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THE REAPER AND THE HARVEST

The topic for consideration, The Reaper and the Harvest, is one that is relevant to the times we live in, and they are dreadful times. The two main sets of scriptures that will be referred to are found in Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43 and Revelation 14:14-19 where Jesus tells us about the parable of the wheat and tares, and the Apostle John tells us of his vision of the harvest of the earth. All references are from the King James Version, unless otherwise stated.

Matt.13: “²⁴And another parable put he forth unto them saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: ²⁵But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. ²⁶But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. ²⁷So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? ²⁸He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? ²⁹But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat unto my barn.”

Matt.13: “³⁷He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man. ³⁸The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; ³⁹The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. ⁴¹The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity; ⁴²And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Rev.14: “¹⁴And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man,

having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. ¹⁵And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. ¹⁶And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. ¹⁷And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. ¹⁸And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. ¹⁹And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.”

The first question that naturally arises from these two sets of scriptures is, **Are they talking about the same events?** The mere fact that both talk about a harvest, does not mean that they are talking about the same harvest. A harvest, both in literal and symbolic usage, applies to the activity of gathering in the fruitage of a period of growth. The scriptures talk about three major harvest works since God has been dealing with human nations. We find these works of harvest at the ends of the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age, and the Millennial Age. The harvest work in each occurs on the basis of whether groups of individuals have developed sufficiently to act on God's truth and principles. John the Baptist tells us about the harvest of the Jewish Age – a separation of wheat from chaff. These symbolise the ‘Israelites indeed’ and the false ‘nominal Israelites’ respectively. They were separated on the basis of whether or not they recognised Jesus as the Christ, their long-awaited Messiah, the Anointed of God. Jesus brought this truth to the Jewish nation. He

In This Issue

The Reaper and the Harvest	1
Our High Priest	6
Butterflies– a reflection	11
Love...is better than sacrifice	12

was the chief reaper in this work and was present during the Jewish Age harvest. We note that the separating work occurred on the basis of the truth that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

We know that there are important parallels between the Jewish Age and the Gospel Age. These parallels also extend to the harvest periods of both Ages. We would expect this since we note that both of these harvests gathered fruit that is intended for the seed of blessing, the Abrahamic promise, the long-promised seed that will bless all nations of the earth during the Millennium. We note that the early church was purely Jewish. The same call went to the Gentiles, although later. As the call to the Gentiles was later, so the Gentile harvest was also to be later. The Gospel Age harvest is talked about as though it is a separation of wheat from tares. This will be discussed subsequently. The final separation occurs at the end of the Millennium, a separation of sheep from goats. The sheep are set on the right hand of the shepherd and the goats are set on the left hand of the shepherd. The sheep inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, (Matt. 25:34) while the goats are consigned to everlasting destruction, symbolised by fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. We note that this millennial separation work is quite different to that of the Gospel and Jewish Ages. Here God is dealing with the world rather than a selected few. What is more, even though the separation of the sheep and goats is conceptually a type of harvest, the actual word is not used scripturally in connection with it. This may also indicate the fundamental difference between it and the scriptural harvest periods at the end of the Jewish and Gospel Ages. So how do we work out what period or periods the harvest in the parable of the wheat and tares and the vision of John apply to?

We notice in **the parable of the wheat and tares** Jesus helps us by telling us in verse 39 that the harvest is the end of the world. Also in verse 40 – ‘As therefore the tares are gathered and are burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world’. The Diaglott renders the phrase in verse 39 as ‘the end harvest’ and the one in verse 40 as ‘so will it be in the end of the Age’. The Diaglott seems to make it clear that the harvesting, the gathering and burning of the tares occurs during the time at the end of this Age. The word translated ‘end’ here we are familiar with. It is the Greek word ‘suentelia’ meaning not a point in time as the Greek word ‘telos’ but a period of time when there is a bringing together of important events. The word ‘end’ does not really do the original Greek word justice and a more accurate translation would be ‘consummation’ or ‘completion’ (from Vines). But at the end of what Age are these features occurring?

There are several important clues that help with the

answer:

1. We know that the field is the world. A field is the ground in which the seed is sown and out of which the wheat and tares grow. The wheat and tares are therefore not the world but come or grow out of the world. We know that the word ‘world’ is basically the right translation since it is a translation of the Greek word ‘aion’ which we are familiar with, meaning “an age”. So these two groups, the wheat and tares, come out of the world or are selected, so to speak, out of the world. This suggests that the age talked about cannot be the Millennial Age since in the kingdom the whole world will be dealt with rather than a selected part.

2. Jesus tells us in verse 39 that the enemy who sowed the tares is the devil. We know that the devil is bound and therefore incapacitated during the Millennial Age. This in itself would exclude the parable being set in the Millennial reign of Jesus and His body members.

3. We are told that after the harvest and the burning of the tares the righteous shall shine as the sun. This occurs after the statement that ‘all things that offend and them which do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire’ has been fulfilled. It is in the Millennial Age that the righteous shall shine as the sun, and we note that this comes after the harvest and the destruction of the tares. This would put the parable in the Gospel Age and the timing of the harvest and the destruction of the tares at the end of the Gospel Age. It is interesting to note the sequence of events here that straddle the junction of the Gospel and Millennial Ages, namely, harvest, destruction, followed by righteousness.

We also need to be clear that the harvest of the Gospel Age is being talked about in these two passages rather than the harvest of the Jewish Age. The most important point distinguishing the Jewish and Gospel Age harvests is that the former related to the house of Israel and the latter to the whole earth or world. During the Jewish Age God dealt only with the nation of Israel. Israel was the only nation that He ‘knew’. During His first advent, Jesus exclusively dealt with and sifted that nation, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Despite coming unto His own, His own received Him not, as we know, but to the few that received Him He gave power to become the sons of God (John 1:11,12). As a nation, Israel rejected Jesus and consequently Israel’s house was left desolate. This distinguishes the harvest talked about in the parable of the wheat and tares and the vision of John from the Jewish Age harvest of wheat from chaff.

But is **John’s vision of the harvest of the earth** in Revelation 14 referring to the same time and event as the harvest of the parable of the wheat and tares? The

verses in Revelation 14 preceding the harvest of the earth set the context, namely, the contrasting works and faith of the true and false followers of Jesus. This fits in nicely with the subjects and the timing of the harvest of the wheat and tares. The wheat and tares represent the true and false followers respectively. They are the fruit of the seed sown by the Son of Man and that sown by the devil. This suggests that the subject and time of the two passages is similar. We also notice that verse 13 which immediately precedes the vision of John refers to a particular phase at the end of the Gospel Age which is associated with the blessed fate of those that die in the Lord at that time, and this is because they rest from their labours and their works follow them. This appears to be a reference to those saints that will not sleep in death but be transformed in the twinkling of an eye as mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. A more detailed account of this is given in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

We note, then, that those referred to in Revelation 14:13 whose works follow them, do not sleep in death and are united together with those who have already been raised by Jesus. Verse 15 tells us that this event occurs during the Lord's return or parousia. Not only that. It also appears that this event is associated with the early phase of His return for it is associated with His actual coming down from heaven, which of necessity would be at the beginning of the parousia. Therefore, the context of John's vision in regards to the preceding verses in Revelation 14 would suggest that the vision relates to similar events and a similar time to that of the harvest of the wheat and the tares. Further evidence for this is provided by the association between the Gospel Age harvest and the return of our Lord given in Matthew chapter 24 when His disciples asked Jesus concerning the signs of these two events. Jesus confirms the association by giving the signs without any sort of separation. This suggests that Jesus' view on the matter was the same. In fact, it is likely that Jesus had given this thought to them originally.

This same association between the harvest and our Lord's presence is shown again in John's vision. The one 'like unto the Son of man' is the one with the sharp sickle who reaps the earth. The one like unto the Son of man is identified for us in the vision of the seven candlesticks in Revelation chapter 1 as Jesus. Jesus is the first and the last, the one that liveth and was dead and is alive forever more. Confirmation of the identity of 'the one like unto the Son of man' as Jesus is given by Him in wearing a golden crown, a sign of Jesus' divine, regal authority. Daniel 7:13 also mentions this 'one like unto the Son of man'. Again Jesus seems to be suggested by this term. It was only Jesus who entered into the presence of God and was

given authority, glory and sovereign or regal power. Given that this 'one like unto the Son of man' is Jesus and that it is He who reaps the earth, then it would seem reasonable that He has returned to perform this important work. This would again reinforce the thought that the harvest of the earth occurs during Jesus' parousia at the end of the Gospel Age.

We have already noted **the sequence of events** in relation to the latter features of the parable of the wheat and tares, namely, harvest, destruction followed by righteousness. John's vision emphasizes the first two elements. John's vision actually deals with two harvests – the harvest of the earth and also the harvest of the vine of the earth. In relation to the vision of the harvest of the earth, this occurs first followed by the harvest of the vine of the earth. The latter is used in the great winepress of the wrath of God. Rev.19:15 tells us that the winepress of the wrath of God is part of the process needed to subjugate the nations to usher in the kingdom of God. We note that it is the fruitage of the vine that is used to produce the wine of God's wrath. This is the result of man's efforts during the Gospel Age. Man's efforts under the guidance of Satan can only lead to the necessary destructive intervention by God Almighty. The consequences of fallen man's efforts and the righteous intervention by God merge into the one same outcome. During the last plague all the nations have been gathered to Armageddon. God especially remembers great Babylon and to give unto her this cup of the fierceness of His wrath.

In the parable of the wheat and tares, the same event is shown by the burning of the tares, which symbolizes the destruction of a false counterfeit Christian system. Babylon and the nations make up the present heavens and earth, which Peter tells us are reserved for destruction by fire (2 Peter 3:7). The symbol of fire highlights the destructive element of the cup of the wine of the fierceness of God's wrath. Both civil governments, symbolized by islands and mountains, and religious elements are destroyed when the plagues reach their climax in the seventh plague. So we again see the elements of harvest followed by destruction, which again suggests the two visions are talking about the same events and the same timing.

Having laid the groundwork concerning the inter-relatedness of the two divisions, we would now like to explore some issues that these two sets of verses highlight. The first and main issue is that of the relationship between **the harvest and the Second Advent of Jesus**. We note that the 'one like unto the Son of man' is present throughout John's vision and we have already seen that both John and Daniel identify the 'one like unto the Son of man' as Jesus. It is, then, Jesus who reaps the earth. It appears He is

directing the work of the harvest at the end of the Age. It appears in the parable of the wheat and the tares that Jesus tells us the reapers are the angels, and this suggests the harvest is an extensive work with Jesus supervising it. But is Jesus literally present? If He is, this would imply that He had returned and that the harvest work was another sign of His return. John's vision is, of course, highly symbolic. We do not expect to see Jesus literally on a white cloud reaping the earth with a literal sickle. In fact, it would probably be nigh impossible to describe Jesus in any symbolic picture form given His glorious present divine form. Jesus now has inherent self-sustaining life, inhabiting the divine nature. This nature, we believe, is the same nature as God, and we know that no man can see God and live. There is, therefore, a fundamental incompatibility between the human and divine natures. A human cannot apprehend the divine nature according to any of the normal human senses, and this is probably why the expression 'like unto the Son of Man' is used.

The term 'the Son of Man' is used extensively elsewhere in the scriptures to refer to Jesus but we note that these instances are not part of a vision that is attempting to describe Him in picture form. If the question "Is Jesus literally present?" refers to whether humans could see Him with the sense of sight, then we would have great difficulty answering the question in a vision such as John's, which we have already noted is highly symbolic and therefore by definition we cannot answer. So when we ask if Jesus is literally present in association with the earth during the harvest in John's vision, we actually mean has He returned in His immaterial divine nature to the environs of the earth as He said He would? The literalness refers not to whether humans will see Him literally with their eyes, which we understand they will not, but to His actual return and presence in the earth to take the reigns of His kingdom. This is to some extent a difficulty because we don't have a clear understanding of what it means for a spiritual being to be on the earth or associated with the earth. It is difficult to answer questions which arise such as, Do spiritual beings inhabit any or all of the physical dimensions we are familiar with? And if not, in what way do we say they are **on** the earth or associated **with** the earth? To some extent we have to accept that we cannot answer these sorts of questions adequately at present and put them to the side. This is largely due to our poor understanding of spiritual natures. We have to accept at face value that when Jesus said that the heavens would retain Him until His return, it makes sense even though we may not fully understand that sense. Understanding this means that we can glean clues from John's vision and the parable of the wheat and tares about whether Jesus is present on the earth or associated with it.

1. The first clue is that Jesus has a golden crown in John's vision. This suggests that He has obtained divine regal authority and is exercising it when He is reaping the earth. The two symbols of the sickle and Jesus wearing the golden crown are significant. It is significant that the facts that Jesus is wearing a golden crown as He reaps the earth are placed together. We know that Jesus returns as King, gradually subjugating the nations after rewarding His people. Jesus had to leave the earth and enter into the very presence of God Himself to receive for Himself the divine right to the kingdom. This is what the golden crown symbolizes, namely, the divine right to the kingdom. Having received it, He returns to claim it and to set it up. We notice what Luke 19:12 says. Jesus, of course, did not receive the actual kingdom in heaven but the divine right to it. We notice here the important principle that the right to the kingdom is obtained before the kingdom is set up. This is why Jesus can be pictured rightfully showing His right to the kingdom without the kingdom being set up yet.

This setting up of the kingdom, of course, takes some time. This is shown in Daniel's prophecy in Dan.2:44. In Nebuchadnezzar's vision we note that the stone that would smite the great image and destroy it had to be fashioned and present first. The stone represents the kingdom in its formative stage, represented by the returned Lord who has received divine right to the kingdom. He will then rule the nations of the earth with a rod of iron. This involves a further stage in the exercise of Jesus' divine right to the kingdom. In the ultimate exercise of His divine right to the kingdom, Jesus will destroy every enemy and the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Therefore, the fact that Jesus is pictured in John's vision wearing a golden crown whilst reaping suggests that He is exercising His divine right to the kingdom, and this is associated with the early phases of His Second Advent.

2. The second clue that Jesus has returned during the time of the harvest of the wheat is given by the phrase 'But gather the wheat into my barn' in the parable of the wheat and tares. The wheat, we know, symbolizes the true followers of Jesus. Gathering them into the barn suggests that they are rewarded and given habitation in God's house, where we know there are many dwelling places. This was promised by Jesus himself and that this would be associated with His return. Jesus said 'I will come again and will take you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also' (John 14:3). This association between the return of Jesus and the rewarding with life to Jesus' followers is made even clearer by the Apostle Paul. Paul tells us that the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout '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.4:16,17). This is the same event that Jesus promised to His followers. This shows us that a very important work during Jesus' Second Advent is the gathering to Himself of His people. This correlates with the final phases of the harvest's visions, particularly the gathering of the wheat into the Lord's barn. This particular aspect refers specifically to the resurrection of the Lord's people. This is part of the same overall process of the returned Lord receiving His people unto himself. Therefore the harvest time, which is a separating and ingathering work of Jesus' followers, suggests that Jesus has returned and is supervising this important work.

3. Another point that suggests Jesus has returned during this reaping is shown by His sitting on a white cloud (Rev.14:14). We remember that Jesus' ascension to heaven occurred as a cloud received Him out of their sight (Acts 1:9), and as the apostles gazed up into heaven they were told that Jesus would return in like manner. This in itself would raise the possibility that Jesus had returned. More important is the fact that clouds are frequently associated with the wrath of God during the great Day of the Lord, and this is one of the last features associated with our Lord's return prior to the establishment of the kingdom. This has already been alluded to in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar where the stone strikes the feet of the image, leading to its destruction. The wrath of God during the great Day of the Lord is symbolized by the great winepress in John's vision. Jesus' return is associated with these clouds of trouble. These clouds are associated with God's judgment upon the present heavens and earth, and as a generalization clouds appear to symbolize judgments. Eventually the powers of this Age will be destroyed and man's pride, arrogance and selfishness will be swept aside (Zeph.1:15-18). This will allow man, including and especially the nation of Israel, to see Him and His righteous reign. In John's vision the cloud Jesus sits on is a white cloud. This suggests a righteous element is associated with this particular judgment. This would be consistent with the thought that Jesus' followers are rewarded justly for their faithful testimony throughout the Age. Therefore, the fact that John's vision refers to Jesus sitting on a cloud also suggests that He has returned to the earth during this harvest.

4. Another clue that this harvest is associated with the return of our Lord is the symbol of the sickle. The sickle is what does the harvesting, and this includes separating the wheat from the tares. It has been suggested and it is usually taken for granted that the sickle symbolizes truth. Because the scriptures give us few direct clues to the link between sickle and truth, we need to ask what is it that separates the wheat from

the tares? In other words, what separates the true followers of Jesus from the false followers of Jesus. We know that the true followers of Jesus have heard the call and separated themselves from the confusion of Babylon. Babylon primarily means 'confusion'. Confusion stands opposed to reason, reasonableness and order, and these are hallmarks of truth. It seems reasonable that the truth, and in particular present truth, is the primary force in this separation. It is the Word of God, the truth that discerns the very thoughts and intents of the heart. Those endowed with keen sight like the eagle will be gathered around the 'meat in due season' dispensed by the Lord.

It has already been mentioned that there are important parallels between the Gospel and Jewish Ages. It was the truth that separated the 'Israelites indeed' from the false Israelites in the Jewish Age harvest. It was only a few that were taught by the Law and were brought by the truth to Jesus. It was only a few that could accept that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed of God, the Messiah. Likewise then we can expect that it is the truth that does the separating of the true followers of Jesus from the false during the Gospel Age harvest. It seems reasonable then that the sickle which separates and harvests the wheat from the tares symbolizes truth, and more particularly present truth. However, how does this point to the presence of our Lord during the Gospel Age harvest?

It has already been mentioned that the keenly sighted eagles are gathered around the meat of present truth. We note that the preceding verses associate this with the Second Advent of our Lord. This association of the meat, the due season and the Second Advent of our Lord is made even clearer later in Matthew 24:26-28. We also note that the final destructive forces during the harvest period are not allowed to do their work till the servants of God have been sealed intellectually. This requires knowledge, which in turn requires truth. We are familiar with Daniel's 'time of the end' prophecies (Dan.12:1-4). The resurrection prophecies in verse 2 are set in the harvest time. 1 Thessalonians has already shown us that one of the first works, if not **the** first work, performed by Jesus when He descends from heaven is the raising to life those who are dead in Christ. These would correspond to those in Dan.12:2 who are referred to as 'those who shall awake to everlasting life'. In Dan.12:4 we note that this time is associated with the running to and fro and an increase in knowledge. In Amos 8:11,12 we find the phrase 'run to and fro' probably refers mainly to spiritual knowledge so that the harvest period is associated not just with a general increase in knowledge but also, and particularly, spiritual knowledge. This would tie in with the 'meat in due season' truth that the sickle used by Jesus in the harvest period symbolizes. Therefore, the fact that the sickle is used in the vision to John

links it to the known increase in spiritual knowledge associated with our Lord's Second Advent. This would again suggest that Jesus is present during this harvest period.

Conclusion: It would seem, then, that the clues given in John's vision, namely the sickle, the golden crown, the white cloud as well as the clues given in the parables of the wheat and tares such as the gathering of the wheat into the barn and the destruction of the tares all suggest that Jesus has returned personally and is directly supervising the harvest work. The last question that arises from these two sets of scriptures, having addressed the aforementioned points is, Are we living in the time of the harvest? If we can reasonably answer Yes, then we have another important sign suggesting that our Lord has returned and that we are indeed living in the days of the Son of Man. It has already been mentioned that the harvest time is a separation of the true and false followers of Jesus and that the separation occurs on the basis of truth, particularly present truth. Some of the basic tenets that we regard as truth include the ransom, restitution, the resurrection, the true nature of the soul and hellfire as well as God's plan for the whole world.

The critical question is, How long have these sickle truths been associated with the separation from the system of Babylon of confusion? The answer to this is really a matter of historical record. This time period stretches back over a century now. The rediscovery of these precious truths that we now often take for granted occurred in the middle and towards the end of the nineteenth century. This led to the dissemination of the sickle truths and the consequent separation quickly followed. This separation from false Christian systems on the basis of these truths is a harvest feature, which therefore suggests we are living in the time of the harvest and therefore in the days of the Son of Man.

In the spirit of open discussion this presentation has sought to explore this apparently important sign of Jesus' return. We do not usually speak about the sign when we discuss the signs of His return, and this is why it has been focussed on here in the hope that the points raised may be considered in the light of present truth.

May the Lord add His blessing.

(ES:04)

OUR HIGH PRIEST

When looking into the qualifications and status of our high Priest we need look no further than Hebrews. Let us start with Hebrews 4:14-16 "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." (KJV)

Let us take a few moments to look at the reason for the writing of the epistle to the Hebrews, the lessons that were intended for them and of course their application to those who follow Christ to-day. It was written to the Hebrew people as James puts it in his epistle in James 1:1 "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings." (NIV) But more especially it was to those who had come to accept Christ as their Saviour and thus were "Israelites indeed" as well as to those amongst the Gentiles who have been "grafted" into the promises of God to Abraham by union with Christ, the true and faithful seed.

To appreciate the reason for the book of Hebrews, and the great understanding that it can bring to us about Christ in his role as the high priest we must mentally take a step back to when it was written, and get our

orientation as though we were living under those conditions. The question of the Law Covenant was a burning issue in the Early Church, not only to the Hebrews, but also to the Gentiles, many of whom came under the influence of the Hebrew followers. It seemed, especially to the Hebrews, impossible that the Law Covenant was no longer necessary and that the Gentiles were to gain access to the Abrahamic covenant through Christ. It was written for the purpose of counteracting the powerful error of the day that the Law covenant was still in operation and their tenacious adherence to it. To many it had a dominating influence from which they were having great difficulty freeing themselves. The Epistle was written to prove to them that a totally new dispensation of grace and not of works had been ushered in through Jesus at Pentecost.

It was not written to the Jews, with the intention of converting those who did not believe in Christ, but to the Hebrews, those who were the children of Abraham in the true sense, who had accepted Christ, not those who were Jews by birthright only. The aim of the apostle was to strengthen and establish their faith, to acknowledge God's dealings with Israel, and also to show how the new dispensation provided a new and living way of access to God, their Heavenly Father.

Paul reminds them in Heb 1:1-3 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many

times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (NIV) Thus he was showing them the connection with the Old Testament prophets, their purpose in bringing God's word to the Israelites and how God finally sent his Son to them to bring them back to the faith that Abraham had. Christ was the fulfillment of many of the prophecies of old, and those who were students of the scripture were expecting His coming. We read in Luke 3:15 "And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not." (KJV)

Let us return to Heb.14. 4 "Seeing then that we have a great high priest" (KJV) Paul here brings out the point that Christ was "a great high priest" and further in Heb 7:17-21:-"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (NIV) The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" (NIV)

Melchizedek is first mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20: "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." (NIV) In these verses we see Melchizedek portrayed as both King of Salem and also as Priest of God Most High. The Hebrew word for God in this instance is the same as used in other places and rendered "God Almighty" in Genesis 17:1,(NIV) and "The Everlasting God" in Genesis 21:33 (KJV). Melchizedek worshipped the same God as Abraham who recognized him as a Priest.

Melchizedek appears next in Psalm 110:4 "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek'." (NIV) This Psalm is of special interest because Jesus refers to it in Matt 22:44, Mark 12:36 and Luke 20:42-43 and it is regarded as one of the Messianic Psalms. It shows us that the ideal ruler of the Hebrew nation and thus all mankind would be one who can combine in his person both the role of Priest and King. Paul in Hebrews uses Melchizedek to show forth Jesus Christ as the final and perfect High Priest. Hebrews 5:7-10

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek." (NIV)

To show forth Jesus Christ as the final and perfect High Priest, Paul looks into the fact that the Levitical priesthood had failed, being unable to bring the people to God. Their sacrifices were only temporary, they could not bring eternal life, and only Christ with his more perfect sacrifice was able to bring about their reconciliation to God. Another argument that shows that Christ was the fulfillment of this prophecy in Psalm 110 is that he came out of Judah, a tribe that did not have any connection to the Levitical priesthood. While the claims of the old priesthood were based on genealogy, God ordained Christ's priesthood.

Paul also speaks of the High Priest Aaron, telling us how he was selected by God in Hebrews 5: 4 "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was..." (NIV) Aaron and his sons were chosen of God to be the priests to serve him. The Tribe of Levi was separated from all the tribes of Israel, separated and purified unto the Lord: Numbers 8:5-7- "The LORD said to Moses: 'Take the Levites from among the other Israelites and make them ceremonially clean. To purify them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them; then have them shave their whole bodies and wash their clothes, and so purify themselves'." (NIV) Verse 11 "Aaron is to present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the Israelites, so that they may be ready to do the work of the LORD". Verse 14 "In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be mine". Verses 21-22 "The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD and made atonement for them to purify them". After that, the Levites came to do their work at the Tent of Meeting under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses". The special position that Aaron held, that of High Priest, and the fact that he had been specially selected by God is shown in Numbers 17:6-8:- "And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of

Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.” (KJV)

Later in Hebrews Paul tells us (Hebrews 7:11-12):- “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come - one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.” (NIV) This we realise happened at our Lord’s death and the rending of the veil of the temple. Thus was exposed the Most Holy, the area that only the High Priest on special occasions was allowed to enter. This brought to an end the sacrifices that the Levitical priesthood had performed, as well as bring to an end the Law Covenant as we are told Colossians 2:13-14:- “God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” (NIV) They had served their purpose as we are told in Galatians 3:24-25 “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” (KJV)

It is of interest that only a very few of the High Priests are mentioned, in the Bible, one who is mentioned is Eli who comforted Hannah when she went to the temple to pray for a male child. The result was a son, Samuel. 1 Samuel. 1:20; “So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I asked the LORD for him’.” (NIV) Samuel was returned to the temple to serve God. The other high priest that is well known to all Bible Students, and certainly to the Hebrews to whom Paul wrote, was Caiaphas the high priest at the time of our Lord’s death. It was Caiaphas who issued the statement after our Lord had raised Lazarus “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” (John 11:50 NIV)

Paul introduces us to the subject of Christ as our high priest in Hebrews chapter 2. Let us turn to verses 9-10 “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering”. (NIV) He is setting up his argument for the better high priest by first showing our Lord’s position when born on earth. John the Baptist also realized the position our Lord had when he said in Mark 1:7 “After me will

come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie”. (NIV)

This was then reinforced with the acknowledgement by God at Jesus’ baptism when he said “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) Paul then continues on in Hebrews 2:16 to remind them that he had descended to help mankind, “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants”. (NIV) He then tells us of his purpose in verses 17-18. “For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”. (NIV) Paul then tells us in Hebrews 3:1 “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess”. (NIV)

In chapter 4 of Hebrews, Paul brings out the point that our high priest has “passed into the heavens”(verse 14 KJV) This seems to parallel with Aaron, and the High Priests that followed, who once a year went into the Most Holy Place in the temple to offer the blood of atonement in the presence of God. Christ has gone into the heavens to make intercession for us at the mercy seat of God, as the Son of God. Christ had fulfilled the first part of his priesthood on earth, that of dying for all mankind. The last part of our verse states “Let us hold fast our profession” or, as the NIV puts it, “Let us hold firmly to the faith we possess”. Here Paul exhorts us that as our High Priest has passed into the Heavens this should encourage us to hold firmly to our faith. Our Lord has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. He has not deserted us because he has trod the path showing us the way to the Heavenly Father.

Following on to verse 15, Paul tells us “For we have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” (KJV) Our High Priest is not cold and unfeeling. We have one who is abundantly qualified to sympathise with us in our afflictions and to whom therefore we may look for both aid and support in our trials as we try to follow in his footsteps. During his time on earth our Lord demonstrated this quality many times. The shortest verse in our Bible: John 11:35, (“Jesus wept”) is a famous verse showing his compassion to Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus, showing the profound effect the death of one human being had on him. He also showed his distress over the entire nation of Israel in Matthew 23:37:- “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as

a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing", (NIV) Our Lord knew that their destruction for rejection of the son of God was near at hand.

Even in his most trying hour just before his death He showed compassion for his disciples at the garden of Gethsemane where he had gone to pray. We read in Matthew 26:43-44 "when he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time". (NIV) His compassion is shown vividly when he was on the cross, in agony and just before his death, when he turned to his disciple. "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19:26-27.NIV)

Our Lord's tenderness and sympathy attract those of us who are weak or in need and his kindness does more than anything else to encourage those who have to encounter the difficulties and dangers of the narrow way. This is just as well when we realise what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are." (NIV) We realise that in ourselves we do not have the power to overcome the problems of our journey but must rely solely on the power of our Heavenly Father.

Paul then continues in Hebrew 4:15: "But (he) was in all points tempted like as we are" (KJV) or as the Diaglott puts it, "Tried in all respects". He was subject to all the kinds of trials to which we can be and he is therefore able to sympathise with us and to aid us. He was tempted in the literal sense, after his baptism at Jordan, as we are told in Matthew 4:1-3 "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him." (NIV) The first temptation was in respect to his God given powers; he was very hungry and there was no food available. The adversary suggested that he use his miraculous powers to make the stones become bread. This he could have done for we remember that on more than one occasion he miraculously provided food to feed the multitudes, and at another time he turned water into the choicest wines, but on this occasion he refused to use this power to satisfy his own hunger. He realised that the purpose for which

his father had led him into the wilderness was for prayer and meditation to prepare him for his sacrificial work.

The second temptation was to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, thus calling the attention of all the people to him with his super human powers. The adversary knew that God had promised to protect him- Matthew 4:6-7: "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (NIV) He refused to tempt God: the written word was his refuge and strength in every temptation.

We too, can be tempted to do things in a spirit of recklessness hoping that God will shield us from the results of a course that would be contrary to the law of nature, or to save us from consequences which would be the natural result of certain actions. This would be arrogant on the part of a child of God. Our bodies belong to the Lord and we have no right to do anything unnecessary which would be a risk of injury or death. Only duty or necessity would excuse such an action.

The final temptation of our Lord was one where he was offered control of all the kingdoms of Earth without the suffering, without taking the painful course set forth by his Heavenly Father. If he would just fall down and worship Satan, acknowledging his authority instead of Jehovah. Matthew 4:8-10: "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (NIV) So on every point the adversary was foiled. Jesus had as a shield the Word of God and was safe from attack.

This sort of temptation may come to us, we might be told that if only we were not so straight-laced but were to become more cooperative with the world and its spirit, we might get along better and have a greater influence on people. This was the adversary's argument with our Master - cooperate with me and we will bring the whole world to great blessings. We see some church systems compromising their standards to fit in with worldly notions and with the government of the day, trying to curry favour using the excuse that if they do this they will be more in tune with the people and more will attend. In doing so, the word of God has to be watered down or rejected, so we too have to be careful that we do not compromise our beliefs in order to be popular. We too have to say 'get thee

hence Satan, we worship our Father in heaven, and Him only will we serve'..

Our Lord in the literal sense was also persecuted, he was poor, he was despised, he suffered bodily pain, he endured the sorrows of a lingering and most cruel death, that of the cross. In Matthew 8:20, the Lord tells us "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (NIV) There were times when he was tired, there were times when he felt he was let down by his disciples, by the nation of Israel and by the Scribes and Pharisees. This culminated in Mark 11:15-18 "On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him." (NIV)

Our Lord could have been tempted to return evil for evil, our Lord was so tempted just before his crucifixion when he was delivered to the high priests and taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin. He could have shown them up with his knowledge of the scriptures, he could have delivered a scathing attack on the High Priest at that time and he might truthfully have made comment on his character and those of the Scribes and Pharisees. We know He had the eloquence of speech as we are told in John 7:44-46 "And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, never man spake like this man". (KJV) He did not use his eloquence to defend himself but held his peace and allowed himself as a lamb to be lead to the slaughter. We too can be tempted to render evil for evil, but we are told "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:20-21(KJV)

In the garden of Gethsemane it appears that Jesus felt momentarily that he did not have the strength to go on-Matthew. 26:39: "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'" However we know that the Father provided all our Lord's needs and will provide ours also. Our Lord passed all the tests, as it says "yet without sin" or "without yielding to sin". He steadfastly refused to yield to any appeals from his flesh to escape or to lessen his suffering. 1 Peter 2:21-

23: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps... He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to Him who judges justly." (NIV) Paul also states further in Hebrews 7:26: "he was holy, harmless, undefiled" (KJV) -The great High Priest of our Christian profession was without sin, thus able to assist those of us who are sinners and who put our trust in him.

Now let us turn to the last verse of our opening scripture, Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need". (NIV) What a beautiful expression "the throne of grace!" How many times have we used this expression in our prayers to our Heavenly Father. A throne is the seat of sovereignty, the seat of power; but a throne of grace is designed to represent a sovereign seated to dispense mercy and pardon. This was first pictured in the temple service where God is represented as seated in the most holy place on the mercy seat. The Jewish high priest approached that seat or throne of divine majesty with the blood of the atonement to make intercession for the people and to plead for pardon.

In the case of the Great High Priest, Christ, having shed his own blood to make atonement for our sins has made it possible for us to come before the throne with boldness, not because of our own merit but through Christ. We are assured that God is merciful and we therefore come without hesitation or trembling to ask for all the mercy that we need. But not only does God offer us mercy, but also grace, i.e. favour, strength, help, counsel, direction, support for the various duties and trials of life as we venture up the narrow way. We have the privilege that we may come before God and ask through our Lord Jesus for all the strength, direction, and support that we need with the assurance given here by Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:31-32: (KJV)

Let us take a final look at our opening verses in Hebrews 4:14-16 "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. (KJV)

Amen.

(RC:06)

BUTTERFLIES—a reflection

Butterflies are among the most beautiful insects in God's creation. But the most significant thing about them is their metamorphosis - the transformation they undergo to become such beautiful creatures.

After they hatch from the egg butterflies begin life as a larva or caterpillar. They eat constantly and grow rapidly into an enormous, not very attractive, grub. They attach themselves to a twig and form a hard outer shell called a chrysalis. The chrysalis is often camouflaged to offer protection from predators while the unattractive slow crawling caterpillar is being transformed inside into a beautiful flying butterfly.

This transformation lends itself so well to an analogy of our transformation in Christ. One analogy is the protective hard shell of the chrysalis compared with the protective spiritual armour we must put on to guard against spiritual predators. However, the more appealing analogy is the *invisible* change that takes place *inwardly*; the transformation of something unattractive to something of beauty. But what does this transformation involve for us?

Romans 12:2 urges us *not* to allow our character to embrace the unattractive elements of the world, but to be a part of the beautiful things. *"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God."*

This thought is expressed similarly in Ephesians 4:22-24. *"Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

There are two elements to this. Firstly, we must not conform to this world by embracing the unattractive things. *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* (1 John. 2:16).

Secondly, the renewing of our minds - changing our thinking. This is not simply changing our thoughts, but it is actually *putting off* our old thoughts and actions, as well as *putting on* God's thoughts.

This same sentiment is expressed as a positive instruction in Philippians 4:8 *"... whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

This change is something that takes place *inwardly*, because whatever controls our thinking controls our lives. In our caterpillar stage, we allow Satan to influ-

ence our thinking because we are immersed in our human emotions and therefore can only react from a frail human perspective. While we are in this stage, it is difficult for us, especially through trials, to always be a genuine and true witness for Christ. The witness that people remember the most, is not what we say but what we do, which is motivated by our inward thoughts.

So we have to learn to react, and to see all things that happen to us, from God's perspective. That requires a real mind shift. The most important reason for mind renewal is that if there is no mind change, then there is no life change. For us to transform completely to the butterfly stage, we have to take on the *mind of Christ*, so that there is an outward manifestation of our inward transformation!

What a challenge! How do we acquire the mind of Christ? Perhaps a starting point might be to take on His mantle of true humility. Philippians 2:3-5 instructs us to *"Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."*

So once we have adopted Christ's example, we can rejoice with the words - *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come"*. (2 Cor.5:17)

But unlike the butterfly, whose transformation is a one-off event, we must ensure that we work at staying in tune with Christ in our transformed stage and not slip back to the unattractive stage.

So we must focus on the butterfly, not the caterpillar. We do this by following the words of Romans. 12:1. *"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*

(All quotations above are from the RSV)

Albert Orsborn wrote:

***Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity;
O Thou Spirit divine,
All my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.***

LOVE ...IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

The Apostle Paul's statement - *"though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"* (1 Cor. 13:3 KJV) - might have been more meaningful to the church at Corinth than it is to us today.

The offering of animal sacrifices has been part of Man's religious worship since very early times. Genesis 4:4 records Abel bringing *"of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof"*. *"Bringing of the fat"* infers that Abel had killed the lamb and brought it as an offering unto the Lord. In Genesis 8:20 we read that Noah, after the flood, *"builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar"*. Genesis 31:54 records Jacob *"offering sacrifice"* upon the mount when he separated from Laban, and Genesis 46:1-3 records that later he offered sacrifices to God at Beersheba before *"he went down into Egypt"*.

Israel accustomed to sacrifices

Consequently it is not surprising that, when God commissioned Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, He told Moses to say to Pharaoh - *"The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God."* (Exodus 3:18) Pharaoh refused Moses' request, but Moses and Aaron persisted and repeated their request to Pharaoh. (Exodus 5:3, 8) Finally, when Pharaoh agreed to the Israelites leaving Egypt, Moses contended with Pharaoh to allow them to take their herds so that they could continue to offer their sacrifices: *"Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, 'Go ye, serve the Lord, only let your flocks and your herds be stayed; ... And Moses said, 'Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the Lord our God. Our cattle also shall go with us ...'"* (Exodus 10:24-26)

With this aspect of Israel's history in mind, we see that the idea of sacrificing lambs at the passover was not, in itself, unfamiliar to them, although the sprinkling of the blood on the door posts and lintels was new. (Exodus 12:1-11) The annual observance of the passover sacrifice - *"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"* (Exodus 12:14) further engrained the offering of sacrifices into their culture.

Consistent with this background, the Israelites were required to *"... build an altar unto the Lord thy God ... and offer burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord thy God"* when they entered the promised land. (Deut. 27:1 - 7)

The Law Covenant added numerous other burnt offerings to the customs and obligations of the nation of Israel. (Exodus 20:24; 23:14-19) Burnt offerings were required when the priests were anointed, (Exodus 29) and on other occasions the Israelites were to offer voluntary sacrifices. (Leviticus 1:1-10; 22:18-21)

The Gentile nations

The Gentiles also had a history of offering sacrifices to

their gods. In Exodus 34:12 - 17 we read that God instructed Moses to *"take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee. But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves. For thou shalt worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice"*.

And so it seems that offering sacrifices was an inherent desire (or need) of both Israelite and Gentile, at least of that era. Whether the desire was inherent or not, it is evident that the offering of sacrifices was well engrained in their culture.

That offering sacrifices was still being practised when Paul wrote to the Corinthian church is evidenced by the fact that the Corinthian brethren had written to Paul seeking direction regarding *"the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols..."*. (1 Cor. 8:4). So prevalent was the practice that the surplus was offered for sale *"in the shambles"*. (1 Cor. 10:25)

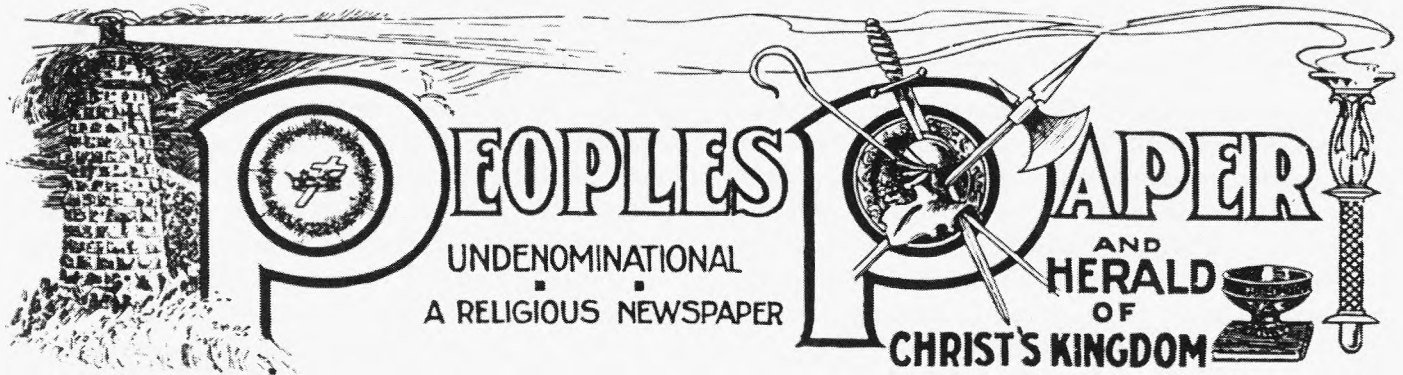
Martyrdom

Offering an animal sacrifice was a gruesome ceremony - it terminated a life, albeit a life of the brute creation. Of much greater moment is the sacrifice of human life. Many human lives have been terminated in war and by other acts of homicide; others have been terminated because of one's conviction that it was contrary to God's will for them to comply with the forces of evil. Such is martyrdom. Many Faithful of old were called upon to pay the supreme sacrifice in testimony to their faith in God, as we read in Hebrews 11:37: *"... they were stoned, ... sawn asunder, ... and 'slain with the sword ..."*. Martyrdom introduces another dimension to sacrificing - not just the spilling of animal blood but the sacrifice (laying down) of human life. Martyrdom is on a level well above the sacrifice of animals. Notwithstanding the drama and agony associated with animal sacrifices, and the tremendous courage and faith necessary to enable one to suffer martyrdom, the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian brethren that *"though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing"*.

Is it possible for us to fully comprehend how important it is for us to develop the fruit of love? It surpasses the offering of all animal sacrifices, and it also surpasses even the greatest sacrifice Man can offer, that of giving his or her own life.

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THE PRIVILEGE OF REMEMBERING HIM

The release of the nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage in the days of Pharaoh and Moses was one of the greatest miracles that had occurred on the Earth to that time. Even with modern organisational aids such as computers, telecommunication facilities and mechanised transport, the size of the event would present modern day organisers with a challenging task. The record is in Exodus 12: 29-39: *"And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead. And he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, 'Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also'. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, 'We be all dead men'. ... And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. ... And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual."*

The **scale** of the exercise alone represents a daunting task. The number of adults on foot - 600,000 - would have presented a challenge in itself, not to mention the children and the *"flocks and herds, even very much cattle"*, all of whom were also on foot. Such a large number bears testimony to the statement that *"when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt"*. (Acts 7:17) So while the organisation of such

a large number might be a miracle in human terms, we are assured that it was all pre-planned by God as He had previously *"sworn to Abraham"*.

The **haste** of the exodus is expressed simply in the words *"that they might send them out of the land in haste"*, and *"they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry"*. Those few words might not convey an accurate picture of the short time in which their departure was accomplished.

Another factor that adds to the **miraculous nature** of the exodus is that the Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years as recorded in Exodus 12:40-43: *"Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt"*. The Israelites who left Egypt in the exodus had lived in Egypt all their lives, and so the idea of leaving what had become, in earthly terms, their *"homeland"* was completely new to them.

Israel's memory of the exodus

Nevertheless the Israelites soon lost sight of the great miracle that God had performed in bringing them out of Egypt *"by the hand of Moses"* (Isa. 63:12). Within a few months of leaving Egypt, when dwelling in the desert at Mount Sinai, the people rebelled. The record is in Exodus 32:1-6: *"And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves to-gether unto Aaron, and said unto him, 'Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought*

In This Issue

The Privilege of Remembering Him	1
The Pre-Human Existence of Jesus Christ	4
A Mountain Top Experience	7
God is Good	9
Love...Suffers Long	12

us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him'. And Aaron said unto them, 'Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me'. And all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt'. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, 'Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD'. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."

It might seem remarkable that the Israelites could so soon turn away from the true God who had delivered them from Egypt, to worship an idol made by human hands. However the incident shows the necessity for God's requirement, by way of the Passover memorial, for them to each year recall their deliverance. The requirement is recorded in Exodus 12:14- 27: "*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 forever.*"...: "*And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever.*"... "*And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.*"

The memorial ceremony was to be kept "**throughout their generations by a feast by an ordinance forever**", with a requirement for their children to perpetuate the memorial being specifically included in God's instructions. Consequently Israel celebrated the memorial of the Passover every year and Jesus was accustomed to that frequency: "*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast*". (Luke 2:41-42) And so it was that during His ministry Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples.

Only Israelites to keep the Passover

The original Passover procedure applied only to the

Israelites who were in bondage in Egypt. However the ordinance that required Israel to keep the memorial of the Passover each year provided for strangers to eat it: "*And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof'. But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and a hired servant shall not eat thereof ... All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is home born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. Thus did all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they*". (Exodus 12:43-50)

The spiritual fulfillment

The Passover was a miraculous event. However the greater significance is its spiritual consequences and there are many pictures that can be drawn.

Jesus is our Passover lamb - "*For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*". (1 Cor. 5:7) He met all the criteria that were required of the lamb at the initial Passover in Egypt: "*Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year ...*" Jesus was without blemish: "*For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, ...*". (Heb. 7:26) . Such was the requirement for the ransom price; the equivalent of Adam before he transgressed.

The blood of the passover lamb protected the first born of Israel from the angel of death - it is Jesus' blood that saves the firstborn of the *Israel of God* (Gal. 6:16) from wrath: "*Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him*". (Rom. 5:9)

Just as God required Israel to remember their release from Egyptian bondage by repeating the feast at the same time each year, Christians (*the "Israel of God"* - Gal. 6:16) are to remember the sacrifice of our Passover Lamb each year: "*For as often⁽¹⁾ as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come*". (1 Cor. 11:26)

Only Christians to keep the memorial

The original application of the Passover to the first-born in Egypt, and the subsequent admission of strangers who had been "*bought for money*", and had been circumcised, foreshadowed God's plan in that the Greater Passover applied firstly to those who were Israelites by birth. The admission of strangers may be considered to foreshadow the grafting in of the

Gentiles into the Israel of God. (Romans 11:17) The picture is complete in detail - they must come in a condition of circumcision, not a circumcision of the flesh but of the heart: *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God"*. (Romans 2:28-29) Thus we can see that those who are not Israelites by nature but have been grafted into the olive tree, may remember the sacrifice of Jesus by keeping His memorial provided they are circumcised in their heart. There is nothing new about this application of the concept of circumcision because Israel should have understood the spiritual significance of fleshly circumcision: *"Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem..."* (Jer. 4:4)

The format of memorials

The format of the way by which people are remembered in the secular world varies. Jesus did not request any sophisticated format. Jesus had eaten the Passover with His disciples year by year in accordance with God's requirement. It was during His last Passover memorial supper with them that He asked them to remember Him. *"And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, 'With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God'. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come'. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: **this do in remembrance of me**'. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you'."* (Luke 22:14 - 20 KJV) The format by which Jesus' disciples were to remember Him was simple - there was no fanfare of trumpets, no street parade and no one in special robes. He simply asked His disciples to remember Him, and He asked them in the privacy of the upper room, out of sight of the masses, and with no public ceremony.

Jesus' desire to be remembered was not centred on glorifying Himself. After eating the Passover memorial with his disciples, and asking them to remember Him, he retired with them to the garden where He prayed to His father: *"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might*

know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was". (John 17:1-5) His prayer was not centred on Himself; His only wish was for His father to be glorified. All He asked for Himself was to be reunited with His father in the same relationship that He had with God in heaven before He came to earth.

Personal relationship

In every case, one critical factor that determines the desire to remember anyone, and which also affects the depth of feeling during a memorial ceremony, is the nature of the relationship between the two people; the closer the relationship the greater is the desire to remember them.

Only Jesus' disciples ate the supper at which Jesus asked them to remember Him, which is consistent with any memorial; only those who have had the privilege of some association with the one to be remembered can remember them. So, just as it is a privilege to *"know him, and the power of his resurrection"*, (Philippians 3:10) so also it is a privilege to be invited to remember Him.

And so it is today. Those to whom Jesus' life and death mean nothing do not remember Him at all. It is only those who have been blessed to know Him, and to whom He is *"wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"* (1 Cor. 1:30) who are invited to remember Him. It is only those who appreciate His great personal sacrifice in coming to Earth to be Man's redeemer, the cruel and gruesome nature of His death, and the wonderful consequences of His sacrifice, who are truly able to remember Him.

While the ceremony was and is simple and private, it is the most important ceremony ever to be celebrated by mankind, far more important than the Passover memorial that the Israelites ate year by year to remind them of their deliverance from Egypt. So let us who have been invited to remember Him in this simple but all important way, come with joy and gratitude to His table, and *"keep the feast"*. (1 Cor. 5:8)

(1) Strong's Concordance: #3740 : hosakis -*"how* (that is, with #302, *so*) *many times* as: - as oft (-en) as."

The definition *"how, as many times as"*, is not an exhortation to eat it often, but *"whenever"*, i.e. from now on do it in remembrance of Him and not in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt. This definition is consistent with the other verses where it occurs in the New Testament 1 Cor. 11:26 and Rev. 11:6 - and with the New International Version translation *"whenever"* in 1 Cor. 11:25 and 26.

THE PRE-HUMAN EXISTENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

John 8:58: *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."*

The doctrine of the pre-human existence of Jesus Christ has been with us from the days when Jesus himself walked upon this earth during his first Advent. Its beginning comes from our Lord's very own words, such as: (**John 6:38**) "I have come down from heaven," and (**John 6:51**) "I am the living bread which came down from heaven."

When it became apparent to Jesus that many of his disciples were not quite sure about this claim he said, in **John 6:61-62**, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" We can see that what Jesus said was understood by his followers after his resurrection and ascension. From the words of Peter, in **Acts 2:32-33**, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God (i.e. where he was before), and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet.' Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

We see from the Gospels that Jesus declared the same truth to the Pharisees:

John 8:14, "I know whence I have come and whither I am going;"

John 8:23, "I am from above ... I am not of this world;"

John 8:42, "I proceeded and came forth from God;" and culminating in our title verse,

John 8:58, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

This doctrine, then, forms part of the foundation of Christianity and without it one can make no real sense of the resurrection or of the atoning work that was carried out by our beloved Redeemer and Saviour, our very own Lord Jesus Christ.

However, many theologians dispute the validity of this doctrine. For example, John Macquarrie, in "**Jesus Christ in Modern Thought**," says "Jesus Christ pre-existed in the mind and purpose of God, and I doubt if one should look for any other kind of pre-existence." He adds, "I would reject any personal pre-existence as mythological." Another writer, ²John Hick, in "**The**

Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age," says that Jesus was "a human being extraordinarily open to God's influence and thus living to an extraordinary extent as God's agent on earth, 'incarnating' the divine purpose for human life." Hick espouses the basic error of liberal Christianity: He considers the importance of Christ to lie in his teaching rather than his work. He sees Jesus as simply one teacher among many. Such writers attempt to argue against this doctrine, to explain it away to such an extent that it loses any value and, as a consequence, distort the understanding of God's work in history.

It is important to recognise that, in any research, where one starts determines where one will finish. In the above works there is an underlying presupposition that there can be no supernatural or miraculous events in our world. Methodologically, human reason has been exalted to such a level that if an event cannot be explained scientifically, there is a real tendency to disbelieve its truth or reality. The universe is, then, a closed system and in such a system there is no room for Jesus of Nazareth having pre-existed his earthly life in any meaningful sense.³

There are two reasons why it is appropriate to delve into this topic. Firstly, the New Testament is adamant that eternal life is attainable only by a deliberate and intelligent acceptance of, and faith in, Jesus Christ. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" said Paul to the jailer in **Acts 16:31**. "If you will confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" he said in **Romans 10:9**. And Peter, in **Acts 4:12**, insists that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." It stands to reason therefore that to gain an intelligent and full appreciation of Jesus Christ, we need to learn as much as we can about him, before his earthly ministry, during his earthly ministry, and after his earthly ministry. We cannot gain a full appreciation by limiting ourselves to the period between his birth and crucifixion. Secondly, it is apparent that God does act in history, intervening to bring about his purposes. But why? "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him" as the Psalmist asks in **Psalms 8:4**. Here we are trying to fathom the nature of God Himself, the nature and

¹ J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990)

² J. Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993)

³ See D. McCready, *He Came Down From Heaven*, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, (September, 1997)

extent of his love for us. The answer cannot be obtained without a knowledge of the pre-human existence of Jesus Christ, for it is only as a result of that knowledge that we can really begin to appreciate and embrace that wonderful passage, **John 3:16**, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

In The Beginning

Genesis 1:1 states "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

John 1:1 states "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Jesus, as The Logos, was with God at the beginning. We know that God (the LORD, Jehovah) is from everlasting to everlasting. He is the Everlasting God. (**Genesis 21:33, Psalms 93:2**) The Logos, however, was **created**, the first creation of Jehovah, "the beginning of God's creation" as per **Revelation 3:14**. There can be no disputing that Jehovah, the Heavenly Father is not identical to the Logos. This is not the place to discuss that issue but suffice it to say that the Bible is clear-cut on this issue. Augustine was in grave error when he wrote "Do not imagine any interval or period when the Father was and the Son was not." The Bible expressly states that the Logos "was the beginning of God's creation." One theologian, T.C. Oden has correctly stated "the decisive question of Christian testimony is not whether it is palatable but whether it is true. The vocation of the theologian places the writer under obligation to deliver an accurate reading of Christian teaching, even when it points to a narrow way."⁴

The Logos was with God in a greater sense than physical proximity. The Greek word used, *pros*, instead of *meta*, denotes direction – toward, to, unto – and suggests one looking to another. In this case the Logos was looking to Jehovah, learning from Him, becoming like Him in his character. In all the ages prior to his earthly ministry, Jesus learned from the Father, growing to reflect the same character, disposition and spirit. Paul tells us, in **Colossians 1:15-17**, that "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him." God, Jehovah, is the supreme creator as testified many times, for example **Ephesians 3:9**, "God who created all things," **Mark 13:19** "the creation which God created," and in **Revelation 10:6**, "him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it." Whilst it is true that God, Jehovah,

is the supreme creator, it is also true that it was Jehovah's good pleasure to work "in" or "through" the Logos to accomplish his purposes. As the first-born of all creation he was used as a "master workman" assisting Jehovah in the creation of all that followed. The distinction is summed up in **1 Corinthians 8:6**, "There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

The concept of the Logos 'learning' from God, being taught by the Father, is noteworthy because it shows that, notwithstanding his great work in creation, or of his roles as Michael the Archangel and the 'Angel of the Lord', the Logos had yet more learning to do. Here we see the wisdom of God in sending the Logos to earth as Jesus, who, being already holy, harmless, and sinless, was *made perfect* through sufferings. We read, in **Hebrews 5:8**, that "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who would obey him."

It would be remiss not to here quote that lovely passage from **Proverbs 8:22-31**

22 The LORD (Jehovah) created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.

23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.

25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth;

26 before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.

27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

30 then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,

31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men. (RSV)

This passage has, since the earliest days of the church,

⁴ T.C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989) 2.ix. quoted in D. McCready, *He Came Down from Heaven*, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (Sept 1997)

been applied to our Lord Jesus Christ in his pre-human existence, and there is no reason why it should not be so, for surely he was the personification of God's wisdom; and in his earthly ministry, he did understand himself to be the revealer of divine wisdom. By his unique use of the term "*Amen*", translated as "Truly" or "Verily", Jesus claimed that his words possessed an absolute certainty. "Truly I tell you" or "Verily I say unto you," as in **Matthew 6:5 and Mark 10:29-30**, are to be understood as "You can be certain that what I say is true, *because I say so.*" This is why "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." (See **Matthew 7:28-29, Mark 1:27**) Furthermore, he taught using the forms of past wisdom teachers: proverbs, riddles, parables, paradox, poetry etc. He did not see himself, however, as simply another wisdom teacher but the personification of wisdom itself. We see, in **Matthew 12:38-42**, he said, "and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. behold, something greater than Solomon is here." His unique relationship with the Father, as expressed in **Matthew 11:27** "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son", made Jesus the ultimate wise man. That is why the rejection of him and his teachings would bring terrible judgment. That is why he could say, in **Matthew 23:29-39**, "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" for not only had Israel shed the blood of the prophets, murdered the prophets and wise men and scribes, killed, crucified and scourged them, but here, when faced with the ultimate wisdom of God, "they would not."

Michael, the Archangel

The intimate relationship that existed between Jehovah and the Logos, the Father and the Son, at creation did not end there. We see throughout the Old Testament, and in particular, **Daniel 12:1**, that the Logos is also identified as "Michael, the great prince who has charge" over the Israelites. He is, in **Jude 9**, called "the archangel," or chief angel, that is, the first in rank of the 'princes', or the angels. This chief ruler is identified as the Messiah who was to come from the tribe of Judah in **1 Chronicles 5:2**, and with our Lord Jesus at his second advent, in **1 Thessalonians 4:16**, "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the Archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God."

We see him, in **Exodus 33:2**, going before the Israelites, to drive out the "Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites." We see him, in **Exodus 14:21**, parting the waters of the Red Sea. We see him, in **Joshua 5: 13-15**, meeting Joshua prior to the capture of Jericho, announcing himself as "commander of the army of the Lord." We see him, in **Joshua 10:12-14**, "hearkening

to the voice of' Joshua, darkening the sun, so that victory against the Amorites might be achieved. We see him, in **Judges 5:20-21**, causing the Kishon River to sweep away, in a torrent, the forces of Sisera. And we see him, in **2 Kings 19:35**, as "the angel of the Lord", slaying 185,000 Assyrians during the night, causing the departure of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, a departure to his death at the hands of his own sons.

The Angel of the Lord

The term "angel of the Lord" is used many times in the Old Testament and there are many occasions in which we can safely attribute the term to the Logos. We note that the name Michael, means "who is like God?" and the answer to that question was given by Jesus, in **John 14:9**, when he said to Phillip "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

We note that, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar by a spring of water in the wilderness, advising her that her son, Ishmael, would be the father of a great nation, that she, in **Genesis 16:13**, exclaimed "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?". We note that, when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah, the angel of the Lord said to him, in **Genesis 22:12**, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And then, because of Abraham's faith, the angel of the Lord says, in **Genesis 22:18**, "by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." We note that, when Jacob wrestled with a heavenly being, in **Genesis 32:22-32**, he was given a new name, Israel, and blessed. Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." We know, from **Revelation 2:17**, that it is Christ who gives the overcomers a new name, "To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it."

Other notable episodes dealing with the angel of the Lord, the Logos, the Pre-human Jesus, include Balaam and his donkey (**Numbers 22: 21-35**), Gideon and the Midianites (**Judges 6: 11-24**), and the appearances to Manoah and his wife, the parents of Samson (**Judges 13**). When Manoah enquired as to the name of the angel, "the angel of the Lord said to him, 'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?'" (**Judges 13:18**). This, of course, is one of the names of the Messiah, as prophesied in **Isaiah 9:6**, "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."

Conclusion

"Unto us a son is given." Can we see the extent of God's love for us in this verse? The Son of God, the only begotten Son, the Son who did exist with the Father even before the creation of the world, the Son who was the mouthpiece of the Father, the director of all His activities, the Son who was "daily his delight," this Son is given to us for sacrifice. What the Father could not bear for Abraham to do, he did. He did turn his face from his Son to the extent that the Son cries out from the cross of Calvary, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:46, Psalm 22**). We have seen that the Son, as Jesus Christ, was perfected through his sufferings and, after his resurrection and ascension, was restored again to the right hand of God. As reward for his faithfulness, he was conferred a still higher honour, to be a partaker of the "divine nature," as in **John 5:26**: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." As for us, we can now appreciate the words in **John 3:16** a little better. Life is the gift of the Father. It is what he wants the whole world to have. It is why we were created. He so loves the world that "he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He gave his Son to be our

Redeemer and Saviour as foretold in **Hosea 13:14**, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."

A knowledge of the pre-human existence of Jesus Christ enables us to understand, love and appreciate him far more than we could without such knowledge. We read in **Philippians 2:6-11**, "though he was in the form of God, (he) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (RSV)

**Jesus, the very thought of Thee,
Brings comfort, peace and rest;
O! how I long Thy face to see,
And be for ever blest." BSH 191**

A MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE

It was a nice afternoon; the sun was shining, the temperature was mild and there was no wind. We had not been away from the house for a couple of weeks and we all felt like a break. And so the suggestion was made that we take some time out and go and climb a local mountain. It was only 1200 feet high (350 metres) but none of us had climbed it before, even though we had lived in the area for more than 20 years.

The drive out to the mountain was easy - a smooth road and we were able to drive our car to the foot of the mountain. No physical effort was required.

At the foot of the mountain we had to leave our car and start the climb on foot. It immediately became apparent that progress now depended on individual effort. However initially that was not difficult. The path was well worn from those who had gone this way previously and the incline was gentle. However as we progressed, the gradient became steeper and we began to realise that if the gradient continued to increase it would be a daunting task to reach the peak. Nevertheless we also realised that all we had to do at that stage was to keep putting one foot in front of the other. By doing that we would progress, little by little, towards our goal.

As we climbed, the path became narrower, less well

used, steeper and there were more difficult obstacles to negotiate. Looking ahead up the track, the prospect of reaching the top looked to be beyond us. So we paused and looked back along the path along which we had come. There was a grand sight, one that we had not seen before. The fields made a uniform pattern, stretching out to a distance that was not possible to imagine. We realised that although the climb so far had been difficult, it afforded benefits available only to those who had made the effort. The view stirred us to continue the climb.

We pressed on; the path became steeper and more tortuous, but obstacles that previously we would have deemed to be impossible to pass became nothing more than obstacles that we had to overcome. We had become conditioned to the climb. Also we were stirred by the grandeur of the view behind and the prospect of a grander view from a higher vantage point.

Finally we reached the summit. The sense of achievement was exhilarating. The view was spectacular; not a tortuous, narrow, winding path but a grand view all around. We could see the wonders of creation. "*O! the prospect, it was so transporting!*"

We sat down and pondered our experience. We soon realised the similarity of our experience with our spiri-

tual climb during our earthly lives.

Before we started to climb our spiritual mountain we lived on the plain. We were totally unaware of the view that was available only to those who were privileged to rise above it. Those who live solely on the plain are fully occupied with the routine matters of life, and are unable to see the grandeur and magnitude of God's plan. But it was not a time to boast: *"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"*. (Eph. 2:3) *"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* (1 Cor. 4:7)

In order to climb the mountain we had to expend personal effort; no one else could climb it for us. This reminded us that we must make the truth our own if we are to enjoy the spiritual vistas available only to those who climb their spiritual mountain. *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."* (1Thess. 5:21) *"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."* (Rom. 14:5) *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* (2 Tim. 2:15)

Just as we had to see the physical view with our eyes - one could not see it for another - so it is with our spiritual sight; no one can see it for us, we must see it for ourselves. And spiritual sight can only be gained by God's grace - *"Paul planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase"*. (1 Cor. 3:6)

Initially the way was easy, just as the Lord leads us gently by the hand, not suffering us *"to be tempted above that ye are able"*. (1 Cor. 10:13) That was the way Jesus nurtured His disciples: *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"*. (John 16:12) However as we progress along the narrow way the path becomes more difficult; *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you"*. (1 Pet. 4:12) In order to overcome we need to keep our objective clearly in mind at all times: *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"*. (Phil. 3:14)

The higher we went the less well used was the path. How accurate is the parable of the sower! *"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it. Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended"*. (Matt. 13:20-21) Rather may we be like those to whom Hebrews 6:9

refers: *"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation ..."* So then, *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised"*. (Heb. 10:23) Let us be diligent *"to make our calling and election sure: for if we do these things, we shall never fall."* (2 Pet. 1:10 - paraphrased)

We can be motivated by looking back to the life we had before we were privileged to climb the mountain. That does not mean looking back with a desire to return, but rather it helps us to keep in mind the vanity of those goals and the greater goal ahead of us. The people "below" were going about their daily business, fully occupied with the temporal issues of life. To them, whatever they were doing seemed to be the right thing to do at the time. However we were reminded that *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"*. (Prov. 14:12) Yes, mankind must do what seems to be right at the time to earn a living, but in the end that way (those activities) will lead to death, and were it not for Jesus' sacrifice and the resurrection of all mankind, the end would indeed be death. *"...Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"*. (1 Cor. 9:25)

Looking back also reminded us of the need to be *"gentle unto all"* (2 Tim. 2:24) because *"the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"*. (Rom 8:22)

Just as the view from the summit was beyond imagination, so we can be assured that our spiritual reward will be wonderful. *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure"*. (1 John 3:2-3) *"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. 4:7-8)

We had no desire to return to the earthly plain, but the time came for us to do so. As we contemplated what that would mean, we called to mind the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:2-5: *"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."*

GOD IS GOOD

(This article has been compiled from an address given by the late Fred Grinsted, of Adelaide, South Australia.)

The intention in this address is not to prove that God is good but to highlight the importance of the fact that God is good. Indeed the fact that "God is good" is the second most important fact in the universe.

To the Christian, the most important fact in the universe is simply "God is!" If God did not exist then nothing would exist.

Many learned and intelligent people either doubt or deny the existence of God. They see wisdom and beauty in the design of the human body and other animals and plants but do not realise that a design requires a designer. They know a force must have a source and have learned a lot about the energy within every atom in every particle of matter but do not identify the source. The fact that they do not have "eyes that see" does not detract from the importance of the truth that God **is**. There does have to be a designer and a source of energy and God is both.

Similarly, the greatness of the number who think of God as harsh and condemning does not mean that they are correct nor does it detract at all from His goodness. We see the importance of God's goodness firstly in that which relates to humanity. However we need to learn of Him and not dictate to Him. God's goodness was manifested in creation itself. *"And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good."* (Gen.1:31)

His goodness is also manifested in His providence. *"He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."* (Matt. 5:45)

It was manifested particularly on those special to God, like Joseph. To his brothers Joseph said *"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."* (Gen. 50:20) This example of Joseph is one that shows us something of just how much higher is His way than our way and His thoughts than our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9) God had a grander plan and purpose than Joseph's brothers. The selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:28) was part of God's plan. It would "soon" bring relief from famine for the people of Israel.

The future

God's goodness has certainly been important in bringing us to where we are. However it is when we

look to the future events that He has planned that we see how the present events show His goodness. Because God is good to all, we can look forward to the future He is still bringing about. There is nothing to fear and when we do not have any fear we can better appreciate His goodness to us in the **present**.

Knowing God is good and all-powerful gives us our reason to **be**. We are part of His creation. We are alive. In our own small way, our very lives are a participation in His creative work. We rejoice **now** in the knowledge that the end product **will be good**. All the miseries around us are temporary. Think of the importance of God's goodness on our very sanity. *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."* (Rom. 8:28) His goodness will work all things together for good for almost every human being. The **good** will be different from individual to individual, but it will always be good.

God created man to be in His image. *"God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness."* (Gen. 1:26) Goodness, including love, is foremost in His character. We should know all about it. We should know just what goodness is.

Think of the ten commandments. Are they not a definition of real goodness? Think of the Law expressed in Leviticus 19:18. *"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."* God here reveals the essence of goodness as well as instructing us in the way we are to continue in His goodness. Obedience to these commands will make God's Kingdom a joy to almost everyone forever.

Goodness does not exclude severity: *"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God"* (Rom.11:22) GOD IS GOD. God had to be severe when the whole creation was threatened: by the flood He removed hybrid people, by brimstone and fire He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. He gave extreme instructions to His people to get rid of the false Gods who called for worship of beastliness and violence. There have been limits to the evils He has permitted to bring about the future good He has planned. It is the goodness of God that man is to emulate, not His severity.

Understanding God's Word.

We accept the authority of the Canon of Scripture: *"because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of*

man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. " (2 Pet.1:21) However, we realise that some of the message from God may have been lost in the idiom of the day, in the translation, or even in the word pictures used to convey thought. We need some rules drawn from the overall presentation of the Bible to **"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."** (1 Thess.5:21)

"God is good" is important in the interpretation and understanding of the Bible. "God is Good" is probably at the top of the rules for understanding the word of God. An example of how understanding that God is good influences one's interpretation can be seen in Exodus 34:6-7 which, on the surface, might seem to be self contradictory: **"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."** *"By no means clear the guilty"* seems to contradict *"forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"* The fact that God is Good means that *"visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation"* (as verse 7 continues) cannot be the end of the matter. Even by human standards, that would not be good. It must be part of a process to bring about a greater good.

How blessed are those who see that the last part of verse 7 applies to this present evil world. In it God permits the evil consequences of sin entering into the world to teach the heinous nature of sin whereas **"Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"** belongs to the future age when all will see the Goodness of God.

The blessing of God's creation

The fact that God is Good is obviously important in that it led to His plan to bless all the families of the earth. **"The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."** (Psa.145:9,16)

Goodness will be paramount in the Kingdom He has planned. God said **"They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain."** (Isa.11:9) **"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."** (Rev.21:4)

Love, a prominent part of God's goodness, inspired the plan of blessing, just as His wisdom fitted everything together and His power will bring it to pass.

Bringing about God's Will

To understand the importance of the Goodness of God in bringing His plan to pass, we must ponder some of the features of that plan.

Essential to it is the need for each human being to **repent** of sin even though that sin is the result of his or her having been born a sinner. The ultimate persuasion in that direction will be in the resurrection when all *"come unto the knowledge of the truth."* (**1 Tim. 2:4**) All will then be able to look back on six thousand years of evil coming from a single act of disobedience. Almost all will repent of their own part in that evil.

We have to remember that there are several aspects to repentance. One is the change of direction which repentance brings - the change in turning towards God instead of away from Him. Another aspect of repentance is the discomfort that comes with guilt. Yet another is its self-correcting force. It is suggested that this will be the rod of justice for all mankind in the learning millennium after the resurrection.

Repentance is required before we can lay our guilt at the feet of our Saviour. Repentance acknowledges the guilt. Faith removes that guilt. We need to believe that **"the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."** (1 John 1:7). We need to be convinced that not only do we need the faith that His blood is able to cleanse us, but we need to believe that it has done so and continues to do so.

In the resurrection, the existence and goodness of God will be known by all. It will not be a matter of faith or belief. At that time the Destroyer of Eden will be bound, and sin will be removed from the Earth for ever once the learning millennium and the little season of trial are over. (Rev. 20:3) *"Nothing shall hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"*. (Isa. 65:25)

Bringing about God's will for all to repent is and will be a very important **achievement** of the goodness of God. **"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"** (Rom.2:4) Notice that this is in complete contrast to one common understanding; that violence (or the threat of violence) from God is what leads man to repentance. Such harshness and punishment of those who have never had an opportunity to know God could never truly reconcile man to God.

God's justice

The dark age teachings that eternal torment is demanded by God's justice as a penalty for born sinners doing what sinners do is contrary to Romans

6:23 ***"For the wages of sin is death."*** It is sin that brings death, not God's justice. It would be a peculiar type of justice that condemned, to eternal suffering, sinners who do not know Christ, or who do not believe He died to save them, never having had an opportunity to know Him.

From the beginning God planned a way for mankind to start again free from the contamination of being born sinners. Our condemnation in Adam was God's merciful provision to enable man to be resurrected. His way was costly. It required God's own Son to pay the penalty on behalf of Adam.

Jesus' death as the ransom for Adam's transgression will result in all the consequences of Adam's sin being set aside. All of Adam's progeny will be just as if they had not been born sinners. Setting aside the resulting sin makes their resurrection consistent with justice.

What a victory that will be for simple, true justice. Almost all will grasp eternal life trusting in Christ ***"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus."*** (Rom 3:25,26) Then all will ***"come to the knowledge of the truth."***

As well as thinking of the real meaning of 'good' we have to consider what is 'just'. God would have to be seen as the ultimate in both attributes. The two words 'just' and 'good' can be the root cause of misunderstanding of God's goodness. The fact that 'God is both good and just' precludes eternal torment of any being.

The belief that "God is good" is the second most important fact in the universe and should be an inspiration to us to ***"give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, and not let them slip"***. (Heb. 2:1)

Our message

"God is Good" ought to be our message for the benefit of all who have ears to hear whenever it is "in season" for the hearer. Taylor's Living Bible paraphrases 2 Cor 3:18 as ***"But we Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him."***

Health and happiness

Health and happiness from God's goodness is closely tied to our message. On the one hand our message

leads others to a healthy attitude of mind, while at the same time spreading that word reinforces our own health and happiness, as it increases our awareness of God in our lives.

Thinking about those we love is happiness itself. The assurance that we will be together forever secures that happiness. When coupled with His omnipotence and love for His human creatures, God's goodness is the key to health. It removes fear. ***"If God be for us, who can be against us?"*** (Rom. 8:31). ***"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."*** (1 John 4:18)

Psalm 37 has much to help on health and happiness.

V7 "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."

V3 "Trust in the LORD, and do good."

V5 "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

Awareness of God's goodness, power and love removes anxiety and gives us the peace of God. Thus we can continue in His goodness, doing our part. What is it that God will bring to pass? Verse 4 tells us: ***"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."***

God's faithfulness

Our understanding of God's goodness must include His faithfulness. We can assuredly trust God's promises. We will be reunited with our loved ones who have gone before. ***"They will come again from the land of the enemy."*** (Jer.31:16) ***"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."*** (1 Cor.15:26)

Psalm 107:19-21 provides a concise summary:

"Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses."

He maketh the storm a calm,

so that the waves thereof are still."

Then are they glad because they be quiet;

so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

**GOD has promised a glorious day,
And by faith we now see it draw near;
Our Redeemer has opened the way,
And soon will its glory appear.**

BSH 103

LOVE ...SUFFERS LONG

In 1 Corinthians 13 verses 4 to 8 the Apostle Paul lists 16 characteristics of love. The first one listed is called "long suffering" in the King James Version and "patient" in the New International Version.

In our day to day communication, the terms "long suffering" and "patient" often mean different things. "Long suffering" is often considered to be associated with pain whereas "patient" is often considered to involve only waiting.

The meaning of long suffering in the Scriptures

The Greek word translated "long suffering" (KJV) in 1 Corinthians 13:4 is "*makrothumeo*" and is defined in Strong's Concordance (#3114) as "*to be long spirited, i.e. (objectively) forbearing, or (subjectively) patient*". The subjective sense applies when it refers to the one in control, while the objective sense applies when it is referring to the one who is under the control of another.

The long suffering of God

The Scriptures tell us that God exercises long suffering. In 1 Peter 3:20 we read that "... *the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing...*" God had predetermined how He was going to destroy the "world that then was" (2 Peter 3:6) but save Noah and his family. God had the power to perform that instantaneously, but it was for the ultimate good of mankind that He require Noah to build the ark, and that it take a period of time. This event has been recorded for our learning (Rom. 15:4). One thing we can learn from it is the nature of God's long suffering. Some have suggested it took Noah 120 years to build the ark. (based on Gen. 6:3) The lesson surely is that if God, who is omnipotent, waited "patiently" while his plan was worked out, how much more should we be who are subject to His plan!

The long suffering (patience) of Abraham

In Hebrews 6:12-15 we are exhorted to be "*followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, ... 'surely I will bless thee' ... after he had patiently endured he obtained the promise*". Abraham was 75 years old when God promised that He would give him an heir (Gen. 15:1-4) but it was not until he was 100 years old that Isaac was born. (Gen. 21:5) Abraham "*patiently endured*" for 25 years!

Our long suffering

In James 5:7-8 we read "*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh*". The exhortation in this text is for us to be "patient

unto the coming of the Lord". God is in control and it is His plan that is being worked out. He has set apart a time for the sanctification of the church (the Gospel Age), and we cannot alter His plan. We must be patient until that purpose has been accomplished. This aspect of *makrothumeo* may be regarded as our long suffering (or forbearance), and arises from our subjection to Him as a higher power. While our "*earnest desire is to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven*" (2 Cor. 5:2), the time frame is not in our hands and our cheerful forbearance is a witness of our love for Him and for His plan.

Long suffering to the world

As well as being subject to God's plan, we must also exercise long suffering towards both our brethren and the world of mankind. The long-suffering we need to exercise towards the world arises from our desire to live godly lives. (2 Tim. 3:12) The challenge is to elevate our thinking above things of the world and to realise that we are despised because they are in darkness. (Eph. 4:17-18; Rom. 13:19-21)

The same principle applies when we are trying to tell others of the good news. While we are to be "*ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*", (1 Peter 3:15) let us also always remember that while Paul planted, and Apollos watered, it is God who gives the increase. (1 Cor. 3:7) Waiting for the increase might well require considerable patience (long suffering) on our part.

Long suffering to our brethren

We must also exercise forbearance towards our brethren: "*Now we exhort you, brethren, ... be patient toward all ... both among yourselves and to all*". (1 Thess. 5:14-15) "*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 long suffering, forbearing one another in love ...*" (Eph. 4:1-2) Sometimes it is difficult to be forbearing with our brethren. Each one of us has some idiosyncrasy that has the potential to irk others. We need to be on guard always not to irritate others, and also to not let others' habits irritate us. We need to remember that we are all in the flesh, and therefore none of us is perfect.

PEOPLES PAPER

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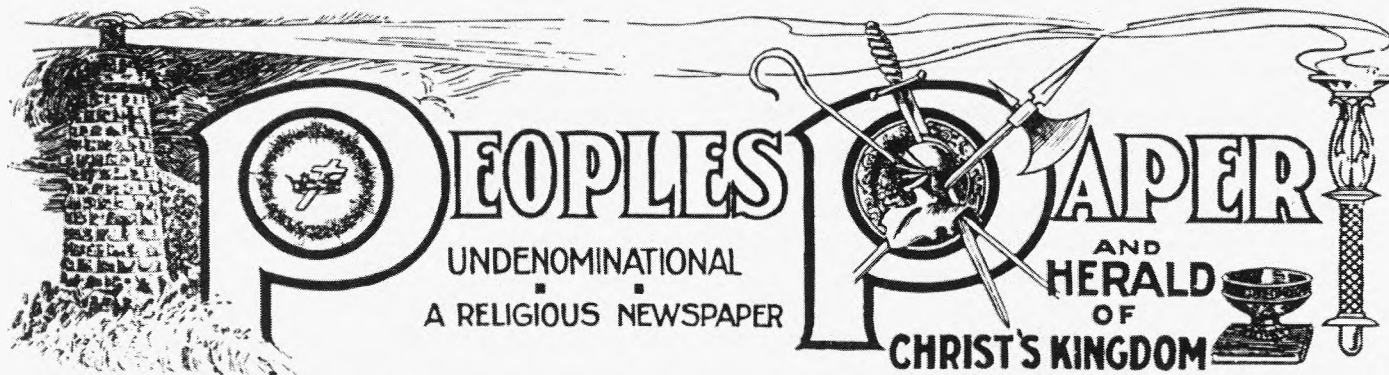
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JUDGE NOT

There seems to be nothing that the natural man is quicker to do, and do continually, than to judge other people. And there is nothing that he is slower to do, and does rarely, than to judge himself.

This attitude is corrected to a degree when a person becomes a Christian; nevertheless there are few Christians who feel that they are not without guilt, and the truly earnest Christian is very conscious of the errors they commit in this way. One cannot help feeling that it would be wonderful to keep the mind entirely free of a judging spirit; many accomplish it spasmodically, but few, if any, are able to maintain that spirit as they know they should.

Times without number, even Christians find themselves, during daily life, forming opinions about people and judging them. How often have people found themselves quite wrong; further contact and better knowledge have given them quite a different picture of a person's character than they first thought.

Circumstances and moods have a terrific impact on the display of character. It is so easy to judge harshly, whereas if all the true facts had been known, no judgement at all would have been made. Instead the person who first made the judgement would have been filled with sympathetic understanding and left all to "Him who judgeth righteously". (1 Pet. 2:23)

There is nothing of a general nature relating to this subject that every Christian does not know. All Christians, at various times, are conscious of the wrong practice of judging others, and from time to time even the finest of Christians find themselves committing this error. It must be always remembered that the Lord will deal with every earnest soul, that the schooling of each Christian will go on until each one comes near to their goal which is to be like Christ himself.

A lesson from Job

This subject of refraining from judging others, like many other subjects, is a very wide one. The book of Job records three men, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar remonstrating with Job, accusing him of self righteousness, and as receiving his just desserts in all the afflictions that befell him.

It might be difficult to fully understand what Job's reaction really was to all this. Reading the account through it would seem that Job is indignant at the charges levelled against him - he knew in his own heart that his character was not as deceitful as these men made out. Nothing stirs the natural man to indignant feelings quicker than to be reproved by one of his fellows whom he knows is prone to the same weakness. The Lord answers Job out of the whirlwind (from Chap. 38), and as a result every vestige of resistance fades and Job confesses freely, "I know I am nothing; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes". (Job 42:6)

Job was brought to the right condition and place but what about those who had "judged" him previously? It is evident that for all their apparent wisdom, they knew nothing as they ought to have known. "And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job'. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job". (Job 42:7-9) So those who thought they had superior knowledge to Job find themselves humbled and compelled to acknowledge him more worthy than themselves. Likewise today, it must not be forgotten

In This Issue

Judge Not	1
God's Justice	4
The Ministry of Reconciliation	7
The King's Son & His Bride	10
Love...is Kind	12

that *"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted"*. (Luke 14:11)

Judging other Christians

How careful one must be not to misjudge other Christians, how all thought of superior knowledge needs to be instantly repelled. The Lord himself was quite capable of dealing with Job, the three men who railed on Job with their accusations evidently did so on their own initiative. They judged their fellow, therefore the Lord judged them, and humbled them. Consequently it behoves all Christians to heed their Master's exhortation to *"Judge not (others) that ye be not judged"* (by the Lord). (Matt. 7:1)

One consideration that might help to suppress a judging spirit is to realise that there is no need for anyone to judge another: *"But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."* (Rom. 14:10-13) These verses embrace the same teaching. Each one is to not only judge himself but is also to help all others to look into the *"perfect law of liberty"* (love) by which all Christians are now being judged: *"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty"*. (James 2:12). *"If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged of the Lord we are chastened, that we should not be condemned with the world."* (1 Cor. 11:31-32)

Our daily judgment

Returning to Romans 14:10, the word "judgment" (*"judgment seat of Christ"*) is "tribunal" and so it might be referring to the daily life of the Christian. Every day Christians are standing before the tribunal of Christ, and he is dealing with them, correcting them when wrong, sometimes lightly, mercifully, sometimes with a heavier chastening hand, and bestowing blessings when true and faithful. Every Christian must stand before this tribunal; why then should anyone be so hasty to do the judging and correcting of their fellow brethren - *"Let us not judge one another any more, but rather let us be careful not to put a stumblingblock in another's way"*. (Romans 14:13)

Few things provoke one to anger quicker than a harsh unjust judgment from another. By judging others one is flouting the Lord's direction, and at the same time possibly putting a stumbling block and occasion to fall in their brother's way by stirring him to anger. The Christian's resolve should always be to live so as to promote peace and not to lead any into sin. It must always be remembered that God has *"committed all*

judgment unto the Son", (John 5:22) and that He in turn is able and just to judge all as the Apostle Paul asserts: *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"*. (2 Tim. 4:8)

The thought that the church, the Lord's body, is not being judged directly by the Father, is consistent with Hebrews 10:31 - *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"*. If we were being judged by Jehovah directly, none of the imperfect race of Adam could stand - all would fall under his just sentence. Hence the importance of realising that God is dealing with the church now as the body of Christ, not imputing our trespasses unto us, but *"accepting us in the Beloved"*. (Eph. 1:6)

2 Corinthians 5:10 reads *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"*. This is a similar scripture and it deserves careful study. There is more in the passage than might be recognised at first glance. One translation renders the first portion *"For we must all be made manifest before the tribunal of Christ"*. When do Christians stand before this tribunal receiving judging corrections for the things done in the body? It may well be now, every day of their lives. If it is so, then why should anyone want to be judging others? It is to their own Lord that all must stand or fall and He is quite competent to deal with all. Rather, one should devote their judging spirit to their own position before this tribunal. Each one knows their own circumstances, and if they judge themselves with the spirit of a sound mind in soberness, they will find that they will be spared much judgment from the Lord. On the other hand, if they spend their time judging others, they will find that they are judged.

The terror of the Lord

2 Corinthians 5:11 goes on to say *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences"*. A very wide circle of commentators and translators has agreed that the word *"fear"* should be substituted for *"terror"*. What kind of *"fear"* is in the apostle's mind here? Maybe it is the thought of reverence. Ephesians 5:33 contains almost the same Greek word and it is there translated *"reverence"*, and Young's Concordance defines the word as *"to be terrified, affrighted, afraid"*. Ephesians 5:33 reads *"Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband"*. The apostle was not urging any wife to fear her husband, and so, wisely and understandingly, the translators have used a word with a more correct meaning.

Going back to the word in 2 Corinthians 5:11 it must be noted that the apostle knew nothing about a Lord of

whom men should be affrighted, terrified or afraid. On the contrary he had come to know a Lord who was so merciful and kind and just and good, that he deeply revered Him. As verse 14 says it was the **love of Christ** that constrained him.

Psalms 111 is a wonderful Psalm to convey the real meaning of the word "fear". The whole Psalm testifies to the wonderful things that God provides and does for all His creatures, and especially for those who know Him and love Him. The Psalmist thus concludes in verses 9 and 10 "*holy and reverend is His name. The fear (reverential fear) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" Another has commented "This is the proper attitude of the creature towards the Creator, Preserver and Lord of the whole universe. When He speaks, our ears should be reverently attentive to His voice, and every power alert to do His bidding. The Lord would foster and cultivate in us that reverence that is due to His name, as we would reverence our earthly parents." Ferrar Fenton has translated 2 Corinthians 5:11 thus: "*Consequently, knowing how to reverence the Lord we persuade men - that we may shine forth to God, and I hope we shine forth also to your consciences*".

1 Peter 3:15 reads "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*". The margin of some Bibles substitutes "reverence" for "fear". The same Greek word is used here as in 2 Corinthians 5:11 and thus it is clear evidence that in both places it should be rendered "reverence" in order to give the true meaning in modern language.

Consequently 2 Corinthians 5:11 may be paraphrased "*Since we have come to know the Lord, so gracious and beautiful in character that we cannot help but deeply reverence Him, so go on persuading men that they might taste and see and learn to know Him that they too might regard Him as we do*". The thought of daily appearing before the tribunal of Christ strikes no terror to any heart when rightly understood because all Christians delight to stand there to receive the benefits that they accrue from being there, and with the prospect of finally giving an acceptable account to God - "*every one of us shall give account of himself to God*". (Rom. 14:12)

Weymouth's translation of 2 Corinthians 5:11 is a very interesting one in connection with these thoughts. It reads "*Knowing then what the fear of the Lord means, we endeavour to win men, and to God our motives are clear, and I hope clear also to you in your own consciences, despite what other men and opponents of truth and righteousness might be saying about us*".

Pre-judging

There is still another kind of judging - condemning other workers and writers before the facts are known,

or without taking proper cognizance of the surrounds and circumstances that existed in the time of the writer.

False teaching should not be condoned anywhere or at anytime, but the one who so teaches in ignorance should be dealt with patiently and sympathetically. To illustrate, this is what one commentator says about 2 Corinthians 5:11: "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, knowing how much the Lord is to be feared, what an object of terror and alarm it will be to stand at the judgment seat .. it will be a day of awful wailing and alarm when all the living and dead shall be arraigned on trial with reference to their eternal destiny; and when countless hosts of the guilty and impenitent shall be thrust down to an eternal hell. Who can describe the amazing terror of the same ...*". Those who know the truth are likely to be judging this writer already and are likely to be concluding that they "wouldn't bother reading his notes, it would be a waste of time". But read further. He writes "*We persuade men - observe here, it is not we drive men, or we endeavour to alarm men, or we frighten men, or we appeal merely to their fears, but it is we persuade men ... To proclaim constantly the future judgment, and the scenes of future woe, hell fire and perdition - to appeal merely to the fears of men - is not the way in which Paul and the Saviour preached the Gospel. They who fill their sermons with the denunciation of wrath, who dwell on the word hell and damnation ... merely to excite alarm, and who deal damnation round the land, as if they rejoiced that men were to be condemned and in a tone and manner as if they would be pleased to execute it, have yet to learn the true nature of the way to win men to God ... the true effect is to produce tenderness, deep feeling, and love; to prompt to the language of persuasion and of tender entreaty, to lead men to weep over erring sinners rather than to denounce them*". Here there is a writer who, if he had lived just a little later in the Age, when the light of present truth was more powerfully penetrating the darkness of the dark ages, he would have rejoiced in the greater harmony he would have found in God's Word. One must not judge according to the light that is now shining - it has not always shone so brightly. And so the temptation to judge this man and his consecration must be suppressed. Observers do not always know the circumstances of another and it behoves them to leave all the judging to the Lord.

May God help all who profess the name of Christ to put away all spirit of harsh judging, and lead them in the way of gentle forbearance, conceding to others the kindly mercy and consideration that they ask for themselves, and receive, from the Lord. All Christians should rather heed the Apostle's exhortation to the Corinthians to "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.* (2 Cor. 13:5) Indeed, let all "*judge not, that (they) be not judged*". (Matt. 7:1)

GOD'S JUSTICE

God, as the architect and creator of the universe, had the right to set the standard that He required of His Human Creation: *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth'"*. (Genesis 1:27-28)

God had only one requirement of Adam and Eve when they were placed in the Garden of Eden, and that was total obedience. If they ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the consequence would be that they would die. When they disobeyed God's commandment and did eat of the tree, justice required that the penalty be invoked. God could have created robots with no freewill, but this was not his purpose. Mankind was created in God's image and so Adam and Eve had the freewill to obey or disobey.

The penalty of sin was not simply to die temporarily with the privilege and right thereafter of returning to life. The penalty pronounced gave no indication of any future life - *"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"*. (Genesis 2:17)

The sentence of death was not confined to Adam and Eve but extended to all of their descendants. The Scriptures simply state *"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"*. (Romans 5:18-19)

At first glance the condemnation of the whole human race because of the transgression of Adam and Eve might seem to be extremely harsh - one apparently minor transgression bringing about such a severe penalty. Consequently, in order to fully understand God's justice it is necessary to understand the full implications of imposing the sentence not only on Adam and Eve, but also on their descendants.

In a very short period of time mankind was spiraling downward into sinfulness, with the first murder taking place between Adam and Eve's own children. *"And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him"*. (Genesis 4:8 KJV)

The human creation degenerated so much that God regretted having created them as recorded in Genesis 6:5-7 *"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.'"* (NKJV) The Apostle Paul confirms this degradation into sinfulness in Romans 5:12 *"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."* And so we read *"... all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23)

Glimmers of hope

Man has continued in his degenerate state. All mankind has failed to live up to God's model for them as set out in Genesis 1. However all is not lost. Although the human race as a whole fails to obey God and therefore, on the basis of the sentence passed on Adam, faces extinction, God has a plan that enables Him to be totally just and also to be gracious and merciful. His plan is an act of grace.

As soon as the penalty had been incurred, indeed even while it was being pronounced, the first indication of God's justice and grace was intimated. The first glimmer of hope came in the statement that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head: *"...the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"*. (Genesis 3:15) Without this glimmer of hope the human race would have been in utter despair, but this promise gave a glimmer of hope that God had a plan for mankind's ultimate release from the death sentence.

The second indication that God intended to rescue mankind from the sinful conditions of the earth came with His dealings with Noah. Genesis 6:9 reads *"Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God"*. (NASV) God's dealings with Noah were more than just an example of a righteous man in the midst of a wicked world; they were a picture of what God intended to do in the future. The Apostle Peter says *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh,*

but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ". (1 Peter 3:18-21) God's dealings with Noah not only showed that God had the ability to provide a way for Noah's deliverance through the instructions to build the Ark and thereby provide a safe haven for Noah and his family as well as for the animal kingdom, but it was also a picture of the salvation that God had planned through Christ. As the Apostle explains "*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*".

The massive loss of life and the destruction of the world at that time did not bring mankind, other than Noah and his family, to realize that obedience to God was the only way to have life. The faith chapter in Hebrews (chapter 11) mentions those by name who were faithful to God in Old Testament times, but even they were unable to obtain life as they still came under the death sentence placed on them through Adam. As the Psalmist declares "*none could by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him.*" (Psa. 49:7) Consequently not one of Adam's posterity has ever been able to redress his guilt or to regain the lost inheritance.

God's promise to Abraham

Another illustration of God's ultimate plan came with the testing of Abraham as we read in Genesis 22:11-13 "*And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.*"

Abraham's faith was rewarded with the promise recorded in Genesis 22:15-18 "*And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the*

nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice".

This promise might seem to indicate that God would relent, change His decree and clear the guilty race, but this was not so. Mankind still had to be redeemed from Adam's sin with a price that was equivalent to Adam's status before he transgressed. Since none of his descendants could pay that price it had to be paid by another. God did not leave Abraham in doubt that the only way to blot out and abolish sin's penalty would be by a sacrifice sufficient to meet the penalty. Not only had Abraham's faith in God been tested, but here we also see a picture of God's plan for a sacrifice to pay the penalty for sin.

Still another aspect of God's justice is that the Jewish nation was given an opportunity to obtain everlasting life through obedience to the Law, but they were unable to achieve it because "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*". (James 2:10). The problem for the Jews was that the human race was incapable of keeping the law because of Man's fallen condition. "*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*". (Romans 8:3) Consequently "*the law made nothing perfect*". (Heb. 7:19)

Looking at the world we live in and into the pages of history we see that the human race has continued to fall far short of the model that our Heavenly Father created in Adam and Eve. Some have tried to live good lives and to assist others but all have fallen short of God's perfect standard. The question may well continue to be asked "was the creation of man a mistake or was it part of a greater plan that would show forth God's glory"?

God's Justice

For mankind to have the opportunity to be saved from the curse of death and an opportunity to be reconciled to God a further step was required to meet God's justice. Salvation from death could only be obtained through a redemption that was based upon the fact that the human race as originally created was perfect and upright, an earthly image of its Maker. Man's fall from Divine favor resulted in sin, ruin, and death. All came under this sentence as all were sinners - "*...and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*". (Rom. 5:12)

It was not the pain and suffering in dying that constituted the penalty, but death – the extinction of life. In the case of the sentence falling upon Adam, death was sure even though it was reached by 930 years of dying. Since Adam was dying, all his

children were born in the same dying condition, and were without a right to life. Like their parents, they all died after a more or less lingering process. Thus when Adam forfeited life, as far as he was concerned he forfeited it forever.

Jesus' first advent

At the time of our Lord's birth the whole nation of Israel was in anticipation of the coming Messiah whom they expected would save them from the Roman yoke and restore them to their former glory under the throne of David. We read in Luke's Gospel of two accounts. The first is in Luke 1:67-73 "Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:" (NKJV) The second account is in Luke 2:30-32 when Simeon spoke saying "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel".

Neither Zacharias nor Simeon realized that to bring about this salvation Christ would first have to die as a perfect man to pay the price to redeem mankind. We read in John 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved". (KJV) The expression "gave His only begotten Son" was to be exacted in its fullest sense; Jesus was to die as a man.

A price for the redemption of the whole human race was required because the entire race was in Adam when he was condemned, and lost life through him. So when Jesus "gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6), His death was able to be applied to the whole human race, as an unborn race "in His loins", just as the whole human race was condemned in Adam's loins. ⁽¹⁾ A full satisfaction, or corresponding price, for all men was thus put into the hands of Justice, to be applied "in due time". Jesus thus bought all mankind and has full authority to restore all who come unto God by Him. Thus we read, "As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were

made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rom. 5:18, 19)

The thought of life coming through Jesus after he paid the price for Adam's sin, which had brought corruption and death to mankind, is further explained in 1 Peter 1:3-4 and 18-23 (paraphrased): "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 by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you...ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ...Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world...who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God...Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God". (KJV)

Reconciliation

Thus we see that, with the price paid for mankind's salvation through the redemptive blood of Christ, God's requirement for Justice has been met. With the price paid for mankind's salvation, the work of reconciling the world to God could begin: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life". (Rom. 5:10) The word translated "reconciled" comes from the Greek word "katallasso" which properly denotes "to change, exchange (especially of money); hence, of persons, to change from enmity to friendship, to reconcile." God accomplishes our reconciliation by exercising His grace towards us on the grounds of the death of Christ - "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". (2 Cor. 5:19)

The death of His Son is the means by which we are able to "receive the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:11 Revised Version). Not once is God said to be "reconciled"; the enmity is on our part alone. It is Man who needs to be "reconciled" to God, not God to Man. This reconciliation does not vary God's justice but is in total agreement with it. He always acts according to His unchanging standard of Justice. It is through the merit of the sacrifice of His Son and our Master that we are reconciled to God and by which His justice is satisfied.

¹⁾ The concept of a man's descendants "being in his loins" is also applied to Levi. Hebrews 7:9-10 says that Levi was in the loins of his father Abraham, to the extent that he was considered to pay tithes to Melchisedec because his great grandfather Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec. This was so even though Levi was not yet born and was not even one of Abraham's sons, but was three generations later.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Mankind faces many problems in everyday life. Many struggle to make sense of their plight and this can mean that Christians are at a loss as to how they can effectively minister to them.

Some Christians might not see where they fit into the Ministry and therefore they might feel inadequate to serve in the Work. However in Ephesians 4:11-12 the Apostle Paul wrote *"He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."* (NKJV) Even so some might feel that they do not fit exactly into any of the categories that Paul mentions. Does this mean that they are excluded from the Ministry? No; earlier in the chapter Paul wrote *"Christ has given each of us special abilities - whatever he wants us to have out of his rich storehouse of gifts."* (Eph. 4:7 The Living Bible) Every believer has been endowed with the talents that He wishes them to use in spreading the Gospel Message.

Other possible reasons why believers might be hesitant to share the Gospel Message are a lack of confidence that their knowledge is adequate, and that they lack experience in explaining God's word. However the nature of the Ministry varies greatly, and *"doing good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith"* (Gal. 6:10) is part of it. *"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"*. (1 Pet. 2:11 - 15 NKJV) *"Doing good unto all as we have opportunity"* might have an immediate benefit by *"putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men"*, but if not, the effect is not necessarily lost since it might be of benefit in the *"day of visitation"*. (1 Pet. 2:12) Thus none should feel that they are unable to be part of the Ministry.

The Ministry

Concerning the ministry to be performed in the present time, the Apostle Paul writes *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."* (2 Cor. 5:18-19 NKJV) The question may be asked, "to whom did God commit the ministry?"

There are at least two possible interpretations of the word **"US"** in 2 Corinthians 5:18 - 19:

- The Apostles only. The Apostles were certainly given this ministry while Christ was on earth, as recorded in Mark 3:14-15: *"And he ordained*

twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sickness and to cast out devils"

- The followers of Christ down through the Gospel Age. Paul referred to some of these as "fellow workers", for example *"Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus"*, (Rom. 16:3) and *"Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier"*. (Phil. 2:25 NKJV) The ministry was to continue after His departure as He told them just before His ascension: *"...repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* (Luke 24:47 NKJV) The ministry had to continue until it had reached *"all nations"*.

This article is based on the second interpretation and addresses how the ministry of reconciliation pertains to the believer today.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 the Apostle Paul sets out the instructions, or mission, statement that all the children of God are commissioned to carry out, that of the Ministry of Reconciliation. In order to fully appreciate the task defined by Paul it is necessary to understand the meaning of the words *"reconciliation"*, *"reconcile"* and *"reconciled"* as they are found in these verses.

Firstly however, it might be helpful to revise the meaning of the English words as they are used today. The word **reconciliation** comes from the verb **reconcile** which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, has the meaning of:

- Make friendly after estrangement (persons to one another, person to or with another).
- Make resigned or contentedly submissive to another.
- To heal (after a quarrel).
- Harmonize, make compatible.

The word **reconciliation** has become widely used in society as Governments and people in general have come to realise that the first step in making amends for the wrongs of the past is to bring the parties together. The aim is to reconcile their differences in all senses of the word. The Governments in many parts of the world have set up "Departments of Reconciliation" to facilitate this process.

Some examples of Reconciliation Commissions are:

- The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was set up by the Government of National Unity to help deal with the consequences of apartheid. The conflict during that period resulted in widespread violence and abuses

of human rights.

- Indonesian Truth and Reconciliation Commission for dealing with antagonisms in Aceh, West Papua and East Timor.
- Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation Australia. The Council's mission is *"building and promoting reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians for the wellbeing of the nation"*.

The word **"reconcile"** in 2 Corinthians 5:18 - 19 is translated from the Greek word *"katallasso"* which properly denotes "to change, exchange (especially of money); hence, of persons, to change from enmity to friendship, to reconcile." The word translated **"reconciliation"** is translated from the Greek word *"katallage"* which means "an exchange," and denotes a change on the part of one party, induced by an action on the part of another". (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words)

From the meanings of the words in 2 Corinthians 5 it is apparent that, since God has set before the believers a *"ministry of reconciliation"*, there is enmity between God and Man.

The Beginning of the Enmity

The enmity started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. *"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'"*. (Gen. 2:16-17 NKJV) It was not long before God's commandment was broken: *"Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'"*. (Gen. 3:4-5 NKJV) Eve took of the fruit and gave it to Adam who also ate it. The result was that *"...the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked"*. (Gen. 3:7 NKJV) God's law had been broken and they were banished from the garden and the dying process began.

The Nation of Israel

The nation of Israel had a special relationship with God, which required them to make yearly sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. While those sacrifices constituted a visible ceremony that appeased their conscience, they could *"never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect"*. (Heb. 10:1 NKJV) The sacrifices they made did not reconcile them to God because *"...it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins"*. (Heb. 10:4 NKJV) This was so in spite of the fact that the animals they sacrificed had to be perfect: *"You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God a bull or sheep*

which has any blemish or defect, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God". (Deut. 17:1 NKJV)

God's justice meant that not even the sacrifice of a human being could redeem them; *"None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him; For the redemption of their souls is costly..."* (Psa. 49:7-8 NKJV) Consequently if mankind's reconciliation to God had depended solely on Adamic stock, it would not have been possible. Thus the significance of Jesus' sacrifice is evident: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, ... For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"*. (John 3:16-17 NKJV) The love of the Heavenly Father for His creation and the willingness of His only begotten son Jesus Christ to pay the ransom price opened the way to reconciliation.

The Good News

At the time of Christ's birth the angels brought the message to the Shepherd's saying, *"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord"*. (Luke 2:10-11 NKJV) While the angels' words would have gladdened the hearts of the shepherds, they did not disclose the fact that God had a plan from the *"foundation of the world"* to reconcile mankind to Himself. (1 Pet. 1:20) Jesus, the Christ, His only begotten Son, was to be *"the lamb slain"*, *"a lamb without blemish and without spot"* *"who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"*. (Rev. 13:8, 1 Pet. 1:18, Isa. 53:9) What a wonderful provision God has made for mankind!

A Christian's Responsibilities

As followers of Christ it is a Christian's responsibility to proclaim the Good News of reconciliation.. This work began with Jesus when He commenced His life of ministry at His baptism in the river Jordan.

The words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14 explain the work of reconciliation: *"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again"*. (NKJV) Here is the reason for this ministry to be carried on by the believers today: it is *"the love of Christ"* that compels believers to spread the wonderful news that He died, is risen and is sitting at the right hand of God.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18 Paul explains that *"(God) ... has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ"*.

Christians have been brought into a state of reconciliation through Christ. Before they accepted Christ's sacrifice they were opposed to God, alienated from Him. After acceptance of Christ, believers are brought into a state of agreement, or harmony, and are re-united to him. Paul expands this in Romans 5:8-11: *"...justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"*. (NKJV)

Hope for the World

It is wonderful news for believers that they have been saved, reconciled to their Heavenly Father. However this privileged position brings responsibility: *"God has given us the ministry of reconciliation"*. The question may be asked "to whom are they to minister?" To many believers the world is so alienated from God, showing no love for Him, rejecting Him as their Creator and disobeying His laws that they are unworthy of reconciliation to God.

Before dismissing such a ministry of reconciliation, it is necessary for the believer to remember that before they received God's grace they were sinners just as is the world. The Apostle Paul declares: *"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"*. (Eph. 2:3) Additionally it was not just the physical actions that constituted transgression: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"*. (Matt. 5:27-29 NKJV) Earlier in that chapter it is recorded that Christ told the disciples that they could break God's law just by being angry with a brother; such standards put them at risk of sinning by their thoughts alone.

God has a plan to reconcile all of mankind in due time. The words of the Apostle John clearly explain that *"He (Christ) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"*. (1 John 2:2 NKJV) The meaning of the word "propitiation" is that of *"reconciling, appeasing, turning away anger"*. The promise is that Christ is the propitiation for the whole world..

It is only when believers realise that in times past they had to be reconciled to God, and their reconciliation was met only by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they are able to realise the need for the ministry of reconciliation. They must possess the same spirit of reconciliation as their Lord. If they have only an intellectual knowledge of the sacrifice, and do not

realise the great cost of their redemption, then they will never realise the great joy of the task that has been set before them.

Their ministry requires two way contact; they must be in constant contact with God as well as with the people to whom they are ministering, as revealed in the ministry of Jesus. His presence amongst men is the most eloquent testimony to the fact that He possessed the spirit of reconciliation in fullest measure, being continually in contact with his Father through prayer as well as with the ordinary people of that day.

The atonement made by the Redeemer has rendered it possible for God to exercise the benevolence of His nature, and to pardon the offenders. God has not changed, He was always merciful, and good, and the gift of a Saviour and the plan of reconciliation is an expression of His willingness to pardon those who come to Him either now or during the future Kingdom Age. In 1 Timothy 2:5-6 it is explained that there will be a time, called "due time", when those who have not accepted Christ and his Father during this present "Gospel Age" will have an opportunity to understand Jesus' work. The text reads *"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"*. (NKJV) His sacrificial work, and the reconciliation that it affords, is not yet testified (that is, made known) to the world in general. However the text declares that a time is coming when His ransom sacrifice will be testified, or made known, to all.

The Christians' Joy

How can Christians not rejoice when they realise the great love God has for them, freeing them from the bondage of sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6:18), and the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15)? How can we not want to spread the *"glad tidings of great joy to all men"*, *"that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation"*. (2 Cor. 5:19 NASV)

**O TEACH me Lord, that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.**

**O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as Thou wilt, and when, and where,
Until Thy blessed face I see,
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share.**
Bible Student Hymnal 290

THE KING'S SON AND HIS BRIDE

Revelation 19:7 (NIV) reads: *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."*

Behind all things, and before all things, is the glorious Eternal One, Lord and Father of all. *"The Lord has established His throne in heaven and His kingdom rules over all"* (Psalms 103:19 NIV). His empire is unlimited, His dominion is supreme, His reign is forever. He is the royal head of all that is, the sovereign dispenser of all that transpires on earth, in heaven, in space and in all time as Isaiah 46:9, 10 states: *"Remember the former things, those of long ago. I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come; I say my purpose will stand and I will do all that I please."* (NIV)

Our Father in heaven has a Son, pre-eminent and above all, the only creation by His own divine hand. Colossians 1:15,16 states: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him."* The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 2:7, 8 that this pre-eminent son *"divested himself, taking a bondsman's form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."* (Diaglott translation) What a wonderful story of parental love, blended with divine justice, is conveyed to us in the fact that God so loved the world that while we were yet sinners, He gave His only begotten Son to be our redeemer. He did this so that He might restore again to divine favour and blessing all who will return to Him after learning of his loving provisions. There is but one such story as God has but one such Son.

Our loving heavenly Father, having provided redemption for all our race through Christ Jesus, has glorified and honoured our dear Redeemer as a reward for those things he endured faithfully through obedience to Him. Philippians 2:9-11 continues *"Wherefore God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ...and ...every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (KJV)

In the divine plan, our heavenly Father desired a royal marriage to be arranged for His beloved Son. He was not to be alone. It was meant that he should have a Bride. It was not one individual that was chosen to be the Bride but many individuals. Although they are

many, when compared with the world, the bride is only a little flock. It is hard to grasp the thought that the Creator, when selecting this little flock who would be associated with His Son in the great Millennial work of blessing all the families of the earth, did not invite the holy angels to be the bride, *"Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"* (Heb. 1:14) He has, instead, sent the invitation to our fallen race, to those who have the ears to hear and the hearts to respond to the call of this Gospel Age.

During the process of Her selection throughout the Age, the church has not been the Bride but only engaged to become the Bride. All those who are of this elect church are virgins, pledged to Christ, having the promises of becoming *"joint heirs"* with him, (Rom. 8:17) and *"seeing him as he is"*, (1 John 3:2) so *"that where I am, there ye may be also"*. (John 14:3) The wedding and the marriage has been before Her, in prospect, as a thing of the future. It has been only an object of promise, of hope, to be fulfilled when She is complete at the appointed time.

The Apostle Paul compares this spiritual marriage with earthly marriage, (Eph. 5:22 - 32) and as the earthly bride shares in her husband's glory, so Christ's bride will share in his glory. When Peter asked Jesus, *"We have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us? Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things when the Son of man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father or mother or children, or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."* (Matt. 19:27 - 30 NIV)

In John 3:29, John the Baptist said: *"The Bride belongs to the Bridegroom; the friend who attends the Bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the Bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete."* (NIV) Jesus speaks of himself as a bridegroom in Matthew 9:15 saying, *"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, then they will fast."* Likewise the Apostle Paul wrote: *"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 Corinthians 11:2)

The privilege of this call to be of the bride class was given firstly to a particular people, but they, as a people, failed to profit by their calling. The servants were sent at first not to call all humanity but those

who were invited. Up to the time of the Redeemer's coming to Earth, the Jewish people had been exclusively God's covenanted people, and they were the first to be invited to be His Son's bride. But as a nation they rejected the invitation; they would not come. After his resurrection Christ gave a second commission to the apostles which sent them into all the world after they had made a beginning at Jerusalem. The result was that a number of those invited responded, adding to the remnant of the Jews as the nucleus of the bride class. But still as a nation they rejected the offer. A nation already guilty of the Messiah's blood now filled up the measure of its wickedness by rejecting forgiveness and murdering the men who were sent to offer it.

The failure of the Jews resulted in the call being extended to the Gentiles. Other guests were now invited to fill the places that the chosen people refused, so the command was - "*Go ye therefore into the highways and as many as you shall find bid to the marriage feast*". (Matt. 22:9) From Jerusalem the call went to Antioch, Samaria, Corinth, Athens and Rome and through all the cities and nations at that time.

Two striking features mentioned in Revelation 19:7, are firstly, the '*marriage of the Lamb*', and secondly that his Wife, the church, '*has made herself ready*'. This is a matter of great importance, for membership of the Bride of Christ relates to a relationship and a new life in Christ. "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.*" (2 Corinthians. 5:17 NIV) Also, in Romans 12:2 Paul wrote "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (NIV). James, "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" wrote "*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*". (James 1:19 - 21)

There is a beautiful illustration of the marriage in Psalm 45:10 -13: "*Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear. Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honour him, for he is your Lord ...All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold.*" Her beauty is the beauty of holiness. Outwardly, before the world, she is not glorious but this will not always be so, for the promise in Revelation 2:10 is "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" Psalm 45:14 continues "*She shall be brought to the king in raiment of needlework.*" (KJV)

In this picture each member of the church who accepts Christ as their Saviour, and the invitation to this

wedding, is given a wedding garment. The garment is Christ's righteousness that is attributed to them as it is written "*To the praise of the glory of his grace wherein he has made us **acceptable in the beloved.***" (Eph. 1:6 KJV)

However there is a work Christians have to do, and that is to keep their garments unspotted from the world, and to embroider them. Embroidery is a picture of beauty; adornment by the Christian graces. The Apostle Peter expresses it: "*And besides this, giving all diligence add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self control, and to self control patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love; for if these things be in you and abound they make you that you neither shall be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, for so an entrance shall be administered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*" (2 Peter 1: 5 - 8, 11 KJV)

We would be discouraged by such a high standard set before us if it were not for the many precious promises of divine help and forgiveness when we fall short. One such assurance is stated in 1 John 1:9 - "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (KJV) Another is given to us in Hebrews 4:15,16 - "*For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come with confidence to the throne of grace that we might obtain mercy and find grace in times of need.*"

It has previously been written "We do not know the details of this marriage as it shall be fulfilled, but we are told that with this marriage there is to be a great feast. The king speaks of a dinner prepared and it seems that the various descriptions referring to a feast, a marriage supper, have reference more to the complete enjoyment and feast of blessedness in the heavenly home, the joys of the kingdom in its full manifestation when the shadows of time have given praise to the realities of eternity. It is a feast of perfected redemption. ... As 1 Corinthians 13:12 states: 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror but then we shall see him face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully even as I am fully known.' And again, in 2 Corinthians 4:18 - 'So now we fix our eyes, not on what is seen but what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.' Prayers then will change into praises, crosses into crowns, hope into fruition, feebleness into power, corruption into glory, mortality into immortality, and all the toils and aches and disabilities of this old world will be swallowed up in the perfections and everlasting jubilee of heaven."

May our heavenly Father help each one of us to be faithful to this most blessed invitation.

LOVE ...IS KIND

There are numerous acts of kindness performed every day, all of them springing from a desire of one person or group to help another. Such acts are expressions of love.

Kindness benefits the recipient

One characteristic of all acts of kindness is that they benefit the recipient. It is possible for us to provide "assistance" but for that assistance to "do more harm than good". Every attempt we make to be kind to anyone must have, as its objective, the benefit of the recipient. This means that the focus must be on what the recipient needs, and not on what we are able to do or what we would like to do.

A lesson from the Samaritan

The example of the "Good Samaritan", narrated by Jesus, (Luke 10:30-35) illustrates the two ingredients of every act of kindness; one person has a need and another person relieves that need. The "*man fell among thieves which stripped him of his raiment, wounded (him), and departed, leaving him half dead*". The man had need of assistance. When the Samaritan "*saw him (he) had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds ... and took care of him*". The Samaritan exercised kindness towards the man; he saw that the man had need of care, and he helped him. His action was an expression of love.

Spiritual kindness

The kindness shown by the Samaritan was of a physical nature. There is also a need for us to be kind in our spiritual ministry.

Paul was conscious of the need for his ministry to be beneficial to those who received him. He fed the Corinthians "*with milk and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it*". (1 Cor. 3:2) Likewise he exhorted the Romans to ensure that they did not "*destroy another with our meat*" because to do so would be "*walking not charitably*" (not lovingly). (Rom. 14:15) On his last visit to Ephesus Paul recounted how he had "*kept back nothing that was profitable unto you ...*" (Acts 20:17-38) Paul's focus was on those things that were profitable to them.

Jesus was the first to demonstrate the principle of feeding less experienced ones with appropriate spiritual food. When teaching his disciples He told them that He "*had many things to say unto them but they could not bear them now*". (John 16:12) His focus was on their ultimate spiritual welfare and so He withheld those truths from them at that time.

These principles are relevant to us today. Should the Lord provide us with an opportunity to minister to others we must ensure that we do not overwhelm them with concepts they cannot comprehend at their present

stage of growth. Failure to observe this principle is "walking not charitably", and such a course is the very opposite of what we should try to achieve.

Kindness in Communication

The Apostle Paul alerts us to the possibility of destroying or undoing acts of kindness by our communication. In Ephesians 4:29-5:2, the Apostle contrasts corrupt communication with that which edifies: "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good for the use of edifying*" (building up). In verse 31 he lists some particular aspects of communication that are damaging - "*bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, malice*". In verse 32 he contrasts these characteristics with an exhortation to be "*kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. ... walk in love ...*" (Eph. 5:2)

God's kindness to the world

In Titus 3:4 Paul says that "*... the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared*". Both kindness and love are mentioned, and there is a precious truth to be had in distinguishing these two terms.

The love referred to in Titus 3:4 is God's love for, or "*fondness of, mankind*" - His "*philanthropia*". (Strong #5363). It is God's love for mankind that is behind every facet of His plan, including sending His "*only begotten Son*" to Earth to redeem mankind from sin and death.

However love alone does not require any action. It is kindness that requires action (*chrestotes* - Strong #5544 - "*usefulness*"). There is a parallel between faith and works on the one hand, and kindness and love on the other. Just as "*faith without works is dead*" (James 2:17), so also love without kindness is dead. It is the acts of kindness that flow from one's love that manifests that love. Hence the provision of His son to be Man's redeemer constitutes God's kindness, and it is His kindness that "appeared" at Jesus' first advent. Until that time there was no visible evidence how He was going to redeem mankind - there were numerous prophecies and promises but they were invisible. But now both His love and kindness had "*appeared*" - "*become visible*" ("*epiphaino*" - Strong #2014).

PEOPLES PAPER

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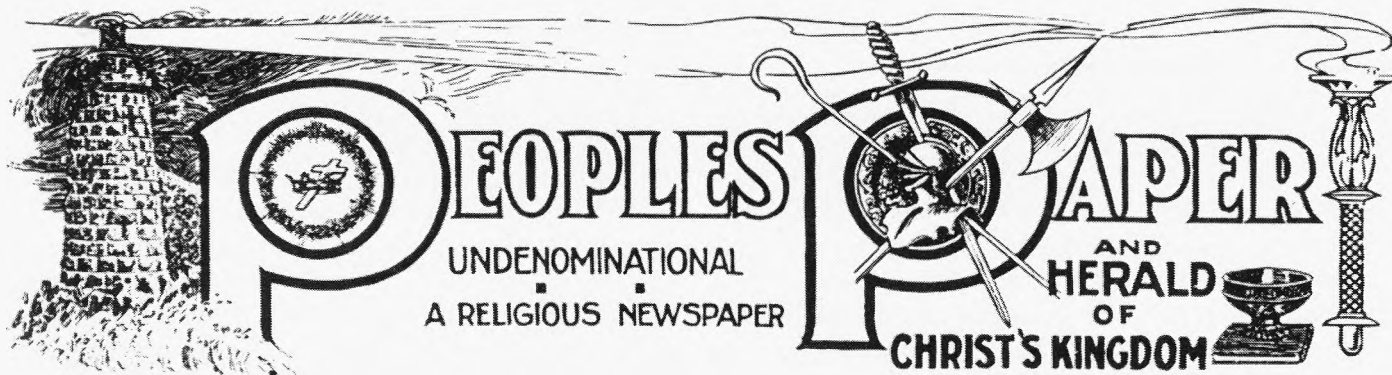
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GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

For more than twenty centuries Christians have remembered the birth of Jesus and given thanks to the Almighty Ruler of the universe because *"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world"* (1 John 4:9). *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, ... that the world through him might be saved ..."* (John 3:16-17). Jesus' birth, combined with His death and resurrection, are the most important events in the world's history. In the words of the hymn, *"The whole world was lost in the darkness of sin, The light of the world is Jesus"*.

The celebration of Christmas has been instituted by Man and involves all of the traditions that we see today in the Western world. This much commercialized celebration is recognised by most of our society; unbelievers, pagans and Christians alike. Although December is not now generally accepted as the time of Jesus' birth, nevertheless we can still, with thankful hearts, remember and celebrate the greatest birthday of all time. It is for each individual to decide how they regard this "holiday", and how they will use the time, for we do not have specific instructions from God concerning the observance of Christ's birth as we do for "the Memorial" – the remembrance of His death.

The power of God was displayed when His appointed time came for our Lord to leave the Heavenly realm and come to Earth to be born as a human being, and ultimately to be a corresponding ransom price for Adam and his posterity. Jesus came at the time God had pre-arranged: *"...when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son ..."* (Gal. 4:4). His coming was not a 'rescue mission' in the sense of being added by God after Adam and Eve transgressed. On the contrary, His coming and sacrifice were part of God's plan from the beginning of time, as the Scripture declares - Jesus was *"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"* (Rev. 13:8).

Purpose foreknown

The significance of Jesus' birth is not yet realised by the majority of the human race but that does not detract from its importance. Jesus knew from the outset

why He had come to Earth. He was only 12 years of age when He stayed behind in the temple after the feast, and was found asking "the doctors" questions. When His parents found Him, it is recorded that *"He said to them, ... 'Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?'"* (Luke 2:42-50). At first glance these verses might seem to be saying that He needed to ask questions about the purpose of His coming, but verses 47 and 50 show that He was more knowledgeable than those to whom He spoke: *"And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them"*. Jesus knew from the start of His earthly life why God had sent Him to Earth as He told His disciples: *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28).

Foretold in the prophecies

The prophecies of the birth of our Redeemer run like a golden thread through every book of the Old Testament. Isaiah 7:14 is one such prophecy: *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"*. The angel of the Lord confirmed to Joseph that this prophecy referred to Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25).

The prophet Micah also was used by God to foretell Jesus' birth, naming the place of His birth: *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"* (Micah 5:2). This prophecy was understood by the chief

In This Issue

Good News of Great Joy	1
The Reconciliation of the World	3
Take Heed That No Man Deceive You	6
King Nebuchadnezzar	9
Love Does Not Envy	12

priests and scribes as stated in Matthew 2:5 - 6.

The birth of Jesus marked the beginning of the fulfilment of many prophecies that had been uttered during the previous 4000 years. It was because the Old Testament contained so many predictions by the prophets concerning the coming Messiah, that about the time of our Saviour's birth "*the people were in expectation*" of Him (Luke 3:15).

The Advent of the Messiah to deliver and restore them to Palestine was the common hope of the Jews and that hope was never stronger than at that time. Daniel's prophecy in chapter 9 verses 24-25 did not say much about the glorious kingdom that they anticipated from other prophecies, but it fixed the time of the Messiah's advent: "*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 ...*". It is possible that the "seventy weeks prophecy" would have been an important topic of study and discussion for many generations of faithful Jews, and may well have been one factor that caused them to be in "*expectation*" as they earnestly looked for their Messiah. God also moved some devout peoples' hearts in readiness for that day as He did with Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-39).

The announcement of His birth

In fulfilment of definite proclamations and promises going back to the Garden of Eden, the event came of the One whose birth was heralded by Angels. Their message was: "*Behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour which is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:10-11).

It is significant that this message of such far-reaching importance was first given to humble shepherds looking after their sheep by night. The message was not given to the religious leaders – the Scribes or Pharisees – but to those lowly ones whose hearts were in the right condition to receive it with reverence and awe. The account in Luke 1:26 of the angel Gabriel telling Mary that she was specially chosen by God to give birth to God's Son shows Mary's humility and faith by her song of praise to God for His grace in selecting her – "*For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name*" (Luke 1:49).

From Jesus' humble birth in a manger to His simple

upbringing and His ministry after His baptism, it is evident that the character of our Saviour was one of selflessness and complete obedience to the Father's will. Jesus said "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls*" (Matt. 11:29). It is striking to note that when our Lord selected His disciples, most of them were not from the higher educated or rich, but from humble occupations.

The proclamation of the angels to those humble shepherds that a king was born that night in Judea in fulfilment of many prophecies holds the deepest significance for everyone who has ever lived. A mighty kingdom of power and light was promised to replace the empire of evil and darkness presided over by Satan, "the god of this world". Yes, there is an empire of evil, there is a dominion of darkness and ungodliness that must and will be broken.

The future

Long centuries have passed into history since the good tidings were first given to the shepherds about the new-born Prince of Peace. At this coming season millions of Christians will celebrate the birth of Jesus and proclaim this wonderful message of "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men*". Yet the world continues in turmoil, anguish and distress and there is no peace. However this will not continue forever, for the promises of God are sure and the earth will yet see this kingdom of peace and righteousness as declared by the prophet Isaiah (chap. 9:6 - 7):

*"For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given us;
And the government will rest on his shoulders;
And His name will be Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness; From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this".*

Looking down the stream of time, the prophet Isaiah saw the fulfilment of all that was promised; from a manger to a throne, from a world that had no house for the Prince of Peace to be born in to a world filled with the glory of His presence and righteous rule.

A blessed hope is this Christmas hope – first in this gospel age for the Church, and in the age to come for the world. This good news of great joy is for all people – for Jews and Gentiles, for Kings and Shepherds, for rich and poor. How blessed mankind will be when during that time they will be brought back into harmony with God through a righteous King who was once born a baby in Bethlehem.

THE RECONCILIATION OF THE WORLD

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... Let the earth bring forth grass... the herb... and the fruit tree ...Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons...Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth ...Let the earth bring forth the living creature ...cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth,...And God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:1-25 NKJV).

Each stage of creation from day three to day five was completed with the words *"And God saw that it was good"*. How wonderful it would have been to have seen the earth in all its glory at that time when it was prepared to receive God's ultimate earthly creation, mankind, as recorded in Gen. 1:26: *"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (NKJV).*

This ultimate earthly creation was given God's blessing with the words *"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth...I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food" (Gen. 1:28-30 NKJV).* All of God's creation for the earth was now in place, everything was now complete, as expressed by the words *"Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good..." (Gen. 1:31 NKJV).*

How things have changed from when mankind was first given dominion over this wonderful earth:

- In January 2006, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization warned that 11 million people in Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia were in danger of starvation due to the combination of severe drought and military conflicts. In 2006, the most serious humanitarian crisis in Africa was in Sudan's region Darfur.
- *"By 2025, two-thirds of arable land in Africa will disappear, along with a third of Asia and a fifth of South America. Some 135 million people - equivalent to the populations of France and Germany combined - are at risk of being displaced. One-third of the Earth's surface is at risk, driving people into cities and destroying agriculture in vast*

swathes of Africa. Thirty-one percent of Spain is threatened, while China has lost 36,000 square miles to desert — an area the size of Indiana — since the 1950s" (Michel Smitall, a spokesman for the U.N. secretariat).

- *"More than 80 percent of the Earth's natural forests already have been destroyed. Up to 90 percent of West Africa's coastal rain forests have disappeared since 1900. Brazil and Indonesia, which contain the world's two largest surviving regions of rain forest, are being stripped at an alarming rate by logging, fires, and land-clearing for agriculture and cattle-grazing" (World Resources Institute).*
- It is estimated that about 125 species of birds and 60 species of mammals have become extinct since A.D. 1600. Currently, there are approximately 1000 species of birds and mammals that are facing extinction.

What has brought about this catastrophic change on the earth, from one specially designed to be inhabited and to sustain and multiply human, animal and plant life, to an earth which is rapidly turning into deserts, where the land is being denuded as the forests are destroyed, plants and animals are rapidly becoming extinct, and where the very existence of the human race is coming under threat by famines and wars?

The present situation was initiated when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instruction *"...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17 NKJV).*

As a result of their disobedience God proclaimed *"Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, And to dust you shall return" Gen. 3:17-19 NKJV).*

It is not only Adam who has fallen from perfection but, as the Apostle Paul explains, *"....all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23 NKJV).* This wonderful earth, created for the enjoyment of mankind, now cursed, Man no longer has dominion over it - He eventually returns to the earth as dust; the death sentence has been invoked. Disobedience of God's law, plus the curse put on the earth as a result of Adam's disobedience, has resulted in the near destruction of the planet and all life on it.

What hope is there for this fallen race and this troubled earth? How can mankind be forgiven and brought back into harmony with God?

Redemption

Mankind needed to be redeemed, that is, that which was lost through disobedience to God's law had to be bought back from the Evil One. God has provided that the price could be a ransom, that is, one payment made on behalf of all mankind. However the ransom price was a perfect human life, and that was something that no ordinary man could pay because *"through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because **all sinned**."* (Rom. 5:12 NKJV). Consequently Psalm 49:7 reads: *"none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him"* (Psa. 49:7 NKJV). The problem remained: a ransom was required that was not tainted with sin, and that excluded all of Adam's descendants.

Provision of the Ransom

The ransom was provided by God himself: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (John 3:16-17). God provided the ransom price through His son, who willingly *"gave his life a ransom"*. (Matt. 20:28). The ransom price required the shedding of blood because under God's law, *"without shedding of blood there is no remission"* (Heb. 9:22 NKJV).

A ransom does not merely achieve a gratuitous release of the captive, but **it pays** for the captive's release. The ransom price (Greek *"lutron"*) for the fallen human race was the life of Christ, his blood, his death: *"... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot... who was foreordained before the foundation of the world"* (1 Peter 1:18-20 NKJV).

Propitiation

As a result of Christ's death the world's sins have been atoned. The word used in the Scriptures to refer to Christ as Mankind's ransom price is *"propitiation"*: *"being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a **propitiation** by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (Rom. 3:23-26 NKJV). The man Christ Jesus was the ransom!

Through God's grace, everyone since Jesus' coming

to Earth, who believes that Jesus is their "propitiation" is delivered from justly deserved wrath. It is important to note that God's justice has not changed; He graciously counts Jesus' death on the Cross as their propitiation and hence He is able to forgive them. By giving up His sinless life sacrificially, Christ annulled the power of sin to separate God and the believer. In other words, the believer is reconciled to God.

Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 shows that there are two stages in God's plan for individuals to be reconciled to Him: *"... God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them..."* (NKJV). The first stage began with the apostles at the start of the Gospel age and the second stage will not end until the whole world has been reconciled to Him.

It is man who needs to be reconciled to God, and not God to man. God has not changed; He is immutable (that is, unchangeable - Heb. 6:17). Nevertheless it is God who has provided the means of Man's reconciliation to Him: *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"* (Rom. 5:8-11 NKJV).

At the beginning of the Gospel Age, God offered the opportunity to be reconciled to Him only to the Jewish nation. It was not until they, as a nation, rejected the opportunity that God offered it to the Gentiles, Cornelius and his family being the first Gentiles to be baptized by the Apostle Peter (Acts 10:1-48). The opportunity to be reconciled to God spread to all the Gentiles in the region as recorded in Ephesians 2:11-19: *"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh - who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands - that at that time you 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. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God..."* {NKJV}.

The calling out of the Gentiles to be "a people for His name" (Acts 15:14 NKJV) does not mean that the Jews have been cast off with no opportunity ever to be

reconciled to God. Paul declares: *"Has God cast away His people? Certainly not!... God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew..."* (Rom. 11:1-2).

The Jewish nation previously obtained favour with God to some extent through the law and the yearly atonement day sacrifices. However they could not keep the Law in its entirety because of the weaknesses of their flesh: *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"* (Rom 8:3). Also the benefits afforded by these sacrifices ended when Christ fulfilled the law at his death: *"having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross"* (Col. 2:14 NIV).

Paul continues to explain the wonder of God's plan for the Jewish nation: *"...Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day'.have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles...for if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?". Paul then warns the Gentiles *"... do not boast against the branches, ...but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either"* (Rom. 11: 7-20 NKJV).*

The reconciliation process for mankind will not be completed in this Gospel Age, as Paul reminds Timothy: *"God our Savior, ...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 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 NKJV). The fact that the ransom is to be testified "in due time" implies that it is not yet fully testified; the time of its full testimony will be during the Millennial reign of Christ when many of the Old Testament prophesies will come to fruition. Both the prophets Habakkuk and Isaiah write of that time: *"...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."* (Hab. 2:14). *"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. 11:9).

Prior to this situation being established, Satan will be bound. During this Gospel age Satan *"...has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ ..."* (2 Cor. 4:4-5 NIV). However when Satan is bound, mankind will come to realise their enmity with God and their

undone condition. Nevertheless, even with Satan bound, it will take a period of time for the prophecy to be fulfilled: *"A highway shall be there, and a road and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads"* (Isa. 35:8-10 NKJV).

As the hearts of mankind change, the Earth will be restored to that of the Garden of Eden. Mankind will have dominion over the animals, the curse will be lifted from the Earth and the promises recorded in Isaiah will come into being: *"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox...They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* (Isa. 11:6-9 NKJV). The restoration of the Earth is also foretold in Isaiah 35: *"The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose ; It shall blossom abundantly, waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water..."* (Isa. 35:1-7 NKJV).

Mankind's health will be restored also as the sentence of death, which brought about the dying process, is lifted: *"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing"* (Isa. 35:5-6 NKJV).

The current governments and religions will also be replaced: *"For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord"* (Zeph. 3:9 NKJV). *"No more shall every man teach his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD', for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them"* (Jer. 31:34 NKJV).

The final step in the reconciliation process - the restoration of mankind to perfection - will be the removal of the death sentence itself: *"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men', and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"* (Rev 21:2-4 NKJV).



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Veronica Daphne Wallace

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Veronica was born in Mackay Queensland where she spent her early childhood, before moving to Brisbane, then later Warwick, the Gold Coast, Longreach and Toowoomba. Veronica spent her last twenty five years at Lara Victoria, from where she and her sister and mother were able to become more involved with the Melbourne Class of Bible Students.

Veronica consecrated with her family nearly fifty years ago. As opportunities arose, she attended Bible Study meetings and Conventions, both in Melbourne and interstate. She had recently taken on the role, with her sister Kay of preparing the published copies of the People's Paper for posting.

In the latter years before her death, Veronica enjoyed researching her family tree and she and Kay, were able to travel to Mackay to attend family reunions and meet many family members. They both shared vivid and happy memories of these trips. A lesser known talent of Veronica's was her artistic ability. Although she had always displayed a talent for sketching, it was only in her later years that she took up oil painting and created many paintings mainly from her imagination and memory.

Her caring nature was particularly apparent in the carer and companionship role she shared with her mother until her mother's death at the age of 97, just four years before her own. In earlier years, she also took on a nursing-caring role for a number of years, for both Sr. and Br. Crouch in Queensland.

Veronica's life was her witness – gentle, gracious and humble. She had faith in the Biblical promises of an everlasting life after death and held onto that belief as she faced the unexpected end of her earthly life with quiet dignity.

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TAKE HEED THAT NO MAN DECEIVE YOU

In Matthew 24:3 it is recorded that the disciples asked Jesus *"what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* Jesus answered *"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, 'I am Christ'; and shall deceive many"* (verses 4-5). Jesus' words relate specifically to the time shortly before his second coming (or second presence: Greek *'parousia'*) and should heighten believers' awareness of the power of the deceptions that would be, and are, in the world.

There are four components in Jesus' answer: believers would need to take heed to ensure that they would not be deceived, there would be *"many"* who would *"come"*, they would claim to be Christ, and *"many"* would be deceived.

Take heed

Regarding the need for believers to *"take heed"*, Jesus warned his disciples that the deceptions at the end of the Age would be powerful, so powerful that if it were possible even the elect would be deceived: *"For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect"* (Matt. 24:24). Jesus' words deserve emphasis: if it were possible even the elect could be led astray. Consequently there is great comfort in the Master's words *"My father ... is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my father's hand"* (John 10:29). The Christian's task is to *"continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel"* (Col. 1:23).

"I am Christ"

Jesus said that many would *"say 'I am Christ'".* The meaning of the word *"Christ"* is anointed, and so those who would say that they were *"Christ"* would, in effect, be claiming to be anointed.

Christians are anointed with God's Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27), and it is that Spirit that reveals the gospel to them (1 Cor. 2:10). There is only one God-given Spirit, the Holy Spirit. All other spirits are from Satan, the great deceiver who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden (1 Tim. 2:14).

It is by the Holy Spirit that Christians are given a knowledge of God's plan: *"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. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 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. But he that is spiritual judgeth ("examines" - Revised Version margin) all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (1 Cor. 2:12-15).

False Christs

The Apostle John alerted his readers to the existence of other spirits. He calls them *"false spirits"*: *"Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but prove the Spirits, whether they be of God, because many false Spirits are gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1). The Apostle Paul warned the church at Corinth about these false spirits: *"But I fear, least by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve though his subtlety, 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. 11:3-4). Paul was *"concerned"* that they would *"bear"* with the false spirits who were preaching another Jesus, and that their mingling with them would result in some being led astray.

Paul was concerned even though he was writing to Christians who had been taught the true gospel, *"the gospel of the kingdom"*. At that time anti-Christ was only beginning, yet Paul said he feared lest these Christians might be led astray by those who would be preaching *"another gospel"*. He warned them that they would be *"clothed with the same subtlety with which the serpent beguiled Eve"*.

How to identify false spirits

Consequently it is natural to ask *"How does one know whether a preacher is speaking by the Holy Spirit or by a false spirit?"*

It can be difficult to identify who has the Holy Spirit and who is under the influence of a false spirit. The task is made more difficult by the fact that the Holy Spirit is manifested in various ways in different individuals: *"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit ... 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 the body is not one member but many" (1 Cor. 12:4-14).

However the Scriptures provide Christians with several tests that may be used to identify false spirits. While Christians are not to judge (Matt. 7:1), they are to be *"as wise as serpents"* because they go forth *"as sheep in the midst of wolves"* (Matt. 10:16). Christians need to be wise so that they are able to identify false spirits and avoid them.

Fruits of the Spirit

One of the characteristics that indicates whether a preacher is motivated by the Holy Spirit is their fruits. Jesus said: *"Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves...By their fruits ye shall know them"* (Matt. 7:15-16). The extent to which the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) are displayed is readily apparent and a lack of the fruits is a sure indication that the preacher is not motivated by the Holy Spirit. A person who shows good fruitage is not necessarily a Christian believer, but anyone who professes to be a Christian must exhibit the fruits. If they do not, it is evident that their faith is not sound and they are not motivated by the Holy Spirit but by a false spirit.

The development of the fruits of the spirit depends firstly on the acknowledgement of God as the Supreme Being. Any prophet who claims to be anointed with God's Holy Spirit must acknowledge that God is the creator of the universe and is Lord of all. As the Wise Man said: *"The fear (reverence) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* (Prov. 9:10). Any prophet who denies the existence of God and proclaims that Man was not created by a Supreme Being but evolved from some lower creature, does not have the very basis of the wisdom detailed in the Scriptures and therefore is unable to understand anything of God's plan for mankind. Such a one might *"have a form of godliness but (they) deny the power thereof"*, and the exhortation to Christians is to *"turn away"* from them (2 Tim. 3:5).

Jesus' ancestry

Another criterion that Christians may use to decide whether one is preaching the true gospel is given in 1 John 4:2: *"Hereby know ye the spirit of God; every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God"*. Jesus declared *"... I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me"* (John 8:42). Unless one preaches the pre-existence of Jesus their message is not the true gospel. The Scriptures declare that Jesus, as the Logos, was the *"beginning of the creation of God"* (Rev. 3:14), and that *"the world was made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made"* (John 1:3). He was with the Father *"before Abraham*

was" (John 8:58). Belief in, and the preaching of, the pre-existence of Jesus is a sure test whether any message is the true gospel. 2 John 7 states: *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ did come in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the anti-Christ"* (Revised Version).

The gospel of the kingdom

Jesus said *"this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations"* (Matt. 24:14). Jesus' statement includes two criteria – the message would be a *"gospel"*, and the gospel would be of *"a kingdom"*.

The word *"gospel"* means *"good news"* or *"glad tidings"* as the heavenly messengers announced to the shepherds: *"Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:10). The gospel message is a message of great joy and any message that declares otherwise is not the gospel. Consequently any preacher who teaches fear and torment is not preaching the gospel and therefore may be dismissed as being an oracle of God.

Jesus proclaimed that *"this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations"* (Matt. 24:14). These words define the gospel: it is the good news of the kingdom. Consequently, regardless of how impressive any preacher might be, unless they preach the gospel of the kingdom, their *"gospel"* is *"not another"* (Gal. 1:6-7).

Daniel 2:44 details several characteristics of the kingdom: *"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 forever"*. The prophecy is clear: the God of heaven will set up the kingdom, it will replace all other kingdoms, and it will last forever. Unless a preacher proclaims this kingdom they are not preaching as Jesus proclaimed.

Unity of the Spirit

A further test that may be used to determine whether a preacher is declaring the gospel is whether their messages promote unity or strife. In the words of the Apostle Paul: *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by their smooth and fair speech, beguile the hearts of the innocent"* (Rom. 16:17-18). The true gospel message should strive to bring the believers together and not cause them to separate. The importance of building unity and not

division is so great that Paul wrote: *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ... Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things ..."* (Eph. 4:3, 15). Any teaching that does not strive to unify the believers is not the gospel: *"where envying and strife is there is confusion and every evil work"* (James 3:16). This is not to say that the Christian must keep the peace at any price, but that the endeavour must be to keep the **unity of the Spirit**, remembering that God has *"set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him"*, and that it is He who *"worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"* (1 Cor. 12:18; Eph. 1:11).

"Smooth talk"

The Apostle Paul also alerted the church at Rome to those who *"by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Rom. 16:18). This deception was so powerful and widespread that he also warned the brethren at both Ephesus and Colosse (Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:4). He also gave Titus clear instruction about those who tried to deceive by words: *"For there are many unruly, and vain talkers and deceivers ... whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses ..."* (Titus 1:10-11).

In this vein it is significant that Paul did not claim to give such a presentation, but rather *"I...when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God"* (1 Cor. 2:1). The thought behind *"excellency"* is "prominence" or "superiority" and so it is evident that the Apostle Paul did not strive to win converts by the quality of his speech but by the substance of his message – *"that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God"* (1 Cor. 2:5). Christians should be wary of those whose aim to attract by glamorous performances and who despise those who are of humble presentation.

The temptation presented by the "smooth talkers" in Corinth caused the Apostle Paul to resort to *"boasting a little"* that he *"may cut off occasion from them that desire occasion ... for such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ"*. He continues: *"And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness ..."* (2 Cor. 11:12-18). Glamorous presentation and "smooth talk" are not fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Bondage

Paul found it necessary to warn some members of the church at Galatia for their tendency to be led away from the true gospel, and their freedom in Christ unto *"another gospel"* which he says *"is not another"* (Gal. 1:6-7). They were being persuaded that it was necessary to be circumcised and keep the law of the Jews. In Galatians 2:4 the Apostle wrote that this attempt to pervert the gospel of Christ was the work of false brethren who *"came in to spy out the liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us to bondage"*. Christians living at the close of the current era should be aware of any preacher who endeavours to bind them to an organization, or in any way restricts their liberty to individually study God's word. It is before the judgment seat of Christ that all will appear, and the criteria there will not include allegiance to any earthly ordinance (2 Cor. 5:10) but steadfastness to the faith.

There are many other doctrines that indicate whether one is preaching by the Holy Spirit, one being that Jesus died to give His *"life a ransom for all, to be testified in due time"* (1 Tim. 2:6). Also the resurrection of the dead as proclaimed by the Apostle Paul: *"there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust"* (Acts 24:15). Also, do they vigorously preach the necessity to develop the fruits of the spirit that their followers are prepared to *"lay aside the filth of the flesh"* (1 Pet. 3:21) and take unto themselves the *"whole armour of God"* and *"stand against the wiles of the devil"* (Eph. 6:11).

A broader view

There is yet another aspect of the deceptions that confront the Christian in the last days of the Age. These further deceptions arise from a lack of purpose. Strong's Concordance defines the Greek word translated "deceive" in Matthew 24:5 as *"#4105: ... to (properly cause to) roam (from safety, truth, or virtue)"*. It is translated as *"go astray, deceive, err, seduce, wander, be out of the way"*. The concepts of *"roaming"*, *"going astray"* and *"wandering"* might not be deceptions, but nevertheless such aimless wanderings with no fixed objective in mind makes one vulnerable to going astray. The Christian's journey must be one of purpose and dedication: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain"* (1 Cor. 9:24).

Consequences

Believing and acting in accordance with the true gospel results in the believers being despised and rejected by the world of mankind. The believers will be regarded as *"a peculiar people"* (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). One powerful consolation for the Christian is that *"The reason why the world does not know us, is that it does not know Him"* (1 John 3:1 RSV).

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

In Romans 15:4 the Apostle Paul declares, *"whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"*. Much of the Old Testament is an historical record of events that took place several centuries ago, and therefore may seem to be of little relevance to the Christian today. However the Old Testament books of the Bible also contain prophecies, some of which have already been fulfilled, and some of which have not yet been fulfilled. The fact that some have come to pass precisely as they predicted should give confidence that all of the prophecies in God's word will be fulfilled in God's due time. As the prophet Habakkuk stated, *"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). Christians may therefore derive much comfort from the statement in Romans 15:4 *"that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"*. Christians need to have patience while they wait for God's program to unfold, and the prophecies that have already been fulfilled give assurance that the remainder will be fulfilled. As the Apostle Peter wrote *"we have also a more sure word of prophecy ..."* (2 Pet. 1:19).

One individual who features in both the history and prophecy of the Old Testament is Nebuchadnezzar.

History of Nebuchadnezzar

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was a mighty conqueror. *"In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon ... had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates ..."* (2 Kings 24:1-7 NKJV). It was under his rule that Israel was carried away captive to Babylon as recorded in 1 Chronicles 6:15: *"... the LORD carried Judah and Jerusalem into captivity by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar"*, including *"the vessels of the house of the LORD"*, which Nebuchadnezzar put *"in his temple at Babylon"* (2Chron. 36:7). In all, Nebuchadnezzar took 4600 persons captive to Babylon (Jer. 52:28-30).

Babylon was a great and glorious empire, and some historians credit Nebuchadnezzar with the building of the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon - one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The Scriptures do not record Nebuchadnezzar's death, neither is there a clear account of his demise. The last reference to his exploits is in Daniel 4:37 where it is recorded that he proclaimed *"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of*

whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down". Some historians suggest that he died in 561BC after reigning in Babylon for 43 years. His son, Belshazzar, succeeded him (Dan. 5:1-2).

God's servant

Nebuchadnezzar was one of God's servants, and as one of God's servants Nebuchadnezzar 'merely' carried out God's will. The prophet Jeremiah states: *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel ... 'I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant ...'"* (Jer. 27:4-6 NJKV). In this statement Jeremiah proclaims God's authority by declaring that it is God who created the Earth and placed Man on it, and it is God who gave the lands to Nebuchadnezzar.

In this respect, Nebuchadnezzar was in the same category as Pharaoh before him (Rom. 9:17) and Cyrus after him (2 Chron. 36:23; Isa. 44:28), and that realisation adds considerably to the importance of his exploits.

The capture of Judah and Jerusalem, and their exile in Babylon, was an amazing military feat. However of no lesser significance is the fact that Nebuchadnezzar had two dreams.

Nebuchadnezzar's first dream

Nebuchadnezzar's first dream is recorded in Daniel 2. It was a very vivid and somewhat startling dream; it was not an ordinary dream. When Nebuchadnezzar awoke he could not remember the details. None of the wise men of Babylon or the astrologers could reveal the dream to him, but God revealed it to Daniel. God revealed it to Daniel in answer to Daniel's supplications and those of his three companions. It was a message from God revealing what was to happen on the world scene, commencing at that time and culminating well over 3000 years later.

Some of the main points of the dream were:

- The dream was of a great image of a man.
- Its head was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass; its legs of iron, and its feet part of iron and part of clay.
- A stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet, and broke it into pieces.
- The iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold were broken in pieces together, and became like the

chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away.

- The stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

God told Daniel that the significance of these features meant:

- The God of heaven gave Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom (Dan. 2:37-38).
- The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar (verse 38).
- The other parts of the image represented kingdoms that would subsequently rule on the Earth (verses 39-40).
- The fourth kingdom would be strong as iron, and it would break others in pieces and crush them (verse 40).
- The fourth kingdom would be a divided kingdom, part of it being potters' clay and part iron; partly strong and partly broken (verses 41-42).
- The fourth kingdom would mingle with the seed of men; but they would not cleave one to another (verse 43).
- In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms (verse 44).
- God's kingdom will stand forever (verse 44).

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that the interpretation given by Daniel was from his God, who is "a God of gods" (Dan. 2:47). However Nebuchadnezzar soon strayed away from acknowledging Daniel's God. He built a great image and demanded that all people worship it (Dan. 3). The refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to do so resulted in them being cast into the fiery furnace, and their survival once again caused Nebuchadnezzar to give praise to God: "Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth ... I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me ..." (Dan. 4:1-2).

Historical Fulfilment

Three of the kingdoms portrayed in Nebuchadnezzar's first dream are identified in the book of Daniel. Firstly, the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar himself, as king of Babylon: "thou art this head of gold" (Dan. 2:38). Chapter 5:28 states that the Babylonian kingdom would be divided and "given to the Medes and Persians", and in chapter 8:20-21, through a vision given to Daniel (of the "ram and the rough goat"), it is foretold that the kingdom would then pass to Greece. The fourth kingdom, the kingdom that was to be as "strong as iron" and yet "... be a divided kingdom ... partly strong and partly broken", is not named in the Scriptures.

The three named kingdoms did come into being and

were subsequently overthrown by the next kingdom in the order given in Daniel's prophecy. Such a sequence of events gives confidence that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, and that the prophecies in it that have not yet been fulfilled will indeed come to pass.

The dream still relevant

While the first three kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream came into existence and disappeared a long time ago, the dream has not yet been completely fulfilled. The prophecy is that "...in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). God's kingdom is yet to be established on Earth as Christians the world over continue to pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The hope of that kingdom is one of the bulwarks of the Christian faith because it promises a world of prosperity such as never has existed in the history of Man. The prophet Isaiah describes it thus: "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 forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7).

The prospect of a kingdom that will bring peace, which will bring justice and which will never end, is a prospect that politicians today can only dream about. The failure of governments so far to bring about such a regime adds greatly to the significance of the final sentence of Isaiah 9:7: - "the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this". Since no man-made kingdom has ever succeeded in bringing about such a wonderful regime, it is naive to continue to hope that any man-made kingdom will ever be able to do so. The factor that makes such a hope realistic is that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts" will bring it about, and the historical record of the fulfilment of the first three kingdoms foretold by Nebuchadnezzar's dream is a source of great assurance that this promise of God will be fulfilled.

Nebuchadnezzar's second dream

Soon after his proclamation following the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar had a second dream. It is recorded in Daniel 4:4-37. Again, Daniel was the only one to whom God revealed the meaning of the dream. The dream prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would be abased and would "eat grass like the oxen and be wet with the dew of heaven" for a period of "seven times".

However, in spite of the vision and its interpretation,

Nebuchadnezzar became proud and again took the honour for his glory unto himself. Daniel 4:30 reads *"The king spoke, and said, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?'"*

While he was still boasting of his accomplishments, indeed *"while the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses'. That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever. For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven. Among the inhabitants of the earth no-one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'. At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honour and splendour returned to me. My counsellors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down"* (Dan. 4:31-37).

Is there greater significance?

In spite of the drama of Nebuchadnezzar's military exploits and the prophecies entwined in his dreams, such an extensive record of the life of one king may seem to be an expensive means of conveying some simple truths to Christians. Since the spirit *"searches all things, yea the deep things of God"* (1 Cor. 2:10), Christians might feel that there is greater significance in these events than the superficial lessons that are immediately evident.

Such searching may lead to some interesting similarities. However, while these similarities may reflect some wonderful aspects of God's plan, unless they can be established as categorical teachings of His word, they cannot be put forward as a basis for faith, but merely as aids that increase the Christian's wonder at, and worship of, their Creator (Rom. 11:33-36).

One suggestion that has been made is that Nebuchadnezzar's life portrays the history of the human race. Both Adam and Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed great authority and glory that was given to them directly by God. Of Adam it is recorded that *"... God said 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth'. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, '...have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth'"* (Gen.1:26-28). Adam's position was indeed glorious; he had dominion over every living creature on the Earth, and to him was given the privilege of naming the animals (Gen.2:19-20).

However Nebuchadnezzar became proud and so God humbled him by blinding him for a period of time. Adam also became proud in that he deliberately disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. He was humbled also by being cast out of the garden and being forced to earn his living by the sweat of his brow. This will also be for a period of time.

However one difference between the parallels is that Nebuchadnezzar had his health restored to him in this life whereas Adam died (Gen. 5:5). Nevertheless Nebuchadnezzar's life is an accurate parallel in terms of the ultimate outcome because Mankind will eventually, after experiencing this life of decay and death, come to realize that God's provisions are best for them: *"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths'"* (Isa. 2:1-2). The promise is that, when God's kingdom is established in the Earth, all nations will voluntarily flow to it: *"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD"*.

Seven times

The prophecy in Daniel 4:25 specifies that Nebuchadnezzar would eat grass of the field until *"seven times had passed over him"*. The question may be asked whether there is any significance in the term *"seven times"*, and whether there is any parallel that may be drawn with it and other parts of God's plan.

A detailed consideration of the significance of the term *"seven times"* is reserved for a future issue.

Love Does Not Envy

One of the greatest challenges that confronts the Christian is overcoming envy. However they must overcome it if they are to develop love to the standard defined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4: "*charity (love) envieth not*" (KJV). There is no room for envy in love.

A lifetime's work

Envy is inherent in natural man, as the Apostle James declares: "*The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy*" (Jas. 4:5), and therefore conscious effort is required to overcome that disposition. The Apostle Peter exhorts all to "*lay aside all ... envies*", and "*as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby*" (1 Pet. 2:1-2). Milk is the appropriate spiritual food for "*babes in Christ*" (1 Cor. 3:1-2), nevertheless the Apostle exhorts even these to "*lay aside all envy*". Hence the task of rooting out envy must commence as soon as one decides to embark on the narrow way.

Paul's sequence

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul refers to envy immediately after he lists kindness: "*love is kind; love envieth not*". The statement that "*love is kind*" is a positive one - it relates to something we must develop, whereas "*love envieth not*" is negative - it refers to something we must suppress. Just as positive and negative are direct opposites, so also are kindness and envy. Kindness is concerned with helping another whereas envy is concerned with usurping another's possessions, whether they be of a material (concrete) nature or of an emotional (abstract) nature.

Material possessions

One source of envy is the possession of material goods. In Genesis 26:12-14 it is recorded that "*Isaac ... had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants, and the Philistines envied him*". The Philistines were envious of Isaac's material possessions. Likewise "*when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister*" (Gen. 30:1). Leah had children, and the prestige of motherhood. Rachel had neither and desired both. It was Leah's greater material possessions that caused Rachel to envy her. The challenge for Christians is to not let another's material possessions make them envious.

Esteem

The esteem given to another can give rise to envy. Genesis 37:3-4 records Jacob's love for Joseph: "*Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his children ... and when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him ...*". They envied Joseph because of Jacob's greater love for him. Christians must not let another's

greater esteem cause them to envy, but instead they must strive to "*let our conversation (conduct) be without covetousness, and be content with such things as we have ...*" (Heb. 13:5).

Authority

Envy can also arise when one person has more authority than another. When Joseph told his brothers of his dreams that indicated they would be subordinate to him, "*his brethren envied him*" (Gen. 37:11). This prospect caused "*the patriarchs (to be) moved with envy, (and to sell) Joseph into Egypt*" (Acts 7:9). It is easy to be envious of those who have authority over us, in either secular or spiritual matters.

In relation to authority in spiritual matters, the exhortation is "*to know them which ... are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*" (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Christians must not be envious of those whom the Lord has placed over them.

Regarding authority in secular matters, the instruction is to "*submit ... to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake...*" (1 Pet. 2:13). Rather than contest their authority Christians are to pray "*for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*" (1 Tim. 2:2). It is helpful to always have clearly in mind that the "*things which are seen are temporal*" (2 Cor. 4:18), and those things include secular authority. May we always "*look not at the things which are seen ... but at the things which are not seen*" because the things that are not seen are the ones that are eternal.

Popularity

Matthew 27:18 tells us that the Jews were envious of Jesus - "*for he knew that for envy they had delivered him*". Mark 12:37 reads: "*the common people heard him gladly*" (KJV). Jesus was popular with the common people; it was the Jewish rulers who were envious of him. Greater popularity can be a source of envy, and care is required to ensure that one does not envy those who are more popular than themselves.

May all strive to overcome the natural inclination to be envious, and having "*purified our souls ... love one another ... fervently*" (1 Peter 1:22).

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