

Volume 93 No. 1

AUSTRALIA

January — March 2010

THE PAST YEAR

The beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to reflect on the events of the past year and to ponder what might be in the year ahead.

During 2009 there were several events whose effect was to cause alarm rather than peace: armed conflicts, acts of terrorism, earthquakes, tornadoes, cyclones, floods and drought. The human suffering, both in degree and magnitude, was enormous, and so when reflecting on the past year it is profitable to keep in mind John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid".

Armed conflicts

During 2009 several parts of the globe were plagued with war—Iraq and the Middle East, Asia, the African continent, parts of South America, and the Adriatic region. There were several other places, not published in the media, where human beings inflicted pain and suffering on fellow human beings. One example is Iran; below is a report from Israel National News television published on 25 June 2009:

"Iranian Dissident: Dear Israeli Brothers and Sisters - Help Us! by Nissan Ratzlav-Katz

*Iranian anti-regime activists are hoping for an Israeli technological hand to help them fight the Islamic Republic. As of now, **hundreds of protesters have been killed by the regime**, which is evidently using Arabic-speaking armed thugs from Hizbullah to help perpetrate the violence.*

*"Dear Israeli Brothers and Sisters," writes Iranian dissident Arash Irandoost, "Iran needs your help more than ever now. And we will be eternally grateful. Please help opposition television and radio stations which are blocked and being jammed by the Islamic Republic (Nokia and Siemens) resume broadcast to Iran. There is a total media blackout and Iranians inside Iran for the most part are not aware of their brave brothers and sisters fighting and losing their lives daily. And the unjust treatment and **brutal***

massacre of the brave Iranians in the hands of the mullah's paid terrorist Hamas and Hizbullah gangs are not seen by the majority of the Iranians. Please help in any way you can to allow these stations resume broadcasting to Iran.

"And, please remember that we will remember, as you have remembered Cyrus the Great's treatment of you in your time of need," Irandoost concludes, signing his blogged call for help "Your Iranian Brothers and Sisters!"

In an interview with Israel National News, Iranian expatriate pro-democracy activist Amil Imani said that Irandoost's message represents the sentiments of much of the youth in the streets in Iran. They have a strong belief in the technological know-how of the Israelis to overcome the Iranian regime's attempts to block communications.

"This is going to be the most massive, impressive revolution of the 21st century," Imani said, "and we're seeing it live." However, he added, it is now too dependent on Internet communications, so the protesters are very much in need of outside assistance to fight the technological and information war. More generally, Imani said, the Iranian people are lionizing any leader of any nation who comes out strongly against the Islamic Republic at this time.

In This Issue

The Past Year	1
The Way That Seemed Right	3
The Church at Philadelphia	5
Jacob The Prophet	6
The Manger and the Napkin	9
To The Intent	10
Love Beareth All Things	12

According to Imani, at least 500 people have been killed by Iranian government forces, with another 5,000 injured. But the hospitals are no longer safe, he added, as the gunmen from the basiji militia enter the emergency wards looking for wounded protesters. Therefore, Imani said, sympathetic doctors have taken to treating the wounded wherever they can, including in private homes.

Even outside Iran, tens of thousands of protesters are out in the streets every day, especially in the United States and Europe. Imani said he thinks the phenomenon represents unprecedented unity in the Iranian expatriate community.

As for the basijis themselves, Imani reported, many of them are Lebanese and Palestinian Authority Arabs hired by the regime to do its bidding. Iranians reportedly captured seven basijis who spoke no Persian, only Arabic. According to Imani, 10,000 more Arab hired guns arrived in Tehran to serve "the mullah-led regime.

But they are not the only ones thinking about guns at this point. Some Iranian protesters, Imani reported, have taken to threatening their oppressors, "God have mercy on you if we decide to [take up] arms!" "There is no turning back," Imani concluded.

(Source: www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/132073).

The United Nations

The above report, and the prevalence of other armed conflicts in the world in 2009, is a reminder that, in spite of their best efforts, Man is unable to establish peace on the earth. Engraved into the stone wall of the United Nations' Churches Center in New York (directly across First Avenue from UN headquarters) is the inscription: "...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more—Isaiah". The specific reference of the quotation (Isa. 2:4) is not engraved into the wall, maybe to avoid offending those nations of predominantly non-Biblical faiths. However, in spite of this noble objective of the UN, the total fire-power in the world today is greater than when the UN was established on 25 October 1945, and so the UN is failing to achieve the conversion of "swords into plowshares and spears into pruninghooks".

The armed conflicts in the world in 2009 made it a challenge to be truly at peace and, in view of the reporter's prediction quoted above for Iran, it will remain a challenge during 2010. Everyone who believes in the existence of a God may well ask the question: if you are a God of love, compassion and

mercy why don't you do something to end the suffering? How can you sit idly by and watch your human creation endure such heartbreak?

God's supremacy

The first point to be grasped in any search for the answers to those questions is that the creator of the universe is supreme and operates at a level far above the level of the human mind—indeed the challenge is to realise how much higher are His ways than Man's ways. The prophet Isaiah wrote: "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isa. 55:9). A consideration of the height of the heavens above the earth gives some idea of the difference in the levels of intellect between God and Man.

The prophet Jeremiah also wrote of the power of God relative to that of His human creation: "*But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath, the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens'. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish*" (Jer. 1:10-15).

Jeremiah wrote that not only has God complete control over the affairs of men but also that He made the world "**by His wisdom**", which implies that whatever is happening in the world is happening because it will yield the best outcome for mankind in the long term. God is "*the only wise God*" (Rom. 16:27) in contrast to "*the gods that have **not** made the heavens and the earth*", as Jeremiah termed them. Consequently Christians can rest assured that the present distress is in accord with God's plan for mankind; He has the power to stop it, and will do so when it has accomplished His purpose.

Meanwhile Christians should be at peace within themselves because, although "*men's hearts will fail them for fear for looking after those things that are coming on the earth*", the faithful should: "*...look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*" (Luke 21:26-28).■

THE WAY THAT SEEMED RIGHT

The writer of Proverbs exhibited a comprehensive understanding of mankind's plight when he wrote: *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12 KJV). The verse expresses, in a few words, the results of Adam's transgression and Man's struggle to thwart its effects.

The verse does not say that the way that seemed right is the cause of death—the death sentence had already been imposed shortly after Adam disobeyed in the Garden of Eden—but rather that every effort mankind makes to offset or delay its effects ends in death and not eternal life.

Genesis 2:17 records the pronouncement of the death sentence upon Adam but it does not give any details as to how the sentence was to be carried out—the verse simply states: *"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"*. However Genesis chapter 3 does give some details of human experience as each one progresses down the way which finally ends in death.

Genesis 3:16-19 reads: *"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"*.

The ground cursed

The first element of the curse which God conveyed to Adam was that the ground would be cursed and bring forth thorns and thistles. Thorns and thistles were not part of God's initial provision for mankind: *"And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so"* (Gen. 1:29-30). The earth was to bring forth everything that Man required for his sustenance and no mention is made of him having to cultivate the soil.

However God changed the situation when He pronounced the curse on Adam. Confronted with the need to earn his living by the *"sweat of his face"*, mankind has cultivated the ground in an endeavour to increase its yield. In many third world countries the development has been nothing more than the use of animals to pull primitive cultivating implements; in Western countries machines powered by combustion engines have been developed. Although cultivation has produced increased yields the consequences of the curse remain; cultivation has not provided a comprehensive antidote.

Western countries have developed more sophisticated systems. Experimentation has led to the development of chemical fertilizers to overcome soil deficiencies and various other chemicals have been developed to reduce the prevalence of thorns and thistles. The effect of these chemicals has been *"marvellous"*, increasing yields to values previously not considered possible—initially the development of these chemicals *"seemed to be right"*. However the continued use of them is now having an adverse effect and some of the land is becoming infertile. Additionally, some of the chemicals have been absorbed by the crops and have made the produce toxic to mankind and has required those chemicals to be banned. The long term outcome of the use of the chemicals has not been to mankind's benefit but rather has led to his death—the end of the way that seemed to be right has resulted in death and not life. The original death sentence remains.

Irrigation systems have been developed to bring water to land which was unproductive due to a lack of water. However, although the short term benefits are and were substantial, their long term effects include the soil becoming salty and unproductive. Again the way that seemed right is not yielding the results for which mankind yearns—eternal life.

The sweat of thy face

The curse also promised that man would eat his bread *"in the sweat of his face"*, and until recently such has been the case. However the industrial revolution of a little more than 200 years ago sparked an endeavour by mankind to alleviate the burden of physical labour. Today machines perform many tasks which previously had to be accomplished by manual labour. Initially such inventions were deemed to be *"great steps forward"*, and there is no doubt that they have relieved mankind of many tasks which caused them to perspire. However it is now becoming apparent that those developments are not enabling mankind to annul the death sentence. Indeed their long term effects are now adversely affecting the whole globe.

The main problems arising from industrialisation stem from the need for raw materials to provide the energy necessary to drive the machines (energy which previously was provided manually and which resulted in man experiencing sweat on his face), and the effluent produced by the machines.

The acquisition of raw materials such as coal and other minerals required to sustain the industrial processes requires the natural environment to be disturbed which, in turn, is upsetting the ecological balance of the planet. One of the effects of such disruption is now considered by some scientists to be a reduction in rainfall and currently there is some movement towards preserving forests in order to restore natural rainfall.

Pollution

The effluent from the industrial processes is causing even greater concern. Apart from effluent such as toxic gases and other chemicals which are foreign and injurious to mankind's physiology, concern is currently being expressed about the widespread effects of factories belching huge amounts of effluent in all forms; solid, liquid and gas.

Some scientists claim that the exhaust gases from factories and motorised means of transport are affecting the earth's atmosphere increasing the proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere which in turn is raising the average temperature. One term used to refer to the phenomenon is "global warming" and international co-operation is currently being sought to arrest the amount of carbon dioxide being exhausted into the atmosphere. One way currently being sponsored to reduce the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is to preserve forests because trees absorb carbon dioxide during the photosynthesis process.

The concern about global warming is not new. Some scientists have warned of the potential for several decades. Below is an extract from this publication almost 60 years ago, which quotes a report printed in the Melbourne press at that time:

*"Peoples Paper, Volume XXXIII No. 6,
MELBOURNE, JUNE, 1950 Price—Fourpence
Halfpenny.*

The World is Warming Up, Experts Say

New York.—The world's climate is becoming slowly warmer and there is a danger that the levels of the oceans may be raised, causing serious inundations as a result of the melting of glaciers and the polar ice-caps.

This is stated by the Reports and Forecasts section of the U.S. Weather Bureau. Its chief, Ivan Tennehill, says the evidence of this change of weather is

becoming too impressive to be ignored. He says that weather men may not be able to agree on the cause but the rise in temperature has been going on for 100 years. Average temperatures in many places have risen four degrees in that time, fish are moving farther north, and so are the Alaskan forests. Most of the world's glaciers are melting faster and in Iowa the length of the growing season has increased by 20 days in 40 years."

The editor of the "Peoples Paper" added: *"The above news item... is of interest to all who have faith in the 'times of restitution of all things' during the Millennial reign of Christ. Undoubtedly the extremes in climate, as in all other things, will be corrected to produce perfect conditions ultimately for all the world of mankind...."*

The editor expressed the view that there will need to be a moderation in the world's climate for the times of restitution to be effected. Scriptures such as Isaiah 35:1-7 imply that there will be changes: *"...the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly...in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes"*. The promise that streams will break out in the desert, that the desert will blossom as the rose, and the parched ground will become a pool all indicate that the amount of water available on the earth will be increased. However whether those changes will come about because of industrialisation is not stated in the Scriptures. At the present time the amount of water in some areas of the globe seems to be decreasing but increasing in others; some scientists attribute the increase to the melting of the polar ice caps.

Further endeavours

Mankind has endeavoured to negate the effects of the curse in other fields also. One of the more prominent fields is medicine. The short term benefits to mankind are amazing, however the prolongation of life of the aged is requiring increased expert care and accommodation for them which in turn is increasing the financial burden on the immediate relations and the wider community.

Finance is another area where sophisticated systems have been developed to enable people to more promptly acquire goods which, it is hoped, would improve their standard of living. However those systems also have failed. Thus it is evident that every endeavour which *"seemed right to Man"* to alleviate the effects of the Adamic curse has failed, and the death sentence remains.■

THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

The message to the church at Philadelphia is the sixth of the seven messages sent to the churches in Asia minor.

The city of Philadelphia (now named “Alasehir” in Turkey) was situated 45 kilometres S.E of Sardis on the Cogamus River. The city is situated on a fault line, and is subject to frequent and sometimes powerful earthquakes. The earthquakes are amply recorded in history, a severe one occurring in 17 AD which destroyed the city and eleven others. Sardis fared worse from the initial quake, but Philadelphia shook more frequently from severe aftershocks, traumatizing the population.

Historians record that the city may well have been founded for a social purpose, being regarded as “a missionary city” founded to promote “a certain unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty within the realm...”. Such a purpose is consistent with the ancient city having several temples; indeed the city became known as “little Athens” for its dedication to deities. The word Philadelphia means “brotherly love”.

The open door

The message to the church at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8-13) contains expressions which relate to the physical characteristics of the city. The reference to “doors” (verses 7 and 8), and the keys necessary to open them, may well refer to the numerous doors of the various temples in the city. The message to the Christians that an open door was set before them which “*no man was able to shut*” might have been a sharp contrast to the closed doors of the temples which were under the strict control of the officiating clergy. The language of the message was particularly meaningful to the Christians in Philadelphia.

Likewise the reference to the “*synagogue of Satan*” in verse 9 would have been particularly meaningful to them because of the prevalence of physical synagogues of Satan in the city, and their adherents’ claim to be Jews but were “*not*”; the term “Jews” being used in a general sense to mean that they claimed to be the true people of God.

Little strength

The reference to them “*having a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name*” (verse 8) was a further reference to the need for the Christians to remain pure and separate from the several philosophies being taught in the temples. In comparison to the other institutions the church was of “*little strength*” and so again the language used in the

message of the angel was particularly meaningful to the Philadelphian Christians.

Another reason for the angel using the expression “*having a little strength*” might have been the burden, physical and financial, of repairing the damage caused by the earthquakes.

However, whatever the reason, it was inconsequential to the Philadelphians because their commendation was that they had kept the word of the Lord and had not denied His name.

The message continues with words of encouragement: “*Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown*” (Rev. 3:11). The word “*behold*” appears to have been added as it does not appear in the oldest manuscripts. Their cheerful endurance of the trials they endured was to be rewarded in that the Lord promised “*I come quickly*”. The promise of the Lord’s return, for which the believers had prayed in the words “*Thy Kingdom come*”, was now nearer. They were to hold fast; not to waiver in their faith. As they saw the troubles in the world around them they were not to be distracted, because to do so meant they ran the risk of losing the promised crown of life. They would lose that opportunity if they exchanged consistency and suffering for compromise and ease.

A pillar

The last portion of the promise to the Philadelphian Church is in Revelation 3:12: “*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name*”. The promise, “*him that overcometh I will make a pillar...*”, was particularly meaningful to the Philadelphians because of the number of earthquakes in the region. It is noteworthy that amongst the ruins of the Greek churches of Asia a column (or pillar) of the church of Philadelphia still stands today.

Christians today do well to remember that the symbolism of a pillar is equally appropriate now as it was in the Philadelphian’s time—not just for the local church’s benefit but indeed for the church at large: “*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15). Thus the language of the angel’s message has been relevant all down the age.■

JACOB THE PROPHET

When the Apostle Peter wrote *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Peter 1:21 KJV), he was referring to the prophecies which relate to the *“coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (verse 16). He went on to explain that he was one of those who heard God speak to Jesus in the *“holy mount”*, and that God’s words at that time confirmed what had been written previously by the prophets. Consequently they were justified in being absolutely certain that what was prophesied regarding the future would come true.

The prophecies relating to Jesus’ first and second advents, and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, are prevalent in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the later (“minor”) prophets. The significance of those prophetic writings is so great that it is easy to overlook that God used other *“holy men”* to foretell other events which were to transpire on the earth. One such *“holy man”* was Jacob.

Jacob’s life

Jacob’s life comprised many remarkable events. Before he was born his mother was told that the elder of the twins in her womb would serve the younger. Jacob was born second, making him the younger. However he purchased his older brother Esau’s birthright in exchange for a bowl of pottage and, in collusion with his mother, obtained by deception his father’s final blessing. In fear of his life he fled, stopping overnight at Bethel where he had a dream of a ladder reaching up to heaven. After arriving in Padan Aram he was deceived into marrying Leah, after which he served Laban for seven more years before being given Rachel to wife.

By his two wives Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens Bilhah and Zilpah, he fathered twelve sons. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28; 35:10), and his twelve sons are the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 49:28). Jacob died in Egypt at the age of 147 years (Gen. 47:28-29; 49:33).

Shortly before his death, his favoured son Joseph visited him and took his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh with him. Genesis 48:17-20 records Jacob’s prophecy concerning his two grandsons: *“And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father’s hand, to remove it from Ephraim’s head unto Manasseh’s head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also*

shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh”.

Jacob’s prophecy comprised several elements, each of which illustrates the degree of detail that God has built into His plan for His people.

To become a people

Jacob declared that Manasseh would also *“become a people”*, which implies that both Ephraim and Manasseh would have numerous progeny. Numbers 1:32-35 and Deuteronomy 33:17 record the fulfillment of that prophecy. Numbers 1:32-35 records the number of the children of Ephraim who were 20 years old and upward was 40,500, and the number of the children of Manasseh was 32,200; Deuteronomy 33:17 reads: *“...they are the **ten thousands of Ephraim**, and they are the **thousands of Manasseh**”*.

Ephraim to be greater

Jacob prophesied concerning Manasseh that *“his younger brother shall be greater than he”*. It might be a small indicator but the number of their tribes given above, and the difference between the expressions *“ten thousands”* and *“thousands”* confirm the fulfillment of that aspect of his prophecy.

Another aspect of *“his younger brother shall be greater than he”* was when the tribes pitched around the tabernacle prior to their entry into the promised land. The tribe of Manasseh assembled under Ephraim’s standard: *“On the west side shall be the **standard of the camp of Ephraim** according to their armies...and those that were numbered of them, were **forty thousand and five hundred**. And by him shall be the **tribe of Manasseh**...and those that were numbered of them, were **thirty and two thousand and two hundred**. Then the tribe of Benjamin...and those that were numbered of them, were **thirty and five thousand and four hundred**. **All that were numbered of the camp of Ephraim** were an hundred thousand and eight thousand and an hundred, throughout their armies...”* (Num. 2:18-24). The tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin were both under the standard (or flag) of Ephraim, and their number was counted as part of the number of Ephraim, which is another instance of Ephraim being regarded as greater than Manasseh.

Manasseh to be a multitude of nations

Another element of Jacob’s prophecy was that Manasseh would become a *“multitude of nations”*.

There does not seem to be a specific reference to this prophecy being fulfilled, however it may be deduced that the prophecy will yet be fulfilled.

Joshua 14:1-4 records that the land of Canaan was distributed to the tribes *“as commanded by Moses”*. Verses 3 and 4 read: *“For Moses had given the inheritance of two tribes and an half tribe on the other side Jordan: but unto the Levites he gave none inheritance among them. For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance”*. Likewise Joshua 16:4 records: *“So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance”*. Thus the tribe of Manasseh was counted for one of the tribes of Israel. This is consistent with Revelation 7:5 which records Manasseh as one of the twelve tribes of Israel from whom the 144,000 are sealed. Consequently, although there is no direct and specific reference to Manasseh becoming a multitude of nations, it may be deduced that the tribe had at least two identities and, depending on the interpretation of who constitutes the tribes listed in Revelation 7 (whether they will be comprised of some Gentiles who were grafted in), it is logical to interpret the prophecy that Manasseh would become a multitude of nations has been, or will be, fulfilled.

Israel to return to Canaan

The last feature of Jacob’s prophecy to Joseph is recorded in Genesis 48:21: *“And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers”*.

The promise to Joseph that Israel would return to the promised land was precious due to the length of time the nation of Israel had been in Egypt. Deuteronomy 34:1-4 records the Lord showing Moses the land that He had promised to Abraham, which promise had been confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5) and to Jacob (Gen. 35:12; 48:4). Joshua 3:9-5:12 records in detail the entry of Israel into the land and hence Jacob’s prophecy to Joseph was fulfilled.

Prophecy to his sons

A short time after he prophesied about Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob prophesied about his sons: *“And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days”* (Gen. 49:1).

He prophesied about each of his sons individually. They are too extensive for all of them to be included in this article and so only those relating to Levi and Judah will be addressed. However that is not to deny the significance nor the accuracy of each prophecy.

Levi

Genesis 49:5-7 reads: *“Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will **divide** them in Jacob, and **scatter** them in Israel”*.

The majority of the message relating to Simeon and Levi refers to events which were already history. The reference to them being *“instruments of cruelty”* might refer to their slaying of Hamor, Shechem and *“all the males”* (Gen. 34:25-26). The **prophecy** contained in the message is that they would be *“divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel”*.

The concepts of division and scattering are complementary—a division into smaller parts is necessary for anything to be scattered. However the division and scattering of the tribe of Levi was of greater significance than a mere division.

The divisions of the tribe of Levi are recorded in 1 Chronicles chapters 23 to 26:

- There were 38,000 men aged 30 years and older (chap. 23:3);
- They were divided into 5 groups (chap. 23:4-5);
 - ⇒ 24,000 were set to work on the tabernacle;
 - ⇒ 6,000 were officers and judges;
 - ⇒ 4,000 were porters;
 - ⇒ 4,000 were musicians;
 - ⇒ Aaron and his sons were separated to serve in the tabernacle (chap. 23:13);
- David further divided the sons of Aaron into 24 lots (chap. 24:4);
- The musicians were divided as detailed in chapter 25;
- The porters were divided as detailed in chapter 26.

Thus Jacob prophesied in minute detail about his own sons and two of his grandsons. Surely He was a *“holy man of God who was moved by the Holy Spirit”*.

Judah

Genesis 49:9-12 records Jacob’s prophecy regarding Judah: *“Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine;*

he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk”.

Brethren to praise Judah

The first prophecy which Jacob uttered concerning his son Judah was that Judah’s brethren would praise him.

The thought behind Judah’s brethren praising him is not so much a verbal expression but rather reverence. Strong’s Concordance gives the meaning of the Hebrew (#3034) as “...to revere or worship...”. A wide variety of English words is used to translate it: the statement that Judah’s brethren would praise him may be exemplified by the statements which follow.

Hand in the neck

Jacob prophesied that Judah would have his hand “*in the neck of his enemies*”. There are several passages of Scripture which imply that this expression means the destruction of one’s enemies. Three examples are:

- Deuteronomy 28:48: “*Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee*”;
- 2 Samuel 22:41: “*Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them...*”;
- Psalm 18:40: “*Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them...*”.

Consistent with the idea of Judah being given power to destroy his enemies is God’s appointment of him to lead the Israelites in the battle as they entered the promised land: “*Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand*” (Judges 1:1-2; 20:18).

Brothers to bow down

Jacob also prophesied that Judah’s brothers would bow down to him. That prediction might be a reference to the tribe of Judah’s future role of leadership. Bezaleel, the man chosen by God to oversee the manufacture of the tabernacle and its furnishings, was of the tribe of Judah (Exod. 35:30); the tribe of Judah was the first to give their offering in the tabernacle (Num. 7:12); the tribe of Judah led the pilgrimage from Sinai (Num. 10:10-14); one of the two kingdoms of Israel after the nation divided was named Judah (2 Sam. 2:4); Judah was the lawgiver (Psa. 60:7); both King David and King Solomon were of the tribe of Judah (Matt. 1:2-6); Judah will be the first to be saved (Zech. 12:7); the tribe of Judah is the first tribe to be named as the tribe from which the

servants of God were sealed (Rev. 7:9), all of which may be interpreted as hallmarks of one who was preferred above his brethren.

Lion’s whelp

Jacob termed Judah as “*a lion’s whelp*” (Gen. 49:9). Revelation 5:5 identifies Jesus as the “*lion of the tribe of Judah*” and so Judah, as a whelp (or young lion) appropriately indicates Jesus’ human heritage—Jesus’ human genealogy was by the tribe of Judah: “*For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood*” (Heb. 7:14).

Consequently, notwithstanding natural Israel’s acknowledgement of Judah as the premier tribe, it will be to the spiritual Judah to whom all mankind will bow the knee: “*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:9-11). The future subjection of the whole world to Jesus as King cannot be excluded from the prophecy of Jacob.

The sceptre

Yet another feature of Jacob’s prophecy regarding Judah is that “*the sceptre would not depart*” from him “*until Shiloh come*”. The term “Shiloh” has been interpreted to mean the Messiah (Young’s Concordance), but the only instance where that meaning may be attributed is Genesis 49:10. Every other occurrence refers to “a place in Palestine” (Strong’s Concordance #7887—and with which Young’s Concordance agrees).

Perhaps the significance of the reference in Genesis 49:10 is that the Israelites first set up the tabernacle there after entering the promised land (Joshua 18:1), and it was the place where God revealed Himself to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21). Both of those events are consistent with Jeremiah 7:12: “*But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel*”. It is possible that the meaning of Shiloh in Genesis 49:10 is the presence of God on earth and, if so, it might have been fulfilled at Jesus’ first advent (Matt. 1:23) in accordance with the interpretation that Shiloh refers to Jesus Christ.

Whichever interpretation is correct, Jacob accurately foretold God’s dealings with Judah. Likewise his prophecies regarding Ephraim, Manasseh, Levi and all of his sons qualified him as a holy man of God who spoke as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.■

THE MANGER AND THE NAPKIN

The period between Christmas/New Year and Easter is spiritually rich for Christians. The day of the year when Jesus was born into the world is not explicitly stated in Scripture and therefore all proclaimed dates of His birth are derived. Most deductions are based on a combination of the day of His crucifixion and the prophecy in Daniel 9:27: “*And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease...*”. Adopting the time scale of a day for a year (Ezek. 4:6), one week (7 days) represents seven years, which corresponds to Jesus’ earthly ministry of 3½ years, followed by 3½ years after His death when the gospel message was confined to the nation of Israel. He was crucified on Passover Day and 3½ years prior to that day gives a day for His birth as early in the month of October.

Nevertheless the date traditionally celebrated by mankind at large as being the date of His birth, December 25, provides a stimulus for the Christian to meditate upon God’s wondrous love in sending His only Son to earth, to a realm much lower than that in which He had previously dwelt, and the period until Easter becomes a period of reflection about the trials He endured from His birth until the terrible death He suffered amongst thieves on the cross.

However Christmas has become a time of spending, stress, overindulgence and at times riotous behaviour. In such a flurry of activity it is easy to lose sight of the significance of His coming and the simplicity of the event. The following essay attempts to capture some of the true sentiment of His birth.

His coming: the manger

“Long ago a young peasant woman was given the task of being the mother of a special baby. She wasn’t anyone important, she didn’t dress in the latest fashion, she didn’t live in a luxurious palace and at the time of receiving the news she was to have this baby she wasn’t even married.

Her baby was born in a dirty stable, a place where animals slept, ate and did what comes naturally. No satin sheets or bright colours to wrap the baby in; no cot with clean linen and maids to assist the young mother.

Those who were the first to receive the news of His birth were shepherds tending the sheep. The news wasn’t given to kings, princes, religious leaders, merchants—those who were considered to be the important people. It is beneficial to reflect on the simplicity of the first Christmas.”

His death and the napkin

The end of Jesus’ life, and the discovery of His resurrection, also bear reflection.

John 20:1-10 reads: “*The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, **And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.** Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home”.*

The napkin was not with the other grave clothes but was wrapped together and in a place by itself. A knowledge of Hebrew tradition gives some insight into the significance of it being separate from the other clothes.

In Hebrew tradition the folded napkin had to do with the Master and Servant.

When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure that it was exactly the way the master wanted it.

The table was furnished perfectly, and the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating. The servant would not touch the table until the master had finished his meal.

When the master had finished eating he would rise from the table and leave the napkin in a ruffled state on the table. The servant would then know to clear the table.

However, if the master folded his napkin and laid it beside his plate when he left the table, the servant would not touch the table because the folded napkin meant that the master was coming back. The Master who folded His napkin when He left the tomb was also coming back!■

TO THE INTENT

In Ephesians 2:11-13 the Apostle Paul reminds the Gentile Christians at Ephesus of their heritage: *“that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... 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 ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”*.

He continues in chapter 3 to explain that it was by revelation that he now understood *“that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel”* (Eph. 3:3, 6).

In verses 7 and 8 (Ephesians 3:7-8) he tells the Ephesians that he was made a minister so *“that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”*, and in verse 9 he confirms that he was to make all (that is, both Jew and Gentile) *“see the fellowship of the mystery”*, that the Gentiles were to be *“grafted in”* to be part of the *“Israel of God”* (Rom. 11:17-23; Gal. 6:16).

Then follows verse 10 (Ephesians 3:10): *“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”*.

Verse 10 may be interpreted to mean that the intent of Paul’s ministry was to enable *“the principalities and powers in the heavenly places to know the manifold wisdom of God”*, and that their knowledge would be brought about by (or through) the church. However that interpretation gives a different purpose for his ministry from that stated in other verses—Romans 11:13 reads: *“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles...”*; no mention is made of ministering to the *“principalities and powers”*. Also, in both of his letters to Timothy he confirmed that his purpose was to preach to the Gentiles—1 Timothy 2:7 reads: *“Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles...”*, and in 2 Timothy 1:11 he repeated the statement that he was a *“teacher of the Gentiles”*. Thus it is clear that the primary purpose of Paul’s ministry was to preach to the Gentiles and not to *“the principalities and powers in heavenly places”*.

Principalities and powers

However, having said that, it is necessary to clarify who is meant by *“the principalities and powers in the heavenly places”*. One interpretation is that they were those in authority on the earth when Paul wrote.

However it is suggested that interpretation is negated by two factors:

- The word *“heavenly”* is translated from the Greek *“epouranios”* (Strong #2032) which is defined as *“above the sky”*—that is the spiritual realm; and
- There is no other Scriptural support for the understanding that the purpose of Paul’s ministry was to educate the worldly authorities—indeed he was acutely aware that those in authority would not know anything about God’s calling and the grafting in of the Gentiles: *“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness”* (1Cor. 1:22-23).

Another suggestion is that the words *“principalities and powers”* refer to the church. The interpretation is based on verses such as Ephesians 1:3: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”*; and Ephesians 2:6: *“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”*. However, while those verses refer to things spiritual in contrast to things of the earth, it is unlikely that the term *“principalities and powers”* in Ephesians 3:10 refers to the church because the church is mentioned separately in the verse.

The remaining interpretation of *“principalities and powers”* is that it refers to the angelic realm. There are some texts which indicate that the angels have an interest in the events on earth, one being 1 Peter 1:12: *“Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into”*. The reason why the angels desired to look into the *“things”* that were being preached at that time is not mentioned, nevertheless the fact remains that they did so.

Another text which indicates that those in the angelic realm are interested in the events on earth is Revelation 12:12: *“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”*. The devil may well have been interested in the events that were occurring on the earth at that time because they indicated his tenure over it (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and implied that his demise was imminent.

To the intent

Having established that the term “*principalities and powers*” refers to the angels, it is necessary to investigate the sense in which it was intended that they should know the manifold wisdom of God.

The expression “*to the intent*” is translated from the single Greek word “*hina*” which Dr Strong defines as: “#2443: in order that (denoting the purpose or the result)”. It occurs 620 times in the New Testament.

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the meaning of “*hina*” in every instance where it occurs, suffice it to say that there are some instances where the meaning is clearly “purpose”, other instances where it clearly relates to result and yet others where its meaning is unclear (the phrase could mean either purpose or result). Consequently a word study of “*hina*” does not provide an unequivocal meaning of “*to the intent*” in Ephesians 3:10.

The result

Since it was not the purpose of Paul’s ministry to educate the “*principalities and powers*” it is appropriate to investigate the alternative meaning of the Greek “*hina*”; that is “the result”.

If “*hina*” is understood to “denote the result” (rather than the purpose) of Paul’s ministry, Ephesians 3:10 means that **one result of Paul’s ministry** was that “*the principalities and powers in heavenly places*” (that is, the angels, Satan included) would come to understand, through the calling out of the church, the manifold wisdom of God. It remains to establish whether that could be the case.

The manifold wisdom of God

The meaning of “manifold” is that one act accomplishes or demonstrates more than one function. Such is the case with the calling out of the church and the grafting in of the Gentiles.

Some of the several aspects of God’s wisdom that are made manifest (that is, become apparent) by the calling out of the church are:

- That Jesus would be “*the firstborn among many brethren*”—that is, God would have others to reign with him (Rom. 8:17, 29);
- That God has the power to choose whom He wishes to fulfil His purposes—He is the “potter and His creation is the clay” (Rom. 9:21);
- That He is able to use whom He wishes to accomplish His plan; Ephesians 3:9-11 states that He has chosen some Gentiles to be part of the church, and He has grafted them into His chosen nation, making them adopted sons of Israel—“*the Israel of God*” (Gal. 6:16);

- That He is working to a time scale: “*Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or **what manner of time** the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow..*” (1 Pet. 1:10-11); “***Which in other ages*** was not made known unto the sons of men, as **it is now revealed** unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:5)

One **result** of grafting in the Gentiles has been to make known several aspects of God’s plan.

His eternal purpose

Ephesians 3:11 goes on to state that the events described in the previous verses are “*according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*”. Consequently the Apostle is stating that the calling out of the church and the acceptance of the Gentiles into the fold have been part of His eternal purpose, and that the angels now know of those details. Some verses which state that the calling of the church is part of his eternal purpose are:

- “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as **he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having **predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ** to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved*” (Eph. 1:3-6);
- “*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev. 13:8). It has been God’s plan for His Son to be the world’s redeemer “*from the foundation of the world*”; and
- “*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*” (John 10:16). It was His plan to graft in the Gentiles long before the conversion of Cornelius.

The calling of the Gentiles to be fellowheirs with the natural seed of Abraham is a feature of God’s plan that reveals the manifold wisdom of God, and its accomplishment through the Apostle Paul’s ministry enabled the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (that is the angels) to learn of that manifold wisdom. They need to know that they are “*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be the heirs of salvation*” (Heb. 1:14) so that they fulfil God’s purpose. Not only so, but also that those to whom they minister will include Gentiles. ■

LOVE BEARETH ALL THINGS

The Apostle Paul's statement that "*love beareth all things*" (1 Cor. 13:7) presents a challenge to every Christian.

In general terms, a person may be classified as either Christian or non-Christian; the former profess to be living in accordance with Christian principles—"the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)—while the latter do not. The challenge for the Christian is to bear all things from both Christians and non-Christians.

Bearing fellow Christians

An irritation from one who professes to be a Christian can be more difficult to bear than one from those who do not profess to be Christian. One factor which might make the irritation more difficult to bear is the tendency to forget that every Christian is being assailed by the Adversary and, in spite of being justified in God's sight, is also fighting against the weaknesses of the flesh. It is easy to assume that a Christian should be perfect.

As well as reminding oneself that no contemporary in the flesh is perfect, another factor that can help one to bear another's weaknesses is to remember that God has placed both in the body: "*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him*" (1 Cor. 12:18). Such a realization should remind one that God is building His temple with the stones He has chosen and it is not the province of anyone to question His choices.

A still higher ideal

There is a further situation that requires an even higher standard of forbearance—that of withholding any action when one believes that another should be corrected. One example is that of the Apostle Paul who withheld admonishing the Corinthians because he realised that immediate correction would not have been beneficial for them. His objective always was to further God's work and so he wrote: "*...Nevertheless we...suffer (forbear) all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ*" (1 Cor. 9:12). The Apostle's love for them was such that he chose to bear it, and that silently, until the time came when he believed correction would benefit them and not be to their detriment. Likewise it is incumbent upon every Christian to "*...let all things be done unto edifying*" (1 Cor. 14:26), which might mean bearing all things, at least in the short term, so that the other might "*grow in grace and knowledge*" (2 Peter 3:18).

Notwithstanding the above, there are times when the Christian might be unable to forbear. In such cases

the Lord's instruction must be followed: "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*" (Matt. 18:15-17).

Bearing afflictions from the world

Bearing irritations from those who do not profess to be Christian might be easier because their fruits reveal who they are (Matt. 7:20) and the distinction may be clearly seen. That is not to deny that the irritations might be severe and hard to bear. However the challenge for the Christian is to "*love your enemies*" (Matt. 5:44) and it might be that loving one's enemies is the ultimate test in bearing all things.

Bearing silently

One further aspect of bearing all things is to protect or shield the other from criticism by covering their defects rather than making them public—suppressing criticism rather than flaunting it. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words states that the meaning of the Greek "*stego*" is "**primarily** to protect, or preserve by covering". The situation is indeed as the Wise Man wrote: "*Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins*" (Prov. 10:12), and hence the Apostle Peter wrote "*Above all things have fervent charity (love) among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins*" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Jesus' example

In all of the above respects Jesus is the supreme example—He was the perfect pattern. When dealing with His accusers He did not act with revenge but said "*The Lord rebuke thee*" (Zech. 3:2; Jude 9). Even when He was led to the slaughter He opened not His mouth but suffered all things silently (Isa. 53:7).■

PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

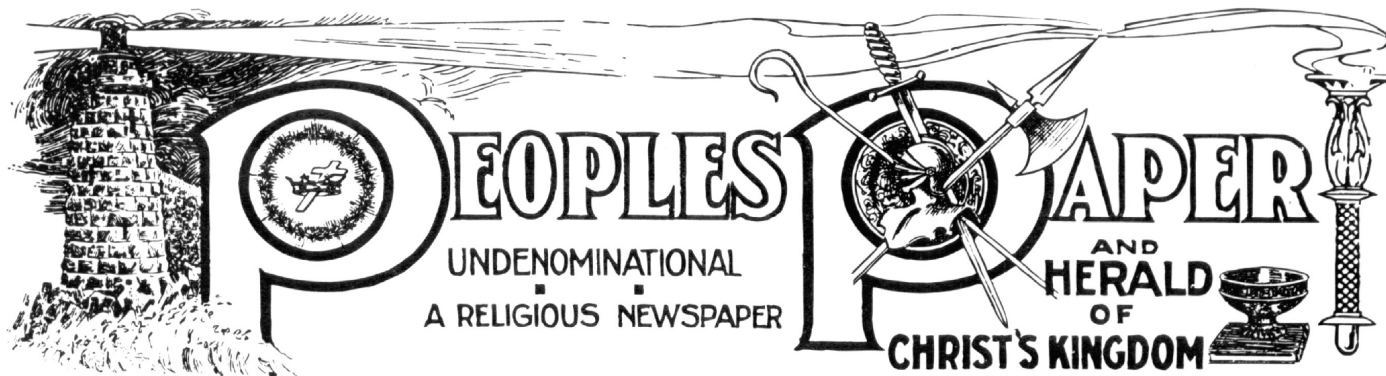
ABN 23 734 654 922

Reg. No. 0022186J

Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.
P.O. Box 402 Rosanna, Victoria, Australia, 3084
Email: FREE.Bereanbibleinstitute@gmail.com

Internet: www.bbi.org.au

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



Volume 93 No. 2

AUSTRALIA

April — June 2010

IF I BE LIFTED UP

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32-33).

It is probable that Jesus' statement quoted above was more profound than His listeners realised—the words reveal that He knew it was His Father's plan for Him to be crucified.

Signifying what death He should die

A realisation that Jesus knew beforehand that He was to be crucified adds significantly to an understanding of His devotion to His Father, and the love He had for mankind. He would have known what crucifixion involved, yet He did not consider withdrawing from His commitment. On the contrary, at the final hour, He renewed that commitment and prayed to His Father: *"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour"* (John 12:27). He knew He had completed His work on earth and all that remained for Him to do was to endure the cross.

One historian has written that crucifixion often began with a flogging, after which the victim was required to carry his own cross to the execution site. At the crucifixion site the victim was laid on the cross while it was horizontal on the ground and metal spikes driven through his wrists. After being hoisted to a vertical position, "the cross" was tied to a previously erected post and nails driven through the victim's feet. There is evidence that one spike penetrated an ankle bone, piercing the heel.

There have been several diagnoses of the ultimate cause of death, ranging from suffocation, accumulation of fluid in the lungs, nervous exhaustion, loss of blood and heart failure.

Such graphic language is distressing to read, nevertheless merely reading such details provides some appreciation of the agony which Jesus suffered during the hours He hung on the cross, and such an appreciation helps the reader to better understand the depth of Jesus' love for mankind. As the Apostle

John wrote later: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13); *"Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us..."* (1 John 3:16)

No greater love than this

An understanding of His love for mankind is further increased when it is recalled that before He came to earth He enjoyed a glorious position with His Father in heaven: *"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was"* (John 17:5). In that glorious position He had made the worlds (John 1:3). He also made human kind whom He had now come to rescue from the grave: *"... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). He had come down from a celestial abode to an earthly abode: *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). But above all that, He had come to die, the just for the unjust: *"...For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:7-8). Jesus came to earth and died the most painful and ignominious death that mankind could conjure up.

In This Issue

If I Be Lifted Up	1
His Exceeding Abundance	4
King David Era Pottery	6
God and Moses	7
Witnessing	9
The Moabites	10
Love Believes All	12

Even in His darkest hour, Jesus' first thought was not for His own welfare but that His Father's plan would be accomplished: "*Father, glorify thy name*" (John 12:28). God immediately assured Him that He had fulfilled His commission perfectly: "*Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes*" (John 12:28-30). His words to His disciples, that the voice came for their sakes, shows that they were His primary concern—He knew they would be dismayed, their confidence shattered, because they "*trusted that it was He who would redeem Israel*" (Luke 24:21). But now He would be dead. He knew also that they did not comprehend many of the words which He had spoken to them—it was not until after His resurrection that, "*...beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*" (Luke 24:27).

The judgement of the world

The record in John continues: "*Now is the judgment (Greek: *krisis*) of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out*" (John 12:31). "Now" was a crisis time for the world; now was the great turning point of the world's history. His sacrifice was crucial—if He successfully completed His work, the prince of this present evil world would be defeated. However if He failed, the whole world of mankind would continue to suffer the fruits of unrighteousness—there would not be any hope of them being restored to their original perfection on the earth which He and His Father had created for them.

For the joy set before Him

The record is that one of the factors which enabled Him to complete His sacrifice is the hope held out for Him: "*for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Heb. 12:2).

It might be difficult to understand how any promise He had received could be an adequate reward for the sacrifice He made: leaving His heavenly home, being despised on earth and then being faced with the prospect of suffering the pain and ignominy of the cross. It might be difficult to understand how there was any joy set before Him which could adequately compensate Him for the sacrifice He would make. It is difficult to imagine how that prospect was joyful.

Additionally there is no explicit record in the Scriptures that God had promised Him anything, perhaps the most direct reference is Psalm 2:7-8: "*I*

will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession". From a human perspective, an inheritance of the heathen might not be very appealing, and certainly not one that could be deemed to adequately reward Him for the sacrifice He had made, and less so to qualify as a "joy". Such an assessment is supported by the fact that in the majority of occasions the reference to "heathen" means the Gentile nations, in contrast to the sons of Jacob who were Jehovah's own (Isa. 43:1). Nevertheless that was a promise that God had given Him and He did not shrink from declaring that decree; He rejoiced in it and had total confidence that God would honour it.

Thus is exemplified yet again the great love He had for mankind. It was the prospect of "inheriting them" (owning them; them being His possession)—wayward and sinners though they may be—that was a joy to Him. A principal feature of His inheritance was that He "*would draw all men unto Him*", not the sick and dying race that was now crucifying Him but the promise that He would draw them just as Moses' serpent, in earlier times, had drawn the Israelites: "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*" (John 3:14-19).

Moses and the serpent

The record of Moses lifting up the serpent is in Numbers 21:4-9: "*And they (the Israelites) journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the*

LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived”.

The Israelites had sinned and God punished them by sending deadly serpents amongst them. However when the people repented, God involved the serpent in the strategy by which He healed them. In this incident there are several parallels and several contrasts with the plight of mankind. One parallel is that God used a serpent as the agent by which mankind was caused to suffer pain and death, with which the disobedient human race has been plagued ever since: *“And... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him”* (Rev. 12:9).

On the other hand one contrast between Moses’ serpent and the Devil is that Moses’ serpent was the agent by which God offered healing to the people—the Devil is not, and never will be, the agent by which God will heal the human race. In God’s due time, the devil will be destroyed: *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are... And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death”* (Rev. 20:10, 14).

A concise summary

Consequently the lesson to be learned is that, because He was lifted up on the cross, Jesus will yet draw all men unto Him, and when they look upon Him they will be healed. The Apostle Paul summarised God’s plan for mankind in a few words: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil. 2:5-11).

Paul’s concise summary lists Jesus’ coming down to earth, taking human form, dying on the cross, and the

promise that eventually every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess His lordship. Paul captured the scenario prophesied by Isaiah: *“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).

This do in remembrance of me

Consistent with His devotion to His Father and denial of Himself, Jesus asked His followers to do no more than remember Him in a simple ceremony, the first of which was held on the anniversary of the Jewish Passover: *“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 brake 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. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined...”* (Luke 22:15-22).

The Apostle Paul, after chastising the Corinthian believers for not attributing due reverence to the occasion, wrote: *“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup”* (1 Cor. 11:23-28). One of the significant points to note in those verses is that the supper is to be eaten in remembrance of Him and not in remembrance of the Jewish Passover as was the original command (Exod. 12:14); Jesus’ sacrifice now supersedes the Passover (1 Cor. 5:7).

May all who love their Saviour, the Lord Jesus, *“... keep the feast... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (1 Cor. 5:8) at this season of the year. It is a simple but solemn ceremony.■

HIS EXCEEDING ABUNDANCE

The Apostle Paul's objective always was to edify the saints: "...we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying" (2 Cor. 12:19). In his letters to the churches he referred to different aspects of God's plan, each aspect having a particular feature which he hoped would urge the saints to strive more earnestly for the faith that had been set before them.

The Ephesians

One of the aspects Paul used to encourage the Ephesians was God's all-conquering power: "*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man... that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen*" (Eph. 3:14-21).

The lesson for the Christian is that God's power is unlimited, and it is that same power which works in the Christian "*to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*".

Creation

In order to appreciate the power that is able to effect changes in, and protect, the Christian, it is necessary to review His power in other realms.

The first manifestation of God's power was the creation of the universe: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Gen. 1:1). The miraculous work of creation remains beyond the human mind to explain and the statement—"*created the heavens and the earth*"—may be considered to be somewhat nonchalant, that is, to not give due emphasis to the miraculous work.

However when considered in detail the work of creation exemplifies God's supremacy: "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (Psa. 8:3-4). The Psalmist likens the spectacle of the heavens to the work of a human being's fingers—fine needlework which adds detail and grandeur to a garment. It is an appropriate illustration.

Isaiah describes God's mastery over the universe from another perspective: "*Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in*" (Isa. 40:21-22). The prophet compares God's mastery with that of mankind over grasshoppers: the illustration deserves meditation.

Isaiah also describes God as sitting on the circle of the earth. That statement was made long before mankind understood that the earth was a globe and so illustrates God's power to enlighten His prophets without them understanding modern science. It is as Job declared: "*He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them*" (Job 26:7-8). Job was shown the nature of the planets and the mystery of them revolving in space, held in their places by something invisible to mankind. Again consideration of that fact aids the human mind to appreciate something of God's power.

Job also mentioned the water which the clouds can support without them "*being rent*". The mechanism by which the clouds can hold such weight of water—many thousands of tonnes—without being "rent", is something about which Man can only wonder. Certainly mankind now explains such a phenomenon in terms of convection and buoyancy, but the fact remains that mankind cannot even today engineer a structure which is able to uplift such a weight. Assuredly the power which God exercised in creation is far greater than what mankind can imagine.

Spiritual application

The Apostle Paul's reasoning in his letter to the Ephesians is that it is that same God who is working in those whom He has chosen, and therefore they should not doubt His ability to grant them all they require to "*comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge*".

Paul's words do not mean that everyone should comprehend every point of doctrine, or be able to develop every fruit of the Spirit, to the same degree as any other member. The members of the body are to understand that the body is comprised of different members, and just as the various members in the

physical human body have different abilities which enable them to perform their allocated tasks for the welfare of the whole body, so it is with the spiritual body: *“If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?”* (1 Cor. 12:17). Every member of His church has an attribute which they are to use for the welfare of the whole body, as Paul goes on to show: *“That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Cor. 12:25-26); *“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph. 4:16). It is the contribution which every member makes that results in the complete functioning of the body—the unity of which should also result in every member sharing the trials and blessings of all others.

Change of motive

The power of God is such that it changes the motive of those whom He has called. Earlier in his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul concisely describes the change: *“And you (hath he quickened), who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 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. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)”* (Eph. 2:1-5).

There are several points in those verses that deserve consideration. Firstly the words *“hath he quickened”* are supplied by the translators and while overall they are in harmony with the passage, their insertion destroys some of the impact. If omitted, the verse reads: *“And you who were dead in trespasses and sins...”*—the focus is changed to emphasise the fact that, prior to their quickening, they were “dead in sins”. The omission makes the contrast more stark: their quickening has resulted in them changing from walking in harmony with the prince of darkness, fulfilling their fleshly desires to walking in light. Thus the power of God which was working in them is made more apparent. The work is not the work of the individual, but of God who had quickened them (made them alive) by His Holy Spirit.

The work of the Spirit is seen to be more remarkable when it is recalled that the members are not from the same background but are varied in origin. The task of unifying individuals from such diverse backgrounds into a unified body is one which world leaders today are finding impossible, regardless of how much consultation and debate is facilitated. Truly the work of the Spirit is something greater than that which any human mind can ask or think.

The Gentiles grafted in

The miracle of the unity of the body is emphasised by the grafting in of the Gentiles. They had no previous customs which even remotely resembled Israel’s ceremonies: *“... the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”* (Rom. 9:4-5). Each of those practices and ceremonies were totally foreign to the Gentiles, and while the Gentiles were not to adopt them, their association with those who had practised them presented them with a challenge. Indeed, recognition of their differences is the main overall thrust of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: *“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”* (Eph. 2:11-16).

The Jewish practice of circumcision continued to be an issue in the early church (Acts 15). Likewise the Gentiles had no comprehension of the obligations and rituals of the Law Covenant. Indeed so great were the differences between them that the Apostle terms it a *“middle wall of partition”*.

Message complete

The Apostle concludes his message by exhorting them to remember that it was God’s power which was working in them, that all the glory of the transformation which they were undergoing was due to God, and that the glory would persist throughout the world—*“world without end”*. ■

KING DAVID ERA POTTERY

The following report was published on the internet web site, “*IsraelNationalNews.com*”, on January 8, 2010. It is reproduced with their permission.

A breakthrough in the research of the Hebrew Scriptures has shed new light on the period in which the Bible books of the Prophets were written.

Professor Gershon Galil of the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Haifa has deciphered an inscription dating from the 10th century BCE (the period of King David’s reign) and has proven the inscription to be ancient Hebrew, thus making it the earliest known example of Hebrew writing.

The significance of this breakthrough relates to the fact that at least some of the Biblical scriptures are now proven to have been composed hundreds of years before the dates presented today in research and that the Kingdom of Israel already existed at that time.

The inscription itself, which was written in ink on a 15 x 16.5 cm trapezoid pottery shard, was discovered a year and a half ago at excavations that were carried out by Professor Yosef Garfinkel near the Elah valley, south of Jerusalem, and west of Hebron.

The researchers dated the inscription back to the 10th century BCE, which was the period of King David’s reign, but the question of the language used in this inscription remained unanswered, making it impossible to prove whether it was in fact Hebrew or another Semitic language.

Professor Galil’s deciphering of the ancient writing testifies to it being authentic Hebrew based on its use of verbs particular to the Hebrew language and content specific to Hebrew culture not adopted by other regional cultures at the time.

“This text is a social statement, relating to slaves, widows and orphans. It uses verbs that were characteristic of Hebrew, such as “asah” (did) and “avad” (worked), which were rarely used in other regional languages. Particular words that appear in the text, such as “almana” (widow) are specific to Hebrew and are written differently in other local languages. The content itself was also unfamiliar to all the cultures in the region besides the Hebrew society. The present inscription provides social elements similar to those found in the Biblical prophecies and very different from prophecies written

by other cultures postulating glorification of the gods and taking care of their physical needs”.

Galil added that once this deciphering is received at research centers, the inscription will become the earliest Hebrew inscription to be found, testifying to Hebrew writing abilities as early as the 10th century BCE. This stands opposed to the dating of the composition of the Bible in much current academic research, which does not recognize the possibility that the Bible or parts of it could have been written during this ancient period.

Galil also noted that the inscription was discovered in a provincial Judean town, explaining that if there were scribes in the periphery, it can be assumed that those inhabiting the central region and Jerusalem were even more proficient writers. “It can now be maintained that it was highly reasonable that during the 10th century BCE, during the reign of King David, there were scribes in Israel who were able to write literary texts and complex historiographies such as the books of Judges and Samuel.” He added that the complexity of the text, along with the impressive fortifications revealed at the site, refute theories that attempt to deny the existence of the Kingdom of Israel at that time.

The contents of the text express social sensitivity to the fragile position of weaker members of society and the inscription testifies to the presence of strangers within the Israeli society as far back as this ancient period, calling on native Hebrews to provide support for these strangers. It advocates care for widows and orphans and encourages the king – who at that time had the responsibility of curbing social inequality – to be involved in improving Israeli society. This inscription is similar in its content to Biblical scriptures (Isaiah 1:17, Psalms 72:3, Exodus 23:3, and others), but according to Galil it is not copied from any Biblical text.”

The Scriptures contain more than 1130 references to David, the first is in Ruth 4:17: “*And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David...*” Testimonies of David’s life increase the Christian’s faith in the authenticity of the Bible, and thereby are another source of spiritual strength: “*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us...*” (Heb. 12:1). To God be the glory!■

GOD AND MOSES

The Apostle Paul wrote: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The “things written aforetime” are not limited to the promises of the times of restitution and the joyous condition of mankind in the new heavens and earth, but include His dealings with His people.

In the past God has exercised His power over many individuals. A knowledge of those events is a source of inspiration, comfort and confidence to the Christian because each instance is a manifestation of His care of the individual. One with whom God dealt was Moses.

His assignment

Moses was chosen by God to lead Israel out of Egypt. Moses lacked confidence that he would be able to accomplish the task. In the first instance he was apprehensive about approaching Pharaoh and so he suggested several reasons why he should be relieved of the task.

Moses’ first reason was that he lacked esteem amongst his fellow Israelites. He contended that they would disbelieve that he had come with God’s authority: “And Moses said unto God, ‘Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?’ And God said unto Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM’: and he said, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you’” (Exodus 3:13-14).

The same temptation might confront the Christian today—not the temptation to avoid delivering Israel from slavery but the temptation to feel inadequate because they are not prominent citizens amongst their fellow countrymen. The lack of recognition in the world should not deter the Christian from any mission God has given them—Paul exhorted Timothy: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Timothy was to act because of the commission he had received, regardless of his esteem amongst those to whom he was to preach.

Heritage

The record regarding Moses continues: “And God said moreover unto Moses, ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, ‘The LORD God of your

fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations’” (Exodus 3:15).

God strengthened Moses by reminding him that He was the God of Moses’ fathers. The same principle applies to the Christian today—calling into mind that the One with whom the Christian has to do is the One who created the universe, and that it is He Who has directed earth’s affairs since that time, may be a source of strengthen for the Christian. The Christian’s authority is derived from the One who is not merely flesh and blood.

The Christian must always be conscious of the fact that they are doing the work of the One who was before all things, He “...who commanded the light to shine out of darkness”—it is He who “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). The Christians’ authority comes from the One who made heaven and earth.

The support of the brethren

The record of Moses continues: “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt... unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt...” (Exodus 3:16-18). God told Moses to take the other elders with him when he confronted Pharaoh.

While all of Man’s strength ultimately comes from God, it should be remembered that He provides others to be a physical and visible support. The old saying that “a problem shared is a problem halved”, while primarily being a temporal and secular catchphrase, is part of God’s provisions for His people. The Apostle Paul was conscious of the strength he received from others; on one occasion he desired the support that Mark provided: “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

It might be in that vein that the Hebrews were exhorted to fellowship with each other: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so

much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). The strength that stems from fellowship with the brethren is one of the channels through which God strengthens the Christian.

Apparent failure

Nevertheless, in spite of all that God did to strengthen Moses, Moses' first representation to Pharaoh was unsuccessful. However that was not because Moses had failed—God had told Moses beforehand that his first representation to Pharaoh would not result in Pharaoh releasing the Israelites: *"And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go"* (Exodus 3:19-20). God had planned that Pharaoh would not release Israel until He had smitten Egypt with *"all of His wonders"*.

The lesson for the Christian today is that God moves in ways which are superior to those of mankind, and an apparent failure or rejection should not be interpreted as a failure to carry out God's will. Just as with Pharaoh, God is assuredly accomplishing a feature (a detail) of His plan of which the Christian might be unaware.

Personal revelation

Exodus 4 continues the record of God's dealing with Moses and describes Moses contending that he did not have any evidence of God's dealing with him on a personal basis. Moses' argument was that Israel's elders would not believe that he was God's agent. God responded with the miracles of Moses' rod turning into a serpent and Moses' hand becoming leprous and then being healed (Exodus 4:1-7). The Christian today should not necessarily expect such miraculous manifestations of the Lord's power because in the present era He gives guidance through the Holy Spirit: *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"* (Rom. 8:16)—that is, the assurance is "internal". The mechanisms by which the Spirit bears witness are just as varied now as they were in the days of the Apostles: *"God also bearing (them) witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will"* (Heb. 2:4). The manifestations to the apostles were varied (diverse), such as the healing of the lame man by the medium of Peter and John (Acts 3 and 4), the angel opening the prison doors (Acts 5:19) and the miracles wrought by Stephen (Acts 6:8).

Fluent speech

Nevertheless Moses still doubted that God would give him the power required to cause Pharaoh to

release the Israelites, and he told God that he was unable to speak fluently: *"And Moses said unto the LORD, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue'. And the LORD said unto him, 'Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say'"* (Exodus 4:10-12). God reminded Moses that He (God) was the very creator of Man's mouth, and therefore He had complete control over it. What a response for the diffident Christian to ponder!

No reprimand

God did not reprimand Moses for his "excuses", but looked upon them as realisations of his weaknesses. The same applies to the Christian—the Christian should not hesitate to seek the Lord's guidance and assurance every moment of their lives. He does not grow weary of His chosen ones asking Him for strength and reassurance: *"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth"* (John 9:31). *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints"* (Eph. 6:18).

God exercises the same watch-care and diligence over the Christian today, and hence the Christian should cast all their care upon Him, because He does care for His children—past, present and future.

In the gray twilight of a dreary morn,
A prisoner stood, defenseless and forlorn,
While, to a Roman judge, with boisterous breath,
His fierce accusers clamored for His death.
It was the Christ, rejected and abused;
The King of kings, his sovereign claim refused;
The Son of God, abandoned and betrayed,
An outcast, in the world which he had made.
It was his chosen people whose demand
That timid judge was powerless to withstand;
And, while their baseless charges he denied,
He gave their victim to be crucified.
His chosen people! those he loved and blest;
Whose little ones he folded to his breast;
Who cried more fiercely, as unmoved he stood,
"On us, and on our children, be his blood!"
Oh, Holy Savior! may thy grace reverse
The dreadful import of that reckless curse;
And, on their children, thy atonement prove
"The blood of sprinkling," through Redeeming
Love!

Francis De Haes Fanvier

WITNESSING

Witnessing is a significant element of God's plan in the present era. After Jesus' resurrection the disciples asked Him: "*Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*". He replied: "... *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*" (Acts 1:6-8). The apostles' mission was to be witnesses, not foretellers. Jesus also told His disciples: "*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*" (Matt. 24:14), which implies that witnessing will continue until the end of the present era—until "*the end come*".

Further, Jesus told His disciples that they were to confess Him before all people: "*Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God*" (Luke 12:8-9). Jesus' statement implies that it is essential for the Christian to witness to others—to "*confess Him*". One may ask, how are they to witness? The question is pertinent because the members of the body have different aptitudes, each being appropriate for their work in the body.

Methods

One form of witnessing is preaching, that is verbal explanation. Of the various ways in which one may witness to another, preaching, either to an individual or to a group, is the most direct. However not every member of the body is gifted to preach, particularly to groups. For those so commissioned there are some principles to observe: "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another... If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen*" (1 Pet. 4:10-11). Let all preaching be done to the glory of God and not the glory of the preacher.

When He was teaching His disciples, Jesus was careful to not present information which His disciples were not ready nor able to assimilate at that time: "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). Jesus was speaking to them before the Holy Spirit was given (John 7:39),

nevertheless the Christian today should note His strategy: care must be taken to realise that some might not be ready to absorb the deeper things of the Word: "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. 2:10). The Christian is to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18), and those processes require time for their accomplishment.

Reading

Another way of witnessing to others, and which might be more appropriate for some, is to give them something to read. The Apostle Paul exhorted Timothy: "*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*" (1 Tim. 4:13). Timothy was to strengthen himself by reading and so it is for all. Reading allows one to consider issues at their own pace, thereby enabling them to assimilate the concepts. This method of witnessing facilitates Paul's exhortation to the Romans: "*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*" (Rom. 14:5). That verse refers specifically to the observance of the Sabbath but the principle of being fully persuaded in one's own mind applies to all the gospel truths: "*And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform*" (Rom. 4:21).

Conduct

Witnessing is not confined to oral explanations or the distribution of literature—the most powerful witness of all is the witness of one's conduct. Jesus said: "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16). Jesus referred to their "*good works*", not to their preaching or distribution of literature. Although it might not be dramatic, the witness of one's conduct is evident to all with whom they meet, just as it was for the apostles: "*For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men*" (1 Cor. 4:9). Likewise Jesus said: "*Ye shall know them by their fruits*" (Matt. 7:15-20). The challenge for every Christian is to display exemplary conduct every moment of every day—to bring forth good fruit.

One's conduct includes their speech. Speech requires constant vigilance: "*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body*" (James 3:2). As the apostle goes on to say: "*But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*" (James 3:7-10). Indeed one's speech may be the most powerful witness, and present the greatest challenge, of all one's gifts. ■

THE MOABITES

Including the references to his descendants, there are more than 180 references to Moab in the Scriptures. Such a prevalence suggests that there is benefit to the Christian in knowing about Moab and his progeny, and how they fit into God's plan.

Moab, the founding father of the Moabites, was the result of an incestuous union between Lot and his eldest daughter, after the destruction of Sodom: *"Now the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is no man on the earth to come in to us as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father'. So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose....Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day"* (Gen. 19:31-33; 36-37 NKJV). Moab means "of his father", and is therefore descriptive of his ancestry.

The Land

Moab, because of its proximity to Israel, was closely linked to the fortunes of the Hebrew people. Moab was situated along the eastern border of the Dead Sea, on the plateau between the Dead Sea and the Arabian Desert. It was about 57 kilometers (35 miles) long and 40 kilometers (25 miles) wide. Although it was primarily a high plateau, Moab also had mountainous areas and deep gorges. It was a fertile area for crops and herds. To the south and west of Moab was the nation of Edom, and to the north was Ammon. After the Israelites invaded the land, the tribe of Reuben displaced the Moabites from the northern part of their territory.



The People

The Moabites were of Semitic stock (descendants of Shem) and were kin to the Hebrews due to their descent from Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Their language was practically the same as the Hebrews. Probably the most well known Moabite is Ruth (Ruth 1:22), who was the great grandmother of King David: *"Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begat David the King"* (Matt. 1:5-6). Thus Ruth is a maternal progenitor of Jesus.

Moabites' connection with Israel

It was from Mt Nebo in the land of Moab that the Lord showed Moses the promised land: *"And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession"* (Deut. 32:48-49).

Another connection which the people of Israel have with Moab is that Moses is buried in Moab: *"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there'". So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day". Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended"* (Deut. 34:1-8).

Sihon's Amorite kingdom annexed much of Moab shortly before the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Num. 21:17-29). After the Israelites defeated Sihon, Balak, the king of the relatively weak Moabites, joined with the Midianites to hire the prophet-magician Balaam to curse Israel so that the Israelites could be defeated (Num. 22:1-20). Balaam's mission failed, but when the Israelites camped in Moab just before crossing the

Jordan River, the women of Moab enticed the Israelites into a form of idolatry that involved ritual sexual immorality. This resulted in God's judgment against Israel (Num. 25:1-9). Eventually the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, "right by Jericho" in the region of Acacia Grove, northwest of Moab (Josh. 3:1).

Military might

During the period of the judges the nation of Israel was relatively weak and sinned against God. God used Moab to inflict punishment on Israel: "*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years*" (Judges 3:12-14). However when Israel cried unto the Lord raised up Ehud to deliver them from the hand of the Moabites: "*And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years*" (Judges 3:28-30).

Saul also inflicted defeat on the Moabites (1 Sam. 14:47). King David had an early friendship with the Moabites (1 Sam. 22:3-4), but eventually he was required to smite them (2 Sam. 8:2) after which they remained subject to Israel until after Solomon's death. Omri, king of Israel, kept Moab under his control, as did his son Ahab until he was so occupied with wars against Syria and Assyria that Moab was able to brake free. The Assyrians conquered Moab about 735 BC and invading Arabs conquered it about 650 BC. The prophet Isaiah lamented over Moab's defeat (Isa. 15:16), and Jeremiah predicted Moab's death at the end of the seventh century B.C. (Jer. 48). When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC, some of the Jews fled to Moab to escape being taken into captivity (Jer. 40:11-12).

Their religion

The chief deity of Moab was Chemosh, (Judges 11:24), who featured in Solomon's idolatry: "*And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem...*" And the LORD was angry with

Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice" (1 Kings 11:6-9).

Consistent with their worship of false gods, Mesha, one king of Moab, offered his son as a sacrifice: "*And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not. Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall*" (2 Kings 3:26-27).

God's agent

God used the Moabites as one of His agents to destroy Judah: "*In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets*" (2 Kings 24:1-2).

However the Moabites became proud and Jeremiah prophesied their downfall: "*And Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he hath magnified himself against the LORD... Woe be unto thee, O Moab! the people of Chemosh perisheth: for thy sons are taken captives, and thy daughters captives.*" (Jer. 48:42-46). A lesson for all!

Moab in Prophecy

Nevertheless Moab is mentioned as a beneficiary of the Lord's blessing: "*And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea... And he shall... assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth... they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them*" (Isa. 11:11-14).

Jeremiah also prophesied of Moab's restoration: "*Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days, says the LORD*" (Jer. 48:47). Their restoration will be part of God's comprehensive plan of salvation and redemption for all the human race in the latter days (that is, in the times of restitution—Acts 3:21).■

Those who leave everything in God's hand will eventually see God's hand in everything.

LOVE BELIEVES ALL

Except for Jesus Himself, the Apostle Paul's understanding of the Christian life was unsurpassed, and his statements in 1 Corinthians 13 regarding the characteristics of love exemplify that understanding. One of those statements is "*love believeth all things*" (verse 7, KJV).

Belief

There are two bases for belief. One basis is observation, that is, the information has been "seen", either directly by the person themselves or by someone else. That basis of belief is frequently described by the expression "seeing is believing".

The other basis for belief is faith: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). Thus belief based on faith is different from belief that is based on things seen: belief that is based on faith is based on things that have not been seen.

In 1 Corinthians 13:7 the Apostle Paul states that one characteristic of love is that it "*believes all things*" (KJV). However the term "all things" requires definition.

"Things"

The Greek text does not have a separate word for the English word "*things*". The insertion of the word "*things*" is significant because it admits the interpretation that Christians are to believe "*all things*", that is, everything.

The idea that a Christian is to believe all things is unrealistic. There is much false information promulgated as "fact" and the Christian is not expected to believe it. Indeed, belief of "all things" is contrary to Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians: "*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*" (1 Thess. 5:21)—the implication is that there are some things which are "*not good*" and therefore should not be "held fast".

When the word "*things*" is omitted from 1 Corinthians 13:7, it is clear that the verse relates to loving persons, and the exhortation is that Christians are to love all persons.

Envy not love

Love for a person engenders belief in them whereas envy and hatred engender unbelief. The relationship also applies in the other direction, that is, belief engenders love and unbelief engenders envy. The Jews' did not believe Paul and their disbelief caused

them to envy him. One instance when unbelief engendered envy is recorded in Acts 17:4-5: "... *But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort...*".

Love your enemies

Jesus' instruction to His disciples was "*love your enemies*" (Matt. 5:43-44). If one loves their enemies, and love demands that they believe them, the conclusion is that love requires one to believe "all", that is, one is obliged to believe what their enemies tell them. However that understanding is contrary to other advice Jesus gave His disciples: "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves... Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*" (Matt. 7:15; 10:16). Jesus alerted His disciples to the existence of false prophets, their falsehood meaning they could not be believed. Jesus' advice was subsequently endorsed by John: "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). The existence of false prophets makes the Christians' task difficult—on the one hand to be loving and believing, and on the other to be as wise as a serpent.

The challenge to the Christian is even more pointed. Jesus exhorted His disciples to "*love one another*" (John 13:34) and that requirement remains unto this day. However not all the words of another Christian are to be believed without scrutiny—Acts 17:11 reads: "*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*". The word was to be received readily but it was not to be believed until it had been verified from the Scriptures.

The exercise of love is summed up by Zechariah: "... *let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour...*" (Zech. 8:16-17).■

PEOPLES PAPER

AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

ABN 23 734 654 922

Reg. No. 0022186J

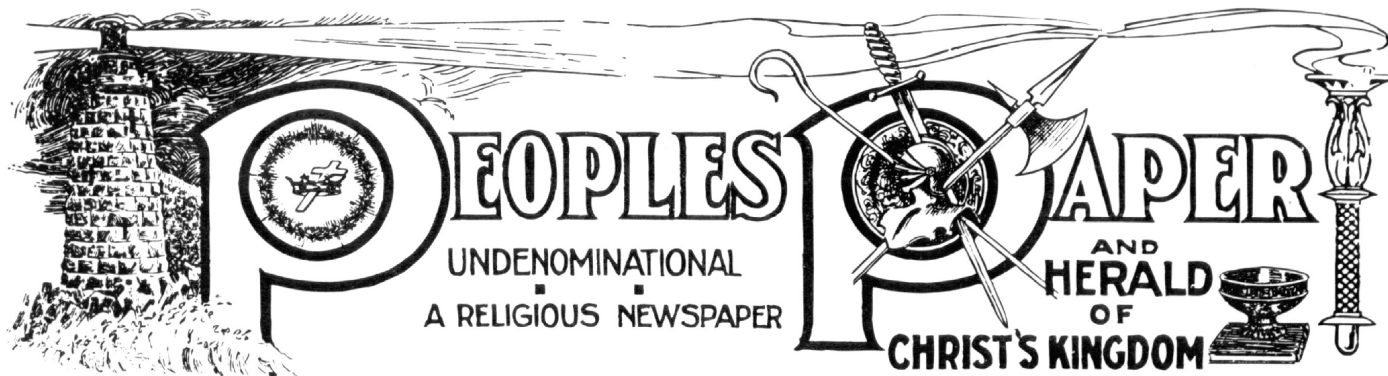
Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.

P.O. Box 402 Rosanna, Victoria, Australia, 3084

Email: FREE.Bereanbibleinstitute@gmail.com

Internet: www.bbi.org.au

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



Volume 93 No. 3

AUSTRALIA

July — September 2010

WHEN YE SEE ALL THESE THINGS

A desire for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth is the second element of the model prayer Jesus gave to His disciples. The petition is preceded only by their address to their Heavenly Father: *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven...”* (Matt. 6:9-10).

Matthew 24:14 records Jesus’ reference to the preaching of the kingdom as the gospel: *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”*. Consequently it is understandable that the disciples wished to know when the kingdom would be established.

Jesus’ statement that the preaching of the kingdom comprised the gospel was part of His response to His disciples’ other questions recorded in verse 3: when the temple would be destroyed; what would be the sign of His coming (Greek: *parousia*—presence); and of the end of the world (Greek: *aion*—age).

They did not understand

However at least two of the disciples did not understand that a period of time would elapse before the kingdom would be established: *“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus... And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, ‘What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?’ And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, ‘Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?’ And he said unto them, ‘What things?’ And they said unto him, ‘Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers*

delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done” (Luke 24:13-21). The disciples had previously thought that Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel—they did not know of His sacrifice.

A fundamental element of the gospel

The establishment of the kingdom of God is such a fundamental element of the gospel that after His resurrection it was Jesus’ principal theme: *“To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”* (Acts 1:3).

Consequently it is understandable that, after His resurrection, His disciples wished to know if He would establish the kingdom at that time. However the time for them to know had not yet come: *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not*

In This Issue

When Ye See All These Things	1
Hold Fast What You Have	4
Ephraim and Judah	6
Modern Israel	9
By Reason of Him	10
Suffer Me First	11
Love Hopes All Things	12

for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8). Jesus introduced them to the idea that there was a work to be accomplished—and the work would require time to accomplish—before the kingdom would be established.

Their failure to understand these events from the beginning is testimony to the truth recorded in Mark 9:31-32: “For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But **they understood not** that saying, and were afraid to ask him”. And so it is that Christians today should not assume that they understand every facet of God’s plan—it is possible that there are stages and developments which have not yet been revealed, to them in spite of their diligent Bible study.

Signs of the times

However Jesus told His disciples that there would be signs which would indicate to them when the establishment of the kingdom was near: “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors” (Matt. 24:33),

According to the traditional texts, the events which He listed can be classified into three groups:

- Those which would transpire before the kingdom would be established (**“the end is not yet”**). These events include the destruction of the temple, the rising up of false Christs and wars and rumours of wars (Matt. 24:2-5; Luke 21:6-9);
- Those which would constitute (or indicate) **“the beginning of sorrows”**. These events include nation rising against nation, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matt. 24:7-8; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11);
- Other events which included them being hated of all nations, many would be offended, many would be betrayed, false prophets would arise and deceive many, iniquity would abound, the love of many would wax cold. They would continue until the gospel of the kingdom had been preached in all the world for a witness to all nations—**“then shall the end come”** (Matt. 24:9-14).

Not all the events which Jesus listed were new, in fact all of them, except the rising of false Christs, the disciples’ persecution and the preaching of the gospel in all the world, had occurred in the past. And so the question may be asked, which details that Jesus gave answered the disciples’ questions?

Destruction of the temple

One event which had occurred previously was the destruction of the temple—it was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar took Judah captive to Babylon: “At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged...And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said...And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man’s house burnt he with fire...And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea that was in the house of the LORD, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon” (2 Kings 24:10-25:13).

However the temple had been rebuilt and was such a magnificent building that, in common parlance, His disciples wanted to “show Him around”: *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down*” (Matt. 24:1-2).

False Christs

Another sign Jesus told His disciples was the rising of false Christs. The word “Christ” means “anointed”, that is, anointed with the Holy Spirit. The likelihood of anyone claiming to be anointed with the Spirit before Pentecost is small because there was doubt whether there was such a thing as the Spirit: “He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost (Greek: *pneuma*—a current of air; breath; Spirit) since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost” (Acts 19:2). The Holy Spirit was not given until after Jesus’ resurrection: “...for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

However there were false prophets in Old Testament times, the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40) and the prophets in the days of Jeremiah (Jer. 14:14-15) being two examples.

Wars and rumours of wars

Wars have been part of the curse placed on mankind since very early times—the first war recorded is in Genesis 14:1-2: “It came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of

Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar”.

Likewise, after their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites were faced with wars (Judges 1:1-4), and rumours were used to frighten enemies (2 Kings 19:6-7).

Hand in hand with war is the “*rising of nation against nation*”.

Famines and pestilences

Famines also have been the lot of mankind from early times; one of the earliest of those recorded resulted in Abraham going to Egypt (Gen. 12:10).

There is some doubt whether the word “pestilence” appears in the original text of Matthew 24:7. It is omitted by Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott, the American Standard Version, the Revised Version, the Contemporary English Version, the English Standard Version and the New International Version. The Revised Version and the New King James Version also omit it from Luke 21:11, but it is retained in Luke 21:11 by the other versions listed above.

Pestilence means a plague—“a troublesome or destructive person, animal or thing” (Strong’s Concordance). God has used pestilences to humble mankind, for example Pharaoh: “*And the LORD said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth*” (Exodus 9:13-15). “*And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me*” (Exodus 10:3). One of the reasons why God brought plagues upon Egypt was to humble Pharaoh.

Earthquakes

There are only three earthquakes recorded in the Old Testament: in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12), Ariel (Isa. 29:6) and Uzziah (Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5).

In the Scriptures, earthquakes also symbolise unrest or confusion—the Hebrew “*raah*” is translated as “commotion” (Jer. 10:22), “rushing” (Jer. 47:3; Ezek. 3:12-13), “quaking” (Ezek. 12:18), “shaking” (Ezek. 37:7; 38:19) and “rattling” (Nahum 3:2).

In divers places

In the King James Version, Matthew 24:7 reads: “*For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places*”.

The expression “*in divers places*” raises the question whether there is a difference between the occurrence of the phenomena that Jesus said would occur in the latter days compared with their occurrence in earlier times. As mentioned above, there are only three earthquakes mentioned in the Old Testament, but there have been numerous earthquakes in recent times. The significance of their occurrence is increased by them being in various (divers) parts of the world. Some of the most devastating ones in the last year have been in the Philippines, Indonesia, Haiti and China. The increased number of earthquakes might well indicate that the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is near.

When ye see these things

Sceptics have suggested that, since the phenomena Jesus mentioned had occurred previously, the prophecy is insignificant; the only difference between historical times and “today” is that modern technology now publicises them. There is no doubt that, in the past, many events in the world went unnoticed because there was no communication media. However it is possible that there is some significance in Jesus’ words “*when ye see these things*”. In other words, the modern means of communication go hand in hand with the fulfilment of the prophecy—that it is the improved communications that are facilitating the people to “see” these things.

The improved communications media are themselves an indication that the kingdom is near, being one component of the fulfilment of the prophecy given to Daniel: “*But thou O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased*” (Dan. 12:4).

Then the end

The events listed in the remaining verses of Matthew 24—the rise of false prophets, the abounding of iniquity, preaching of the gospel on a world-wide scale, the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place and the fig tree putting forth leaves—are events all of which have occurred simultaneously during the last few decades. Consequently there might be some significance in Jesus’ statement that it will be when His followers see **all these things** that they are to know that the kingdom “*is near, even at the doors*” (Matt. 24:33).■

HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE

The church at Philadelphia was exhorted to hold fast what they had: *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"* (Rev. 3:11). In return for their diligence they were promised: *"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world..."* (Rev. 3:10).

The words of Psalm 91:9-10 give a similar assurance to those who do not stray from the Lord; the assurance is expressed in terms of making Him their dwelling place: *"Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling"*.

Jesus also reminded His disciples of the need for continual watch-care to ensure that they would receive their reward: *"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man"* (Luke 21:36).

Laodicea

The condition of the church at Laodicea was a stark contrast to the church at Philadelphia: *"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; 'These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent'"* (Rev. 3:14-19).

The language used in those verses categorizes a person's "Christianity" into one of three groups:

- "Cold", which denotes the state where there is no pretense of religion; everything is utterly lifeless and dead. Even the love that should exist between the members is cold; they have a cold or icy heart lacking interest in the needs of fellow members;
- "Hot", which denotes a warm and zealous heart, open and honest in its appreciation of Christ and what He has done for them. Consequently it is devoted in love to the service of their Master, and therefore with

warm-hearted and honest love towards each of their brethren. The disciples, after hearing Jesus speak on the road to Emmaus said: *"And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"* (Luke 24:32).

- "Lukewarm", which denotes a tepid temperature (neither cold nor hot). The pictorial language used by the Lord to John is graphic, and may be somewhat distasteful, but it accurately conveys the message—drinking tepid water tends to cause nausea and so the expression *"I will spew you out of my mouth"*, although distasteful, is appropriate.

Safeguard or remedy

The members of the church were advised how to overcome their luke-warmness and become faithful followers of Christ, rich in spiritual things: *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see"* (Rev. 3:18).

Buy from Me

Firstly they had to come to the source, Christ, to buy pure gold, that which had been subjected to the heat of the furnace to purify it from dross. Christ was comparing faith to gold, the most precious of metals, highly valued by mankind. The Apostle Peter reminded the brethren: *"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:7).

White garments

The Church of Laodicea was naked in the sense that it was relying on its own righteousness and not on the righteousness of Christ. Writing to the Philippians, Paul wrote: *"...And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith"* (Phil. 3:9-10). In similar vein the Psalmist wrote: *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile"* (Psa. 32:1-2). Only the white raiment which Christ provides is able to "clothe" the human frame and cover their iniquity.

Eye salve

The Church of Laodicea was spiritually blind: they indulged themselves with worldly wealth—riches—

and consequently considered themselves to have “need of nothing” when they were *wretched and poor and blind...*” (Rev. 3:17). Christ counsels them to buy of him eye-salve, so that they might see (recognise) their undone condition.

Revelation 3:18 is the only place where the Greek word translated “eye-salve” (“*kollourion*” - Strong #2854) occurs in the New Testament. In the physical world it was a poultice or small cake which was placed on the eye; it remained on the eye for some time to allow its healing power to be absorbed.

However the eye salve referred to by Christ was the Holy Spirit, which opens spiritual eyes: “*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*” (1 John 2:20).

The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of spiritual vision in his letter to the Church at Ephesus: “*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power*” (Eph. 1:17-19).

Chastening

The Lord further instructed the angel to the Laodiceans to write: “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent*” (Rev. 3:19). The words to the Laodiceans endorse those in Proverbs 3:12: “*For whom the LORD loves He corrects...*”. God’s intention is not to discourage, but to correct and guide those whom He loves, just as an earthly father chastens his children: “*Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?... Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*” (Heb. 12:9-11). God’s correction of the Christian must be considered in the same light so that the believer will benefit from these experiences and become more zealous.

The Christian Today

The exhortation given to the Christians at Philadelphia, and the admonition given to the Laodiceans, are timely reminders for Christians in the twenty-first century. All of the threats which confronted the Christians in those times confront the Christian today, and thus the challenge today is the

same as it was then—to “*Hold fast what you have, that no one take your crown*”.

Material wealth

Many Christians today, especially those who live in the Western world, in general terms are more materially wealthy than at any previous time. Thus the temptations of which John spoke—“*the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16)—are particularly powerful, and therefore Christians should continually remember that they have “*little strength*” of their own. Such material prosperity has the potential to entice one to become lukewarm, and accordingly it is necessary to remember that the Lord’s chastening is for one’s ultimate welfare: “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*” (James 1:12.). The true wealth is the “*gold tried in the fire*” (spiritual truth derived from the hearth of zealous study and faithful self-denial), and not the socially attractive and flamboyant lifestyles which tend to annul the development of humility.

Eye salve

It is necessary to constantly “*examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...*” (2 Cor. 13:5). The spiritual eye must be focused on self: “*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward*” (2 John 8).

Endurance

The Christian must constantly remind themselves that the race is to the end. Towards the end of his life the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “*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). The crown to which Paul referred was not of withering leaves as was awarded to athletes in his day, but it was crown of righteousness which would never fade away, and which therefore implies eternal life. Additionally it will not be awarded by human judges but by the Righteous Judge who will “*execute judgment and justice in the earth*” (Jer. 23:5) to all who will enjoy the blessings of living in a restored earth.

Singleness of purpose

As Paul wrote: “*Brethren...this one thing I do...I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us...as many as be perfect, be thus minded...*” (Phil. 3:13-15).■

EPHRAIM AND JUDAH

“...the envy of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:13 NKJV).

Isaiah chapter 11 is one of the chapters upon which the hope of a future peaceful world is based. The first twelve verses speak of a time of harmony—animals which today are antagonistic towards each other (lambs, wolves, leopards, calves and lions) living in harmony and being led by a little child. Such a situation is so vastly different from what mankind has experienced for the last several thousand years that it is an exercise of faith to believe that such conditions will ever exist on this earth.

Verse 13 continues with the statement that *“the envy of Ephraim shall depart... and Judah shall not harass Ephraim”*. While such a statement is consistent with the peaceful order described in the earlier verses, its inclusion in the chapter implies that prior to the time described in Isaiah 11 there was antagonism between Ephraim and Judah, and that the antagonism was of such significance that the promise of its removal warranted inclusion in Isaiah 11.

Family relationship

In order to appreciate the source and duration of the antagonism it is necessary to review the relationship of Judah and Ephraim.

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, by his first wife Leah (Gen. 29:35). Little is recorded of Judah's life, however it is recorded that he saved his brother Joseph's life when his other brothers wanted to kill him because of Jacob's special love for Joseph: *“... Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh’”* (Gen. 37:26-27).

Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son; the first by Rachel (his first ten sons were by Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah).

Ephraim was Joseph's second son, born of Asenath in Egypt: *“And to Joseph were born two sons ... whom Asenath... bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: ‘For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house’. And the name of the second he called Ephraim: ‘For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction’”* (Gen. 41:50-52). Thus Ephraim was Judah's nephew.

Antagonism between Ephraim and his (uncle) Judah developed over a period of time. The antagonism

might have been caused, at least in part, by their separate promotion by their ancestors. It is unclear whether either of them strove for supremacy; both had power endowed upon them.

Judah

Judah rose to prominence above his elder brothers because of their failure to uphold God's standards. The record is in Genesis 49. Verses 3 and 4 record Reuben's (Jacob's first-born) committal of incest with Bilhah, and verses 5 to 7 record Simeon and Levi's cruelty in slaying a man. Consequently Jacob pronounced: *“I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel”* (verse 7).

In stark contrast to the misdemeanours of Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Jacob pronounced: *“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes”* (verses 8-10). Thus Jacob prophesied that the tribe of Judah was destined to rule over all his sons who were to become the nation of Israel.

Ephraim

Ephraim's rise to prominence resulted from many steps along the way. The main events were:

- Jacob accepted Ephraim as one of his own sons, even though he was his grandson (Gen. 48:5);
- Jacob knowingly blessed Ephraim ahead of Joseph's first-born Manasseh (Gen. 48:18-20).

Thus, with Ephraim promoted above Manasseh, and Judah promoted above Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Ephraim and Judah were positioned to become prominent in Israel.

In the wilderness

Ephraim's and Judah's emergence as the two principal tribes started to emerge when they sojourned in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt, and before they entered the promised land.

Moses and Aaron were given instructions regarding where and how the tribes were to camp around the tabernacle:

- The tribe of Judah was to camp on the east side with three other tribes. However all four tribes

camped under the standard of the tribe of Judah—**Judah was the pre-eminent tribe** of this group (Num. 2:1-9);

- The tribe of Ephraim was to camp on the west side with Manasseh and Benjamin, under Ephraim's standard—**Ephraim was the pre-eminent tribe** of this group (Num. 2:18-24).

Inheritance in the land

When the Israelites entered the promised land, the tribe of Judah was properly given a portion because Judah was one of Jacob's sons. The boundaries of Judah's portion are defined in Joshua 15.

Levi was also one of Jacob's sons, however the tribe of Levi was not given any inheritance in the land because their commission was to serve in the tabernacle (Num. 18:21-23).

The allocation of the land which would "normally" have been Levi's is not clearly stated; however Ephraim was given his own portion, which was consistent with Jacob regarding him as one of his sons: "*So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance...*" (Joshua 16:4-9).

The kingdom divided

For some 450 years after the Israelites took possession of the promised land they were governed by judges (Acts 13:18-22), after which, in accordance with the wishes of the people, Samuel appointed Saul as their first king (1 Sam. 11:15-12:1).

Saul was followed by David (1 Sam. 16). David was a descendant of Judah (1 Chron. 2:3-15), and so, when the kingdom divided, one kingdom was known as either Judah or David.

David was succeeded by his son Solomon (1 Kings 1:13), however Solomon did evil and God pronounced that He would take the kingdom from him and give it to his servant Jeroboam, but He would leave one tribe with David's line (1 Kings 11:11-13).

Jeroboam was of the tribe of Ephraim and rebelled against Solomon (1 Kings 11:26), nevertheless Jeroboam was informed by the prophet Ahijah that God would "*rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give it unto him, even ten tribes*" (1 Kings 11:31-35).

Rehoboam's rule

However when Solomon died "*Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead*" (1 Kings 11:43). The record of Rehoboam's early reign is in 1 Kings 12:1-19. In summary, Rehoboam rejected the advice of Israel's

elders, accepted the advice of his contemporaries and increased the severity of the punishment meted out to the people. (One aside to his action is that he did not act alone but was directed by the Lord: "*So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat*"—verse 15).

Rehoboam's decision led to the division of the two camps: "*Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: 'What share have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!'* So Israel departed to their tents...***So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day***".

The matter of names

Thus Israel became two kingdoms—one known as "*the house of Judah*" under the rule of Rehoboam and comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the remaining ten tribes under Jeroboam being known as Israel (1 Kings 12:21-24).

However, due to the prominence of Ephraim amongst the ten tribes of Israel, the ten tribes are also referred to as Ephraim: "*But a man of God came to him, saying, 'O king, do not let the army of Israel go with*



you, for the LORD is not with Israel—not with any of the children of Ephraim” (2 Chron. 25:7)—the expression “the children of Ephraim” implies that the tribe of Ephraim was the dominant tribe of the ten tribe kingdom.

Conflict perpetuated

As mentioned above, 1 Kings 12:19 records that there has been antagonism between the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah since the division of the kingdom “unto this day”—a period exceeding 2800 years. There have been several battles between the house of Israel and the house of Judah, one of which is recorded in 2 Chronicles 13:1-20.

Another record of the antagonism between the two camps is in Isaiah 7:1-9: “Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, **king of Israel**, went up to **Jerusalem to make war against it**, but could not prevail against it. And it was told to the house of David, saying, ‘Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim’... So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind. Then the LORD said to Isaiah, ‘Go out now to meet Ahaz... and say to him: ‘Take heed, and be quiet’; do not fear or be fainthearted...Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and trouble it...thus says the Lord GOD: ‘It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass...Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, And the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established’”.

The promise of reconciliation

Having traced the history of the two houses of Israel—Ephraim and Judah—and the antagonism that has existed between them, Isaiah 11:13 gives a glorious hope. When the peace and harmony described in the earlier verses of the chapter—that animals which today are antagonistic towards each other will exist in harmony and be led by a little child—the picture would not be complete without an assurance that (“even”) Ephraim and Judah will be reconciled: “Also the envy of Ephraim shall depart, And the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, And Judah shall not harass Ephraim” (Isa. 11:13).

The new covenant

The precise terminology used in Jeremiah 31:1-37 is significant and adds weight to the prophecy of Isaiah:

- Verse 1: “At the same time,” says the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and

they shall be My people”—“All the families of Israel” are mentioned; not just some of the tribes;

- Verse 6: “For there shall be a day when the watchmen will cry on Mount Ephraim, ‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God’”. Ephraim will seek to go to Zion (which is Jerusalem) and not be in conflict with her;
- Verse 9: “They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn”. The specific mention of Ephraim as His firstborn gives unqualified assurance that His dealings of old were not without purpose—as quoted above “... this thing was from the Lord” (1 Kings 12:15);
- Verse 18: “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God’”. Ephraim will repent and therefore be able to accept the blessings which God will pour out at that time;
- Verse 20: “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD”. God will accept Ephraim back into His fold;
- Verse 27: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast...”. Both houses will be blessed;
- Verse 31: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...”. Again assurance is given that both houses will be blessed;
- Verses 35-37: “Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): ‘If those ordinances depart from before Me’, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever. Thus says the LORD: ‘If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done’, says the LORD”. The promise is sure—only if God’s initial work of creation can be fathomed by mankind will His promise fail.

Ezekiel the prophet

The prophet Ezekiel was also given assurance that Ephraim and Judah would be reconciled. The

promise is recorded in Ezekiel 37:12-25: *“Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel’... Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: ‘For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions’. Then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions’. Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand. And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, ‘Will you not show us what you mean by these?’— say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand’... Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.... David My servant shall be king over them... Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your*

fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever’”.

Promise repeated

The promise of a new covenant with both the house of Israel (Ephraim) and the house of Judah given to Ezekiel is repeated by the writer to the Hebrews, showing that the promise is yet to be fulfilled: *“For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord”* (Heb. 8:8-9).

Thus the reconciliation of Ephraim and Judah, which is somewhat inconspicuously referred to in Isaiah 11:13, precisely articulates one facet of God’s plan, exemplifies that His ways are above man’s ways, and confirms His mercy and goodness towards Israel. The fact that He will reconcile enemies of such long standing as Ephraim and Judah gives added confidence that He will also reconcile all the families of the earth. Indeed, the reconciliation of Ephraim and Judah may be regarded as more significant than the reconciliation of the animals described in Isaiah 11 because of mankind’s tendency to transgress.■

MODERN ISRAEL

(as published by <http://www.aish.com/jw/id/90073102.html> on April 21, 2010)

- Israel is one of the smallest countries in the world, having an area of 20,770 square kilometres, which is less than the USA state of New Jersey and less than one third of Australia’s smallest state (the island of Tasmania—68,401 square kilometres).
- Israel’s population (as at the end of 2008) was approximately 7,200,000, which was approximately 0.1% (1/1000) of the world’s population.
- Population density is approximately 300 persons per square kilometre (compared to India 336, UK 246, China 137, Syria 87, USA 31 and Australia 2.6) (not all data has been verified by the United Nations).
- Modern Israel is approaching 62 years of existence; Rome is thought to have existed for 2760 years.
- Israel is the largest immigrant absorbing country per capita in the world—an average of 350% p.a..
- It is the only country in history to have revived an unspoken language.
- Israelis have won more Nobel prizes per capita than any other country.
- There are more laureates in real numbers than China, Mexico and Spain.
- Israel has the eighth longest life expectancy (80.7 years), which is greater than the United Kingdom, USA and Germany.
- Israel is the only country to enter the twenty-first century with a net gain in the number of trees and in an area that is mainly desert.
- 93% of homes in Israel use solar energy which is the highest proportion in the world.
- Israel is the only country to have its indigenous population to return after 2000 years in exile.
- There are 26 declared Muslim states in the world; 18 professing Christian countries and one Jewish state.
- 76% of its population is Jewish, 20% Arab and the remaining 4% is a combination of several cultures.

BY REASON OF HIM

Romans 8:20 is a verse of Scripture which warrants close examination: “*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but **by reason of him** who hath subjected the same in hope*” (KJV). What does it mean, “*He subjected creation to vanity?*” How was it “*not willingly*”, and what is His “*reason?*” Did mankind have any option? Does the verse have any bearing on the idea that Man has a “free will”?

The creature

The “*creature*” referred to in the verse is the whole of mankind. Strong's Concordance gives the meaning of the Greek word as “#2937- ktisis - original formation. It occurs 19 times and in the KJV it is translated “creature” or “creation” 17 times; “building” once (Heb. 9:11) and “ordinance” once (1 Pet. 2:13). In Romans 8:20 “ktisis” is translated “creation” in the NKJV, Revised Version, Diaglott, NIV and the Concordant Version.

Vanity

The word “vanity” is translated from the Greek “mataiotēs” (Strong #3153) which means “*inutility*”; figuratively “*transientness*”. It is translated “*futility*” in the NKJV, “*frailty*” in the Diaglott, and “*frustration*” in the NIV. All of the words amount to the same thing and are summarised by the figurative meaning “*transientness*”—that is, it is temporary and therefore not of lasting value. Solomon is regarded as one of the wise men who have lived on Earth and so it is not surprising that he tried to fathom God's purposes. After pondering numerous aspects of life he concluded: “*Vanity of vanities... all is vanity*” (Eccl. 12:8).

Solomon also concluded that God had a purpose in subjecting mankind to “vanity”. He wrote: “*I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: **this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith***” (Eccl. 1:12-13). Solomon concluded that God has given this “*sore travail*” to the sons of men for a purpose, that purpose being that man would be “*exercised therewith*”. Solomon's conclusion was based on his observations that: “*one generation passeth away and another cometh*”; the repetitive pattern of the sun rising and setting; the seeming purposeless winds; and the rivers failing to fill the ocean (a phenomenon now commonly called “the water cycle”). After observing these cycles he goes on to record how he observed the characteristics of human behaviour and how mankind sought meaning from joyfulness (laughter and mirth), wine,

material prosperity, servants and wealth (“*silver and gold*”). After all his deliberations Solomon repeats his conclusion in chapter 3 verses 10-11: “*I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it...*”.

The primary meaning of the Hebrew word from which “*exercised*” is translated is “to depress”; it also means “to humble”, and hence Solomon's conclusion is that God gave to mankind the present experience with vanity to humble Him.

Not willingly

Romans 8:20 states that the creation “*was made subject to vanity, **not willingly***”. The statement is significant—the word “not” is translated from the Greek “ou” (Strong #3756) which Dr. Strong says is “the **absolutely negative** adverb”; hence the statement is definite that mankind did **not** subject themselves to the vanity of the present experience.

Having reached that point in the argument the depth of truth contained in Romans 8:20 begins to become apparent—the creation did not willingly subject itself to vanity but **it was subjected by God**: “*by reason of Him who subjected the same in hope*”.

Several other translations endorse that understanding:

- “*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but **because of Him** who subjected it in hope*” (NKJV).
- “*For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but **by reason of him** who subjected it, in hope*” (RV).
- “*For the creation was made subject to frailty (not voluntarily, but **by him who placed it under**)*” (Diaglott).
- “*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but **by the will of the one** who subjected it*” (NIV).
- “*For to vanity was the creation subjected, not voluntarily, but **because of Him** who subjects it*” (Concordant).

God's reason

The Apostle's next statement in Romans 8:20, that it was subjected “*by reason of Him*”, means that the arrangement was engineered by God. It is indeed as Solomon expressed: “***hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith***” (Eccl. 1:13). The next step in trying to understand God's reason for subjecting mankind to vanity (the present experience of mortal life), is to understand and acknowledge that God is superior to mankind.

Regardless of whatever other attributes God possesses, He is a jealous God, so jealous in fact that He told Israel: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...”* (Exodus 20:3-5).

As creator and ruler of the universe it is God’s prerogative to use whatever means He chooses to accomplish His purposes. During Israel’s exodus from Egypt He used deprivation to keep them humble: *“All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply... And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to **humble** thee... to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or not. And he **humbled** thee... Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God ... Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were... drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint... **that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end...**”* (Deut. 8:1-16). In human terms, God’s actions were a pre-emptive measure to off-set the likelihood of them becoming proud and self-sufficient when they later became prosperous.

God’s reason needs to be fully grasped here. Israel had been in bondage in Egypt for more than 400 years and yet in His wisdom God subjected them to further deprivation in the wilderness to humble them. As well as that, His purpose was that He might do them *“good **at the latter end**”*, that is, that it would be to their ultimate benefit rather than necessarily being for their immediate benefit. The same principle applies to His dealing with the world of mankind and their subjection to vanity at this time.

The larger scale

God’s plan is to deliver all mankind from *“the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Rom. 8:21). Thus it is apparent that His dealing with Israel during their exodus is one example that has been *“written aforetime for our learning”* (Rom. 15:4) and it illustrates how He uses adverse experiences to accomplish His purpose. In Israel’s case He imposed deprivation in the wilderness to humble them so that they would not

“lift up their hearts and forget the Lord thy God” in their later prosperity. In the same way mankind today is experiencing a lifetime of suffering so that they will not lift up their hearts in the times of their prosperity which are yet future. It is the same strategy as He used with Israel but on a much larger scale—indeed it is on a world-wide scale. God’s purpose in giving this sore travail to mankind for such a long period is so that, when *“the times of restitution of all things”* comes (Acts 3:21), when *“the inhabitant shall not say I am sick”* (Isa. 33:24), when *“the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, and the lame man shall leap as an hart, when streams shall break out in the desert”*, when all mankind shall *“come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads”* (Isa. 35:5-10), when there will be *“no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”* (Rev. 21:3-4), they will **not** lift up their hearts with pride, but will say, *“... Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths”* (Isa. 2:3).

It is at that time that the *“sore travail”* will have accomplished its purpose. The lesson is so powerful that they will say *“this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation”* (Isa. 25:9).

The Apostle Paul’s statement in Romans 8:20 that *“... the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but **by reason of him** who hath subjected the same in hope”* expresses in a few words a profound part of God’s plan.■

Suffer me first

Luke 9:59-60: *“And he said unto another, ‘Follow me’. But he said, ‘Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father’. Jesus said unto him, ‘Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God’”*.

It is not the attendance to physical funeral arrangements that present the Christian with the challenge Jesus presented to his would-be follower, but the matter of priorities.

The temptations presented by earthly cares and responsibilities are so powerful that one can easily put them ahead of the principal task of preaching the Gospel, in whatever form of service God has given us: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matt. 6:33).■

LOVE HOPES ALL THINGS

The Apostle Paul's purpose in writing what is commonly referred to as "1 Corinthians 13", was not to explain the meaning of each of the aspects of love, but rather to remind the Corinthian Christians that by striving for the prominent and spectacular gifts of the Spirit they were missing the essence of their sanctification. Thus in verse 7 he simply states that "*love hopeth all things*"; with no expansion of what that requirement involved—the believers at Corinth were expected to know what hope was and how it was a part of the quality of love. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate the relationship between love and hope it is necessary firstly to have a clear concept of the nature of hope.

Nature of hope

There are at least three characteristics of hope.

Hope relates to things yet future. Romans 8:24-25 reads: "*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it*". Consequently the exercise of hope as an aspect of love requires a vision of things yet future—things which the loving one desires will transpire in the life of the loved one. In the words of another, "hope is a forward reaching concept".

Secondly, hope implies a desire for change. If one has all one wishes—expressed by Paul above as "*things seen*"—there is no place for hope. However hope is essential to the Christian because it is the basis of faith: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). The hope of the Christian is for something better than the present, both for those they love and for all mankind, and that hope is essential to enable them to love everyone, even their enemies.

It is important to realise that hope for something different in the future does not mean that hope is unsure or uncertain—that there is some doubt that the desired condition will be fulfilled. The Christian's hope is not uncertain but is "*an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*" (Heb. 6:19).

Thirdly, hope acknowledges that another power or agency is involved in bringing about the change. If that were not the case, the person who loves another would implement the change themselves and there would not be any need for hope. Thus implicit in hope is belief in a higher power, and for the Christian it is that God will work out all things for good.

The highest desire that any person can have for another in this life is that the other will be given spiritual insight and will consequently enjoy all that the Spirit imparts. The only influence which can change a person into the likeness of Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit, and that transformation is the highest that anyone can hope for another.

That is not to say that the Christian expects everyone to develop "*Christ likeness*" in the present life, but "*Christ likeness*" is the only standard which, when adopted by every individual, will enable peace and harmony to permeate the earth.

Death

The ultimate experience in the exercise of hope for a loved one is at their death. Those who have been available to a dying loved one as they draw their last breath realise that the only source of comfort at that time is the hope that, at some time in the future, the loved one will be restored to life. The hope of the resurrection was the basis of the Apostle Paul's faith as he testified before Felix: "*And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*" (Acts 24:15). In his letter to Titus he wrote: "*Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*" (Titus 1:1-2). Indeed, as Paul also wrote: "*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*" (1 Cor. 15:19). In the ultimate sense, love for another implies the hope of their resurrection to eternal life.

Immediate events

Nevertheless, in the immediate sense, the Christian is to have hope for all with whom they come into contact; hope that the other will have experiences which will give them comfort now as well as ultimate joy in the future. ■

PEOPLES PAPER

AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

ABN 23 734 654 922

Reg. No. 0022186J

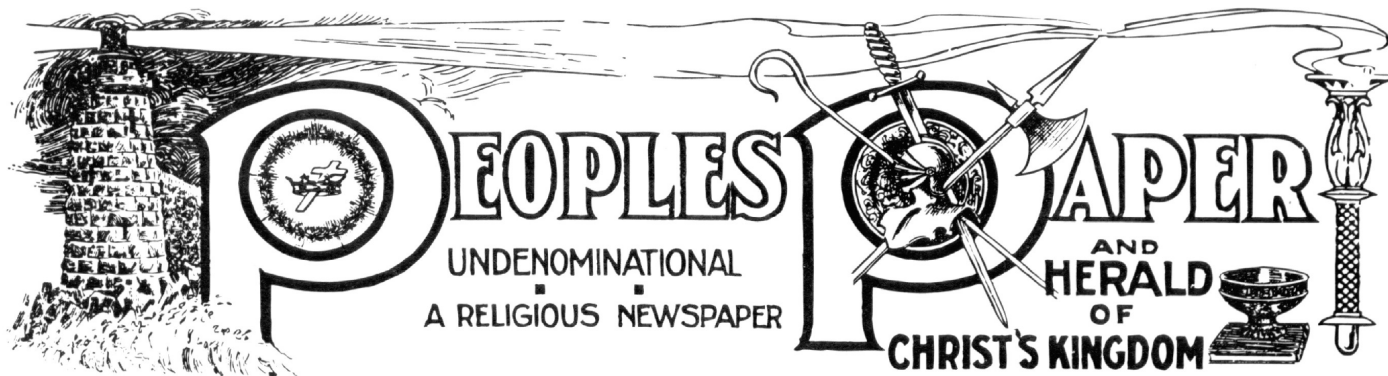
Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.

P.O. Box 402 Rosanna, Victoria, Australia, 3084

Email: FREE.Bereanbibleinstitute@gmail.com

Internet: www.bbi.org.au

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



Volume 93 No. 4

AUSTRALIA

October—December 2010

A BABE IS BORN

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:8-11).

The birth of a child is normally a cause of much rejoicing, firstly by the parents and then by all those with whom the parents maintain contact.

There may be several reasons for such rejoicing, some of which are: the newborn child will perpetuate the family name; they will provide social companionship; and, in later years, provide physical support to their aging parents.

Many who rejoice over the birth express their joy by giving gifts.

Indeed the birth of a child is such a joyous event that in many countries the time of the birth is celebrated annually for many years afterwards, commonly referred to as “their birthday”.

Jesus’ birthday

Jesus’ birth was a time for great rejoicing and His birth continues to be celebrated by millions in the world today. Jesus did not request anyone to memorialise His birth, in spite of the fact that if He had not been born there would not be any hope of an “after-life” as is cherished by Christians. Those who are blessed to understand the full significance of His birth rejoice in the prospect of the benefits which His birth will eventually yield, and so His birth may be remembered and celebrated as a wonderful and critical event in the history of mankind.

Gifts

Even though the shepherds did not immediately understand the full significance of the event when they were in the field, by the time they reached Jerusalem they realised it was the birth of the king of the Jews: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there*

*came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is **he that is born King of the Jews?** for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him... When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, **they presented unto him gifts;** gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matt. 2:1-11).* The practice of giving gifts on every “anniversary” of His birthday (as commonly believed—called “Christmas”), has become a social feature of the Western World, and its commercialisation has resulted in a loss of understanding by the public of its importance.

The date

Down the stream of time there has been much discussion by many learned scholars about the exact time of Jesus’ birth, and differences of opinion still exist regarding the year (as measured by the common Gregorian calendar), the month, the day and the time

In This Issue	
A Babe is Born	1
Eighteen Prophecies	4
Some Aspects of Prayer	5
Paul and Timothy	8
The Clouds of Heaven	9
Love Endures All Things	12

of day. The purpose of this article is not to focus on the precise time of His birth but rather to rejoice in the fact that He was born, and that His birth was the first manifestation of God's plan to rescue mankind from the present experience of suffering and death. (While, prior to Jesus' birth, there had been many manifestations of God's dealing with mankind, including Israel's deliverance from Egypt, none of them directly indicated that His plan provided for Man's redemption from the curse imposed when Adam transgressed in the garden of Eden.)

Parallels

Many parallels (or symbolisms) relating to God's plan have been formulated from the events of Jesus' birth: His earthly parents were on a sojourn; He was born in a manger; His birth was heralded by signs in the heavens; His birth was recognised by only a few; He was brought gifts.

While these parallels are wonderful to meditate upon, there is little Scriptural support which justifies any understanding of God's plan **being based** on them—other Scriptures confirm the truth of many of the pictures that are drawn but the pictures are illustrations and do not comprise a basis for doctrine. For example, some of the pictures (parallels) which have been formulated are: the world of mankind is also on a sojourn, not knowing what awaits them at the end of their journey; they too will rejoice when they recognise that their Saviour has been born; the knowledge of Him does not come through worldly (man-made) circumstances (He was born in a manger and not in a five-star hotel); signs of His birth were given in the heavens and there are signs in the heavens now of the soon establishment of His kingdom; the sign of His birth was given to only a few whom God chose, and so it is today (only a few—God's chosen—are privileged to recognise the signs in the heavens which relate to His return and the establishment of His kingdom).

Comprehension

The "good news" was given to Joseph when he realised Mary was pregnant: "*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21). However the record does not give any indication whether Joseph comprehended the significance of the angel's message (that **the child which his wife would bear would be the Saviour of the whole world**). For all of Joseph's life mankind had suffered the consequences of the sin and corruption inherited from Adam, and so, even though his virgin wife was with child, it might have required an even more dramatic revelation to enable him to fully understand the significance of Mary's pregnancy.

Likewise the shepherds did not fully comprehend the significance of the event when they received the visitation by the heavenly host: "*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us*" (Luke 2:13-15). It is reasonable to expect that had they appreciated the significance of the message they had just received they would not have expressed the purpose of their visit to Bethlehem merely as to "*see this thing which is come to pass*", but rather that it was the fulfilment of the words of the prophet uttered centuries beforehand: "*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (Isa. 7:14).

One additional factor which might have shielded the significance of the event, at least in the first instance, was that, although about that time the people of Israel were "*in expectation*" that "**the Christ**" would soon come (Luke 3:2-15), they overlooked the detail of Isaiah's prophecy: "*For unto us **a child is born, unto us a son is given**: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this*" (Isa. 9:6-7).

The Israelites also overlooked God's revelation to Jeremiah: "*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land... and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness. For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel... Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also **my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne...***" (Jer. 33:14-22).

Even after His ministry His disciples did not understand the significance of their day, as they as

told “the stranger”: *“But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done”* (Luke 24:21).

Later still, after He was raised, the thought of a king who would re-establish Israel’s pre-eminence in the world was still in the forefront of His disciples’ minds: *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6).

Heirship

Many men and women today desire to have children of their own who will perpetuate their family name and inherit their estate—they desire an heir. It was that same desire that motivated Abraham to ask God for a son: *“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness... And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age”* (Gen. 15:1-15).

Abraham immediately understood that the promise of a reward required him to have an heir, otherwise the promise that he would inherit the land was meaningless—as Stephen declared, he had not personally occupied the promised land: *“And he (Stephen) said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give*

it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child” (Acts 7:2-5)

Hebrews 11:8-13 testifies that Abraham did not receive the fulfilment of the promise: *“By faith Abraham... he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise... These all died in faith, **not having received the promises**, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”*.

God’s promise to Abraham (that He would give him the land for an everlasting possession) is yet to be fulfilled, however Christians can take great courage from the fact that the latter part of God’s promise to Abraham has been fulfilled—that for a period of 400 years they were strangers in a land that was not theirs (that is, the days of their sojourn in Egypt).

The heathen

Just as the earthly descendant inherits the estate of their father, so also it is with Jesus. God promised Him: *“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Psa. 2:8).

At first glance, the promise of the heathen as an inheritance might not seem to be a just reward for all that Jesus did: leaving His heavenly home to come down to earth, being rejected by those to whom He came, and ultimately suffering the ignominy of the cross. However the full import of the promise is hidden in one word—heathen.

The “heathen” includes the whole world of mankind—all the nations. In Strong’s Concordance the Hebrew word translated “heathen” is #1471 and is defined in part as “a foreign nation; hence a Gentile...”. In the King James Version it is variously translated as “Gentile, nation, heathen, people”. The same Hebrew word occurs in Genesis 10 verses 1-5, 20, 31 and 32 where it refers to all the descendants of Noah. Jesus will inherit the whole world of mankind.

The inclusion of the Gentiles in Jesus’ inheritance warrants some emphasis. God chose the descendants of Isaac to be His special people: *“Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called”* (Rom. 9:7). Isaac was a descendant of Abraham who was a descendant of Shem (Gen. 11:10-27). Shem was one of Noah’s three sons (Gen. 10:1). Thus God chose only a small portion of Noah’s descendants to be His special people. God’s choice continued through

Isaac's son, Jacob, who was renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28), and only Jacob (the nation of Israel) was given the privilege of being God's witnesses (Isa. 43:1, 10; Amos 3:2; Rom. 9:4-5).

Saviour

It is possible today to overlook the significance of the angelic messages because the term "saviour" is commonly understood to be saving "believers" from "hell". However, as Matthew declares, His mission was to "*save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21)—that is, His people, not just "believers". A saviour is one who delivers or protects (Strong #4982) and that is precisely why Jesus came to earth—to deliver the people from their sins which they had inherited from father Adam. And not just deliver His people but the whole world of mankind: "*So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that **this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world***" (John 4:40-42).

The words of the Apostle Paul emphasise the significance of Jesus' role: "*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his*

*prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of **our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel***" (2 Tim. 1:8-10). The thought behind the term "*abolished death*" is that it has been rendered entirely idle (that is, useless—Strong #2673). Jesus is the deliverer of the whole world of mankind from the power of death—the condition which has ruled mankind for several thousand years, which has prevented a person from living forever and which Solomon called a "*sore travail*" (Eccl. 1:13) **What an achievement!**

Mission accomplished

Jesus' mission has not yet been accomplished in that mankind is still subject to the death sentence—they have not been delivered from it. However the time is coming when they will be delivered, as Isaiah declared: "*And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*" (Isa. 25:9).■

EIGHTEEN PROPHECIES

RELATING TO THE EVENTS WHICH OCCURRED AT THE TIME OF JESUS' FIRST ADVENT

Old Testament	New Testament	Synopsis
Genesis 3:15	Romans 16:20	Seed to bruise
Deuteronomy 18:15	Acts 7:37	A prophet to be raised to Israel
Psalms 22:18	Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24	Casting lots for His vesture
Psalms 118:22-23	Matthew 21:42	Stone to become head of corner
Psalms 118:25-26	Matthew 21:9	Hosanna, son of David
Isaiah 6:9-10	John 12:37-41	Israel's blindness
Isaiah 7:10-15	Matthew 1:18-23	Virgin birth
Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:13-16	Regions see light
Isaiah 40:3	Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:1-3; Luke 3:4	John the Baptist

Old Testament	New Testament	Synopsis
Isaiah 42:1-4	Matthew 12:9-21	Not break a reed
Isaiah 53:1	John 12:38	Arm of the Lord
Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:14-17	Healing the sick
Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:16-21	Bind up broken hearted
Jeremiah 31:10-17	Matthew 2:16-18	Slaying of children
Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:7-15	Out of Egypt
Jonah 1:17	Matthew 12:38-40; 16:4	Jonah
Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:6	Born in Bethlehem
Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:5; John 12:12-16	Ass's colt

SOME ASPECTS OF PRAYER

Prayer is one of God's many gifts to His human creation. However He has not given the privilege of prayer to every individual: *"Ye are of God... They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us..."* (1 John 4:4-6). God does not hear those who are of the world but only those who are "of God".

The blessing of being "of God" was exemplified when multitudes gathered to hear Jesus teach: *"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables... And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand"* (Matt. 13:1-13). Multitudes had gathered and so it seemed to His disciples to be an ideal opportunity for Him to tell them about His mission and the wonderful hope of His kingdom. However, instead of it being an opportunity for Jesus to teach the multitude, the event became a learning experience for His disciples—that it was not God's purpose to enlighten the multitude at that time. Jesus continued: *"But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear"* (Matt. 13:16). Consequently it behoves the Christian to never forget that any knowledge they have of God's plan is a privilege that God has graciously given them—that is, it is a gift.

Purpose of prayer

Prayer gives the Christian direct access to God: *"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name..."* (Matt. 6:9). In order to properly avail oneself of the privilege of being able to address God in prayer it is necessary to consider several aspects of prayer.

The basic purpose of prayer is ask God for help and guidance (in the way which He knows will be best for the one making the petition). Thus the most common component of the prayers recorded in the Bible is requests. At first thought that might seem to be self-centred (selfish), but the Model Prayer which Jesus gave His disciples in response to their request to teach them to pray, is comprised largely of requests: a request for the kingdom to come; a request for daily

bread; a request for forgiveness of transgressions; a request to be kept from evil.

And it has always been so. The first record of prayer in the Bible is not a prayer to God but to Sarai: *"Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee"* (Gen. 12:13). Abram requested (prayed) Sarai to tell the Egyptians that she was his sister. Abram's prayer was a request for her to do something and thus it illustrates one of the primary purposes of prayer—to make a request. Sarai's desire for a child is another example; it was her desire that caused her to pray (request) Abram to go into her handmaid (Gen. 16:2). Other examples include the spies who asked (requested, prayed) the man to show them the entrance to the city of Luz (Judges 1:24), and when the people wished Jesus would leave the area (Mark 5:1-17). Zacharias also made a request when he prayed for a child (Luke 1:5-13).

Even when the Apostle Paul gave thanks to God for the spiritual fruitage of the Ephesians, he added a request: *"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints"* (Eph. 1:15-18).

Another example of a prayerful request is when Paul exhorted the Colossians to continue in prayer with thanksgiving: he asked them to pray that God would open a door of opportunity for him to preach the gospel (Col. 4:1-4). Also, in his letter to the Philadelphians, Paul's exhortation implies that their prayers would contain requests: *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"* (Phil. 4:6).

Even the Christian's prayer for those who are their "enemies" comprises a request: *"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matt. 5:44-45). The Christian's prayer is not that their opposers will increase their opposition but that the persecution will

further develop the Christian's fruits and thus enable them to regard their opposer with pity and understanding, hence the Christian is to pray that all of their experiences will further the development of their fruits of the spirit. A further reason why the Christian's prayer is not for their oppressor to increase their opposition is because any provocation brings a temptation to err, and the Christian is to pray to not be led into temptation: "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*" (Matt. 6:13).

In view of prayer being related to requests, it is appropriate that the manner in which one should pray be addressed.

Privately

Jesus exhorted His disciples to pray privately: "*And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee*" (Matt. 6:5-6). Consequently the first aspect to be highlighted is that personal prayers are to be made in private.

Jesus practised what He preached—He prayed privately: "*And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone*" (Matt. 14:23). Consequently it is no surprise that, when His hour had come, He prayed alone: "*Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt*" (Matt. 26:36-39).

Peter also prayed in private: "*On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour*" (Acts 10:9).

Not repetitive

Jesus also told His disciples not to use "*vain repetitions*" in their prayers (Matt. 6:7). The precise meaning of "*vain repetitions*" is difficult to determine because Matthew 6:7 is the only place in the Bible where the expression occurs. Dr. Strong

states that the expression contains the thought of "not being a stutterer" (the expression is a combination of two words: #945 and #3361). One characteristic of stuttering is the repetition of a word several times without any thoughts being progressed or developed, and thus it is an apt expression for the Christian to consider and practise.

Jesus gave His disciples two reasons why there is no need to be repetitive: "*your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him*" (Matt. 6:8); and that their prayer would not be heard just because of their "*much speaking*" (Matt. 6:7).

The example of the Apostle Paul also gives some guidance regarding repetitive prayer: "*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). The fact that Paul asked three times is worthy of consideration—maybe his repeated prayer was evidence of his sincerity that he believed he could serve the Lord better if it were removed, and also to show that he acknowledged that he was subject to divine authority. However Paul made his request only three times, to which God replied: "*my grace is sufficient for thee*" (2 Cor. 12:9).

In that context it is apparent that the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the brethren at Thessalonica to "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thess. 5:17) was not an exhortation to repeat their requests often but to keep themselves in an attitude which acknowledged their dependency on God for all their sustenance: "*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 4:19).

One has suggested that repetition in prayer makes it possible to lose sight of the blessings which God has already provided: "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*" (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus used the example of people giving gifts to others—giving things which they believe will be profitable to the recipient—to teach that God provides things that are beneficial for His people, maybe not in the form which they desire, but in the form which He knows is best.

All night

In the context of not being repetitive in prayer, the fact that Jesus prayed all night needs to be

considered: *“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God”* (Luke 6:12). The duration of His prayer does not mean that He was repetitive, but rather indicates the number of issues with which He was burdened and the intimacy He enjoyed with His father: *“I and my Father are one”* (John 10:30). The unity of Father and Son is further expressed in John 14:10: *“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works”*.

The point to note is that a long prayer is not to be empty and repetitive but may be necessary to address all the issues with which the Christian is confronted: *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation”* (Greek: *krima*—decision) (Matt. 23:14). The Pharisees erred, not because of the duration of their prayer, but because their motive in making the prayer long was *“a pretence”* (an outward showing). The Christian who is one with their Lord will also have a desire to share with Him every detail of their lives, to listen to His response, and consequently will desire to spend extended periods in prayer (in private).

Content

The first element of the Model Prayer is acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty: *“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...”*. The acknowledgement of His supreme position and power brings the heart into a submissive and respectful attitude. David was an example: *“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s”* (Psa. 103:1-5). And again: *“Bless the LORD’S name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name”* (Psa. 96:2-9). The first element of a Christian’s prayer should be an acknowledgement of the status of the One to whom they are praying—*“which art in heaven, hallowed (sanctified; set apart) be thy name”* (Matt. 6:9).

Thanksgiving

Acknowledgement of His sovereignty leads to expressions of thankfulness because such

acknowledgement recognises that He is the giver of every good and perfect gift: *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). *“Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand...”* (Psa. 95:2-7).

Self examination

Prayer should cause the Christian to examine himself, and to pray for forgiveness where they have come short: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9). The confession of sins relates directly to prayer.

Prayer should not be general but specific and it is when specific instances of falling short are articulated that their significance is fully realised. A Christian grows best when they realise their short-comings—such realization strengthens their resolve to avoid the same pitfalls in the future.

Another element which the Christian can take to God in prayer is secret faults—errors and shortcomings of which they are not aware. Again the words of David provide good counsel: *“Who can understand (discern; distinguish) his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous (proud, arrogant) sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression”* (Psa. 19:12-13). The Christian is to not only make every effort to discern their errors, but to recognize that it is a difficult thing to see all of their own faults, and hence they are to pray that God will bring them to their notice—things which have escaped their self examination: *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...”* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Petitions

The Christian’s life is one of trial and sacrifice, so to pray for God to remove all trials would possibly be contrary to their eternal good. Consequently the appropriate course regarding making petition to God is that He will direct the issue and give His grace and strength so that the Christian will be able to endure whatever experiences He is permitting them to bear.

It is in that context that Jesus told His disciples: *“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”* (John 14:14). John 15:7 adds: *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”*. The Christian’s prayer must always be that God will provide those things which will best yield the fruits of righteousness: *“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God”* (Phil. 1:9-11).

Prayers for others

James 5:16 reads: *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”*. The clause *“the prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* does not mean that God’s benevolence towards a Christian is dependent

on the prayers of another—that would mean that one’s failure to pray for any particular individual would result in the individual being deprived of God’s blessing. Rather the lesson is that the church is to be one: *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one”* (John 17:20-22). The Lord knows far better than any human being what is needed for each individual’s welfare. The reason God wants Christians to pray for others is to help them understand that He wants them to be to one another what He has been to them; in love, forgiveness, and unlimited concern. He wants them to have the oneness for which Jesus prayed.

Thus it is appropriate that the Christian’s prayer concludes with the heartfelt words which Jesus uttered in His darkest hour: *“nevertheless not my will but thine be done”* (Luke 22:42).■

PAUL AND TIMOTHY

It is possible that the Apostle Paul’s second letter to Timothy was the last one he wrote; it is certainly the last letter recorded.

At the time of writing he knew that death was imminent. His whole life since his miraculous conversion had been given to preaching the gospel. He had faced death many times: beaten with the lash and with rods, stoned until he was reckoned dead (Acts 14:19), ship-wrecked and persecuted by several methods by merciless enemies (2 Cor. 11:24-27). He had been delivered repeatedly by Divine intervention (2 Tim. 3:11), but now he knew he was not going to be delivered any more; not that the very moment of death had come when he wrote, but it was growing nearer. The time of his departure from the present life was at hand (2 Tim. 4:6). There was no more a realization that his life would be preserved for future service as he had earlier expressed to the Philippian brethren (Phil. 1:24-25). The present services were the last he would be privileged to minister in the flesh. He was not resisting; he would bind the sacrifice to the altar to the very last for the God who had shown him the light (Psa. 118:27).

He had fought a good fight (2 Tim. 4:7), and what a fight it had been—against many such as Alexander the coppersmith who had done him *“much evil”* (2 Tim. 4:14). The great archenemy had been the Devil himself. He had met the apostle at every turn with

the ferocity of a roaring lion. But the apostle never flinched, he submitted himself to God fully, and resisted the Devil till he cowered from the scene as James also exhorted the brethren: *“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7).

Christ had been Paul’s strength, and Paul had learned how he could do all things through Him (Phil. 4:13). He had finished his course; none of these things had caused him to abandon the ministry he had received from the Lord Jesus; bonds and affliction had been largely his lot, but he saw them as only momentary and he was finishing his course with joy (2 Cor. 4:17; Acts 20:24) (The concept of “course” embraces not only the thought of a race but also of “a career, a training course for an occupation”—Vines Dictionary.)

The “course” had been demanding. He started from a position of chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) and he was reminded time and again within himself of his shortcomings. That for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus was hard of attainment, but he did not allow himself to become discouraged; he had pressed on toward the mark for the prize that was offered to him (Phil. 3:12-14). Now the course of training was complete, he had “graduated” and he could look forward to the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, would give him in due time.■

THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN

Genesis 1:7 reads: “*Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so*”. God separated the water in earth’s environment into two realms; one above the firmament and one below the firmament (the firmament is the “visible arch of the sky”—Strong’s Concordance #7549). However there is no mention of clouds in the account of creation.

Clouds are the visible evidence of water in the atmosphere, and are the source of rain. Consistent with the absence of clouds there was no rain at that time, the earth was watered by a mist which went up from the ground: “*This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground*” (Gen. 2:4-6 NKJV).

Clouds and rain

The first mention of rain occurs in the account of the flood of Noah’s day: “*And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights...*” (Gen. 7:10-12).

The first mention of clouds is shortly after the flood; after it had rained: “*I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud*” (Gen. 9:13-14).

The presence of clouds does not necessarily mean it is going to rain. In response to one of Bildad’s taunts Job answered: “*He (God) binds up the water in His thick clouds, Yet the clouds are not broken under it*” (Job 26:8). The thrust of Job’s reply was to defend God’s supremacy, and the example of the clouds binding up water was a powerful argument—God can bind up the water in the clouds (that is, withhold rain), and the example of the huge weight of water which the clouds can withhold (several million tonnes), the existence of clouds without rain falling is a graphic example of God’s power.

Formation of clouds

Clouds and their associated phenomena may be spectacular—the miracle of the rainbow intrigues many people, old and young alike. Especially in the tropics the formation of clouds can be spectacular, and God has used the formation of clouds, as well their existence, as a sign to His people.

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* describes the weather patterns in Palestine, an understanding of which enhances the significance of the references to clouds in the Scriptures: “*The weather in Palestine is more even and has less variety than that in other lands. It is a long, narrow country with sea on the West and desert on the East. The wind coming from the West is always moist and brings clouds with it. If the temperature over the land is low enough the clouds will be condensed and rain will fall, but if the temperature is high, as in the five months of summer, there can be no rain even though clouds are seen. As a whole the winter is cloudy and the summer clear...The clouds are depicted in two distinct ways: in the autumn rain storms often arise suddenly from the sea, and what seems to be a mere haze, “as small as a man’s hand”, (such as Gehazi saw—2 Kings 4:12; 1 Kings 18:44) over the sea, within a few hours becomes the black storm cloud pouring down torrents of rain (1 Kings 18:45). Fog is almost unknown and there is very seldom an overcast, gloomy day. The west and southwest winds bring rain (Luke 12:54). In the months of April, May and September a hot east wind sometimes rises from the desert and brings with it a cloud of dust which fills the air and penetrates everything. In the summer afternoons, especially in the month of August, on the seacoast there is apt to blow up from the south a considerable number of low cirrostratus clouds which seem to fill the air with dampness, making more oppressive the dead heat of summer. These are doubtless the detested “clouds without water” mentioned in Jude verse 12, and “heat by the shade of a cloud” (Isa. 25:5)*”.

God used the formation of the little cloud over the sea to inform Elijah when to send his servant Gehazi to Ahab. God’s use of the cloud indicates that Elijah was aware of the formation of the cloud and that God would use the cloud to tell him when to send Gehazi. The significance of the cloud is emphasised by the fact that it did not form until Gehazi’s seventh visit.

God’s domain

Clouds are used in some visions to refer to God’s dwelling place: “*He lays the beams of His upper*

chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind, He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works” (Psalm 104:3, 13). In similar vein the prophet Nahum wrote: “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked. The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, And dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, And the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. (Nahum 1:3-5).

The Psalmist also referred to the clouds to establish God’s status as ruler of the universe: *“Who (God) covers the heavens with clouds, Who prepares rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains” (Psalm 147:8). And again: “Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places. He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures” (Psalm 135:6-7).*

Job also marvelled how the clouds manifest God’s **manifold power**: *“By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen. Also with moisture He saturates the thick clouds; He scatters His bright clouds. And they swirl about, being turned by His guidance, that they may do whatever He commands them on the face of the whole earth” (Job 37:10-12).*

Man’s inferiority

Clouds are also used to show the limited knowledge and power of Man. Job 38:37 reads: *“Who can number the clouds by wisdom?”*. Such was Job’s admiration of God’s power as exemplified in the clouds that he also wrote: *“Indeed, can anyone understand the spreading of clouds...” (Job 36:29); and, “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, That an abundance of water may cover you?” (Job 38:34).* The implication is that no man can do any of those things—they are exclusively God’s domain.

Even the marvellous scientific developments during the last 100 years do not enable scientists to control the clouds. Several years ago spreading silver iodide and dry ice in clouds (“cloud seeding”) was carried out in the hope of producing rain and thereby overcoming the devastating effects of drought. However God remains the One who sends rain, both on *“the just and the unjust” (Matt. 5:45).*

Transient clouds

The difference in temperature between day and night

in Palestine results in some clouds existing for only a short time. The clouds formed by breezes from the Mediterranean Sea are often completely evaporated shortly after they reach land. This natural phenomenon, together with the morning dew which also quickly evaporates in the morning sun, is used by Hosea as an illustration of the transitory state of the faith of Ephraim and Judea: *“...your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away” (Hosea 6:4).* Job also referred to the transitory nature of some clouds to say that his prosperity was *“...like that of a passing cloud”*. (Job 30:15).

Presence of God

Clouds have indicated God’s presence. During the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt *“...the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people” (Exodus 13:21-22).*

The cloud also assured the Israelites that God was with them and was protecting them when they were assailed by the Egyptians: *“So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night” (Exodus 14:20).*

A cloud was also used in the tabernacle to indicate God’s presence: *“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle... Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:34-38).*

False teachers

The Apostle Peter uses the fact that not all clouds yield life-giving rain to describe false teachers: *“...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them...These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (2 Pet.: 2:1, 17).* Similarly Jude refers to dust clouds: *“These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots” (Jude 12).* In both texts water is used to represent the gospel (John 4:14).

Clouds in Prophecy

Clouds occur in many of the visions and prophecies recorded in the Bible. One such vision is recorded in Ezekiel 1:1-4: “...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest...Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire”. The cloud pictured in Ezekiel’s vision was not a cloud of water (because it was engulfed by fire) but maybe a cloud of dust or a “fireball”.

Clouds also are part of Daniel’s vision of the time of the end: “I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14). The statement that the clouds were “of heaven” implies they were of Divine origin.

Jesus also used clouds in His explanation of the events at the end of the age: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken... Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:29-30). In this description clouds are both an instrument to obscure the sun and a sign of His return.

The concept of Christ returning in the clouds of heaven reflect the message of the angel at His ascension: “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9-11).

Revelation 14:14-16 also uses the symbolism of clouds to describe His return: “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel

came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped”.

Clouds are also used to describe the resurrection of the saints: “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Interpretation in prophecy

In view of the various ways in which clouds are used in the Scriptures, the meaning to be attached to their use in any prophecy might be difficult to determine. For example, the statement in Revelation 14 that He sat on the clouds may be interpreted to mean that He will not be visible to those on earth—those “below”. Some justification for that interpretation may be derived from Psalm 18:9-14: “He bowed the heavens also, and came down. With darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. **He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him was dark waters. And thick clouds of the skies.** From the brightness before Him, His **thick clouds** passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice, Hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them”. However, in these verse in Psalms, the clouds may be interpreted as the source of hailstones.

Clouds are also used to symbolise turmoil: “For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near; It will be **a day of clouds**, the time of the Gentiles” (Ezekiel 30:3). The prophet Zephaniah also uses clouds to portray turmoil: “The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, **a day of clouds and thick darkness**, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. ‘I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.’ Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath...” (Zeph. 1:14-18).

Summary

Clouds are used to convey several different concepts and the lesson to be derived from any instance must take into account the context of the occurrence.■

LOVE ENDURES ALL THINGS

Endurance is one of the sixteen characteristics of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13: “*love endures all things*” (1 Cor. 13:7). Several aspects of endurance warrant consideration.

Source

The Christian is to endure all things, regardless of the source of the affliction—whether it be family, friends, the world or brethren. Jesus told His disciples: “*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake... brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matt. 10:16-22). Jesus told His disciples that testing would come from various sources and they would require wisdom to endure (withstand) it.

Not for one's own faults

The challenge for the Christian is to endure everything **for His sake** and not because of any misdemeanour by the Christian. The Apostle Peter distinguishes the two: “*For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps*” (1 Peter 2:19-21). Even though he was addressing women in particular, it was in similar vein that Paul wrote to Titus that their conduct was to be such “*that the word of God be not blasphemed*” (Titus 2:5).

Opposition is easier to endure when it is remembered that it is a “natural consequence of the truth”: “*For I have come to set a man against his father...a man's enemies shall be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matt. 10:35-37). The reason for the antagonism is that the Christian is walking in the light whereas the world is in darkness (Eph. 5:8), and men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

Duration

Severe affliction may be tolerated if it is of short duration, however the requirement for the Christian is

to sustain their love “*until the end*”. The Christian's love is not to wane because the trial continues for a prolonged period. The zeal of their first love must be sustained: “*But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions*” (Heb. 10:32).

Jesus repeated the need to endure to the end when He told His disciples about the signs of His return: “*Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted... and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*” (Matt. 24:9-13). Perhaps there is a special lesson for those living at the time of His return.

Love for brethren

Another aspect of a Christian's endurance is forbearing for the sake of their brethren. Paul told Timothy: “*...I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds... I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tim. 2:9-10). Paul endured, even to the point of suffering “*as an evil doer*”, so that others would be victorious. His endurance exemplified the primary concept of endurance—“staying under” (Strong #5278)—that is, he suppressed his own preferences and suffered wrongfully so that they would not be discouraged by his affliction. Such an action exemplifies love enduring all things.

The hope of reigning

There is a reward for those who endure: “*If we suffer we shall also reign with him...*” (2 Tim. 2:12). In this verse “suffer” (Strong #5278) means “to endure”, and thus the lesson is that it is to those who endure to the end—those who suffer for the Lord and for their brethren, but not for themselves—that the promise of reigning with Him is held out: “*to live and reign with Him for a thousand years*”. (Rev. 20:4).■

PEOPLES PAPER

AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

ABN 23 734 654 922

Reg. No, 0022186J

Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.

P.O. Box 402 Rosanna, Victoria, Australia, 3084

Email: FREE.Bereanbibleinstitute@gmail.com

Internet: www.bbi.org.au

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