it. ■

SINCE WORLD WAR 1

The establishment of God's kingdom on earth is the last act of God's plan that has been revealed to mankind so far. He has revealed little about what awaits mankind after that time. The Apostle Paul made only passing comments regarding that time—to the Romans he wrote: *"Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life"* (Rom. 2:6-7); and to the Ephesians he wrote: *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:7). Neither statement gives any details regarding what will transpire in the ages to come.

However the prophet Daniel testified that the kingdom will be everlasting: *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever"* (Dan. 2:44).

The fact that, at this time, there is little detail regarding the situation after the kingdom is established, is consistent with God's revelations all down the ages: *"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints"* (Col. 1:26-27). The mystery was hidden for ages and for generations, and while He has now made it manifest to His saints, it is still a mystery to all who have not been called and given the insight of the Holy Spirit, that is, to those who are *"without"*: *"And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables"* (Mark 4:11).

However the conditions that will exist at that time will be such that Jesus told His disciples to pray for it—*"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."* (Matt. 6:9-10). Also Jesus gave them signs that would indicate when the establishment of the kingdom was near: *"So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near..."* (Matt. 24:33).

The twentieth century

For almost 1900 years after Jesus told His disciples about the kingdom, little was revealed to mankind about God's plans, and consequently there was little overall change in how the nations conducted their business. Indeed little is revealed even until now, however not all mankind is oblivious to the changes that have occurred in the world during the last 100

years. The following excerpt is from the *U.S. News & World Report* of July 6, 1964. It looks back at the previous 50 years, that is, to the outbreak of World War 1, and looks forward to what they expected might occur during the next 50 years—to 2014—which is the current year.

* * *

What 50 Years Have Brought And What Another 50 Years May Bring

There has never been anything like it in history—the half century that started with the first World War. The whole world is unrecognizable now. Life, values, power balance, everything has undergone a complete change. **And the next half century can be just as amazing.** It was just 50 years ago, on June 29, 1914, when a young Serbian nationalist emptied his revolver at Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in the Bosnian town of Sarajevo. Out of that incident flowed actions that produced World War 1; on August 1, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia.

Now it is half a century and two World Wars later. Look back over those 50 years, and the world of today appears to bear little resemblance to that of the half century earlier—a half century that has seemed to speed by. Raised is a question whether the 50 years ahead of us is of vital importance to young people of today. It will bring revolutionary changes to compare with those of the past 50 years.

Only half a-century ago, the world was one of great empires. The empire of Britain was greatest of them all. France, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Italy: all were imperial powers. Almost all of Africa, much of the Middle East, and much of Asia were colonial areas. Kings and emperors and czars ruled the really great nations. Communism was not even heard of as a threat. **Nobody in 1914 could have dreamed of the world of 1964.**

The kings and emperors of 50 years ago, along with their empires, are all gone. Where kings and queens remain, their titles are empty. The British Empire is gone. The French Empire is gone, and France is struggling to try to regain a semblance of glory. Germany, defeated-in two wars, is divided, yet West Germany now is the strongest power on the continent of Europe other than Soviet Russia. There no longer is a great Dutch Empire, or a Belgian Empire or an Ottoman Empire, or an Italian Empire. Instead, nations of Europe are striving to work toward some kind of common market and some over-all political co-operation.

On the move

Those were the days of the horse and buggy. Autos

were few, highways nonexistent, traffic problems undreamed of; electricity was new. Gas lights brightened homes and streets. Paved streets were few in towns; roads were tracks in the countryside. Only the adventurous thought of driving from coast to coast along unmarked roads. Auto travel was a leisurely adventure back in 1914, with few paved roads and no traffic problems. No one dreamed of the bumper-to-bumper conditions that face U. S. motorists today.

National defence now rests upon atomic weapons that were unknown 20 years ago, let alone a half century ago. In that same 50 year span, a League of Nations was born and died. Then a United Nations was born and transformed into something its founders would not recognize. Africa, a continent recently made up of colonies, today has become a continent of more than 40 new “nations”, each struggling to survive. The Middle East, another colonial area of the past, is living from vast oil riches that 50 years ago were unknown and of relatively little importance. Asia is an area of vast populations now living in independent nations torn usually by political division and great unrest. It is in Asia that war is the greatest threat to today’s world.

The airplane—usually a biplane—was a novelty at county fairs. There was no such thing as an airline. The military mind was only beginning to comprehend what an airplane could do in war.

A vote for women was just beginning to be agitated seriously. Nobody so much as dreamed of a Social Security system.

Finance

The U.S. national debt had been stabilized at around 1.2 billion dollars ever since just before the turn of the century: Now it is in excess of 300 billion dollars; how things have changed in half a century. If the record of the past is repeated, the dollar of 2014 will be an 11 cent dollar in terms of 1914.

Now try to look 50 years into the future to the year 2014, and what do you find?

A half century ago, war pitted men against men in trench fighting. Warfare of tomorrow will find several nations equipped with hydrogen weapons that destroy whole cities. Instead of troops, ballistic missiles now can span the oceans.

Population

In another half century there will be 395 million Americans, nearly twice as many as there are now. A population crowded into great strips of cities will be struggling to enjoy driving 200 million automobiles

(there are 66 million now). China will be pushing 1.5 billion people. Supersonic transports will be able to carry passengers across the American continent or to Europe in an hour and a half.

Space will have become an environment supporting defense platforms, communications satellites, maybe launching platforms for ventures not yet dreamed of. Hydrogen weapons will have proliferated among many nations of the world. China is sure to have them. France will, too. So will Germany. Israel and Egypt may. American officials place at 15 or 20 the nations that will have nuclear weapons before the end of this century.

* * *

When such a secular body is aware of the dramatic changes that have occurred since 1914 (and 2014 is the centenary of the outbreak of World War 1) it is surprising that many who profess to be aware of Bible prophecy are unaware of the significance of the changes, and that the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is nigh.

Nevertheless that is the way it is, and such global ignorance of the significance of the time at hand is testimony to the truth of Jesus’ statement that there shall continue to be wars and rumours of wars, and to Peter’s statement that many at that time will refuse to acknowledge the changes that have occurred and are occurring: *“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:3-13).

May each and everyone who has been blessed with a knowledge of God’s plan, and who yearns for the outworking of that plan in terms of the establishment of God’s kingdom, continue to watch the developments in the world that indicate that the day of the establishment of the kingdom, and of their redemption, is near at hand.■

HATH GOD CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE?

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew...” (Romans 11:1-2).

At the time of this issue going to press there is a lull in hostilities in the Middle East. The relationships between the nations in the Middle East are complex and it is not the purpose of this article to unravel them, but rather to focus on whether God is continuing to deal directly with Israel or whether He has abandoned them.

There are more than 2500 references to Israel by name in the Bible, plus a number in which they are referred to under another title; for example, “my people”, of which there are more than 200 instances. By comparison, there are approximately 980 occurrences of “Jesus”, plus approximately 30 instances in which Jesus is referred to as “Saviour” (several references to “saviour” refer to God Himself). Consequently, on a purely numerical basis, it may be regarded as contemptuous to ignore the Scriptures that relate to God’s plan for the nation of Israel.

Classification

The references to Israel may be classified into at least three groups:

- New Testament assertions relating to the part Israel has played, since Jesus’ first advent, in the outworking of God’s plan;
- Prophetic statements, mainly in the Old Testament;
- God’s direct instructions to them.

New Testament assertions

One passage of New Testament Scripture which asserts Israel’s importance in God’s plan is Romans 11, quoted above. Paul’s argument in those verses is simple and emphatic: *“For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin”*. Paul was an Israelite, and he attributed his knowledge of God’s plan to God’s personal dealing with him: *“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)”* (Eph. 3:1-4). If God had cast Israel off Paul would have been an imposter—a phoney—and not a true disciple of the Lord. However on numerous occasions Paul asserted that he was indeed a true apostle: *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...”* (2 Cor. 1:1). Thus at that time, God was continuing to deal with Israel.

Old Testament prophecies

There are numerous prophecies in the Old Testament that testify that God will never cast away Israel. One prophecy is recorded in Jeremiah 31:35-37: *“Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD”*. The credence one gives to the assurance that God will not cast off Israel is dependent on whether one believes God created the sun and moon: if God did not create them the basis of the verses is untrue and the assurance is worthless. However if one believes it was God who gave the sun for a light by day, His statement is trustworthy, and therefore the seed of Israel will not cease from being a nation before Him until the sun and moon cease to exist. Further, it is only if heaven can be measured that He will cast off Israel. In the twenty first century there is much boasting regarding mankind’s knowledge of the extent of the universe; suffice it to say the speculation continues. The prophecy is that it will not be until the heavens have been measured that there is any possibility of God casting off Israel.

God’s direct instruction to Israel

The book of Leviticus records many of God’s direct instructions to Moses and through him to the nation of Israel. They are too numerous to detail here but chapter 26 details how God was to deal with them regarding several aspects. Verses 1 and 2 prohibit worshipping idols. Verses 3 to 9 contain God’s promise that if they were obedient they would be materially prosperous: *“I am the LORD. If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land... For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you”*.

However from verse 14 onwards the promise was that they would be punished if they were disobedient: “*But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments... I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you*” (Lev. 26:14-17). The punishments with which God threatened Israel were gruesome—personal discomfort as well as subserviency to their enemies. One could well imagine such punishments would rapidly cause Israel to repent and become obedient, but alas, God also declared there was more to follow.

Verses 18 to 22 declare: “*And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power... And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate*” (Lev. 26:18-22). The punishments they would receive if they were disobedient were directly opposite the blessings they would receive if they were faithful and obedient, and corrected their ways.

Worse to come

If the accentuated punishments did not cause them to reform, God promised to punish them even further: “*And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins...*” (Lev. 26:23-24).

Failure to reform would bring more severe punishments: “*Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat... And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste*” (Lev. 26:28-33). Continuing disobedience would result in God punishing them in His fury, and they would be caused to eat the flesh of their children. And if that was not

enough, God would make their land desolate (in stark contrast to the prosperity promised if they obedient), and **they would be scattered among the heathen.**

True to His word God did precisely as He declared: “*And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them: Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them*” (Jer. 9:13-16).

All is not lost

However God also promised that if Israel repented He would remember His covenant with them: “*If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land*” (Lev. 26:40-42). The condition on which God would repent was that Israel would repent. That has not yet happened, at least at a national level, and so it may be contended that the hope of them receiving the blessings previously promised are lost.

But all is not yet lost: “*And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD. These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses*” (Lev. 26:44-46). God promised that even when they were still in the land of their enemies—a punishment which He directly brought upon them—He would not cast them off. In view of all the previous threats to punish them, it might be difficult to accept that God would not cast away His people that He foreknew. The only way such a seeming contradiction of action by God—that is, still retaining them as His chosen people even though He is punishing them repeatedly for their transgressions—

can be rationalized is to understand He is indeed the God of all, that His ways are higher than Man's ways, and that His purpose for Israel is not yet complete. God is yet to use Israel as one of the agents that will be used to educate the heathen world: *"And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore"* (Ezek. 37:28). *"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you"* (Zech. 8:23).

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25). *"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"* (Rom. 11:32-34). Yes, indeed, who has known the mind of the Lord? His ways are far above mankind's ways and He is working out His plan, and Israel is in it! ■

THE RANSOM TESTIFIED

The sole purpose of Jesus' coming to earth was to rescue the human race from death. God sentenced the human race to death because their father Adam disobeyed His commandment not to eat one particular fruit in the Garden of Eden: *"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"* (Gen. 2:16-17).

The action required to redeem mankind was for Jesus to give His life: *"For even the Son of man came... to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). Jesus assured His disciples His mission would be successful, and it would be vindicated (shown to be effective) by the resurrection of all mankind from the grave. He declared: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (Greek: krisis) (John 5:28-29).*

However Jesus died approximately 2000 years ago, and to this day there is no evidence, visible to the people at large, of any widespread resurrection of those who have died, and thus there is much skepticism that His life and death have any bearing on the future of mankind. The skepticism should not surprise the Christian because Peter knew in his day that such a situation would develop: *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:3-4). Peter went on to explain that God has set various time periods in His plan. From a secular viewpoint, one factor which might be contributing to the loss of faith in the

effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice is a failure to understand the time periods that comprise God's plan. Hence Paul's statement to Timothy that the resurrection will occur in God's due time is a vital clue in understanding how Jesus' sacrifice will be vindicated: *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; **Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time"*** (1 Tim. 2:5-6). One test of faith for the Christian is to believe in the future resurrection! ■

JAMES STRONG LL.B, DD

James Strong (August 14, 1822 – August 7, 1894) was an American Methodist biblical scholar and educator, and the creator of Strong's Concordance.

Strong was born in New York City and graduated, in 1844, as valedictorian from Wesleyan University. Subsequently, he was mayor of his home town on Long Island. Later, having settled in Flushing, New York, he pursued biblical studies, held various local offices, and organized, built, and was the president of the Flushing railroad. In 1856 Wesleyan University granted him the degree of Doctor of Divinity (D.D.). From 1858 until 1861, Strong was both Acting President and Professor of Biblical Literature at Troy University (New York). In 1868 he became Professor of Exegetical Theology at Drew Theological Seminary, where he remained for twenty-seven years. In 1881 Wesleyan honored Strong with the degree of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.). He died at Round Lake, New York in 1894.

"Strong's Exhaustive Concordance is without doubt the most thorough word index ever to be published on any version of the English Bible. It was first published in 1894, the year of his death".

—The Publishers. ■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 4)

The story so far: The Israelites have left Egypt and are experiencing the trials of the wilderness.

We moved on, to a place called Rephidim. However there was a shortage of fresh water. The Lord told Moses to walk on ahead of the people and to take some of the elders of Israel and his staff with him, and He would stand before him by a rock at Horeb. Moses was to strike the rock with his staff and water will come out of it. Moses did that, in the sight of all the elders of Israel, and a stream of fresh water came pouring out of the rock! Another miracle!

God performed several other miracles for us during our journey including giving us the ascendancy during a battle with the Amalekites when Moses kept his arms up over his head. If he let his arms down they gained the ascendancy. Amazing!

When we reached Mount Sinai Moses chose me to go up the mountain with him to receive stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved. Moses was on top of the mountain for forty days and nights. The people concluded Moses and I were dead; so they gave Aaron their golden ear-rings, from which he made a golden calf, which they worshipped instead of God. Moses was livid, and he hurled down the tablets, breaking them to pieces. He took the calf and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it! Moses went up the mountain again received a second set of tablets, engraved just like the first set.

We left the Sinai Plain and traveled onwards to the Wilderness of Paran, God told Moses to send scouts out—one leader from each of the Twelve Tribes—to explore Canaan. I was chosen to represent the tribe of Ephraim. I was convinced we could overcome the Canaanites and take over the Promised Land, and so was Caleb, who represented the tribe of Judah, however the other ten scouts lacked confidence and they gave a bad report. Consequently no one who was twenty years old or more was allowed to enter the promised land except Caleb and me. Even Moses wasn't permitted to enter the Promised Land because he had disobeyed God and struck the rock at Horeb twice. However he was allowed to climb Mount Nebo and see the Promised Land from a distance, before God took him away—we never knew what happened to Moses, but certainly his body was never found. Aaron died and was buried at Mount Hor.

Then God spoke to me and told me I was to succeed Moses. He told me to be strong and courageous, because I was to lead the people into the land He had promised to Abraham.

The first step was to cross the Jordan river. God instructed me to tell the priests to carry the ark of the covenant ahead. As soon as the priests' feet touched the water's edge, the water stopped flowing so the people crossed over on dry ground. Once the last person had crossed over the Jordan, the priests carried the ark out onto dry land, and instantly the waters started flowing. It was truly wonderful; a near-repetition of what had happened at the Sea of Reeds.

Our task now was to occupy the Land of Canaan, and to drive out or destroy the pagan inhabitants. In our own strength, it would have been far too daunting, but part of my job was to demonstrate to the Israelites that God was on our side. At Gibeon, for example, God hurled large hailstones down on the Amorites killing more of them than were killed by our swords. I prayed to the Lord: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon". And the sun did stand still, and the moon did stop, until we had destroyed our enemies. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and delayed going down for about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for us!

I feel that I've only partly fulfilled the rather daunting commission that God gave to me, which was to establish His people in His Promised Land, but I am perfectly sure that One is coming who is greater than me, or Moses, or Aaron, and He will complete all the work that God sends Him to do. In one sense He will be a greater Joshua as the later writer to the Hebrews implies when he wrote: "*For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day*" (Heb. 4:8). Of course he used that expression because my name in Aramaic is Jesus!

But now, I am 110 years old and I sense that the time for my departure is near and I am ready for Him.

God is good. God bless you all. Amen.■

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