

Volume 94 No. 1

AUSTRALIA

January—March 2011

WAITING WITH PATIENCE

And so it is that the year A.D. 2011 has arrived, with seemingly little change from the beginning of A.D. 2010: the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue; the tension between the Palestinians and Israel (particularly over the Gaza strip and the West Bank) remains; many Western countries continue to struggle to recover from the Global Financial Crisis; “natural disasters” such as cyclones, tsunamis and earthquakes continue to occur; the people of the Western countries continue to indulge themselves in pleasures such as travel and unnecessary material goods while millions in the undeveloped countries starve; children are born and people continue to die in all parts of the world; the religions of the world continue to be powerless to change the situation and the Islamic faith continues to expand. When viewed from a human standpoint one may logically conclude that there is little purpose to it all, and so the beginning of a new year is an appropriate time to ponder the current world situation, the developments which might occur during 2011 and Man’s eternal destiny.

The current situation

A broad scale assessment of the events of the world is not new—many centuries ago Solomon observed the seemingly purposeless repetition of the natural phenomena of his world: *“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh... The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing*

under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after. 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. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Ecclesiastes 1:1-14).

Solomon used the word “vanity” to describe the seemingly purposeless events of his day—the succession of generations, one following another; the sun rising in the east, moving across the sky until it disappeared in the west, only to return to the east the next morning; the rivers continuing to flow into the sea but the sea was not filled, and so on.

Solomon stated that there was nothing new under the sun. That statement might be challenged today because there have been several inventions in recent times which did not exist in previous generations. Many of the recent inventions are based on

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electronics and computers: the internet, “mobile” (“cell”) phones, satellite navigation systems, robots and automation of industrial processes. Other fields where there have been significant technological changes include agriculture (fertilizers, genetically modified plants, insecticides and fungicides), medicine (bionic ears, “key hole” surgery, organ transplants, artificial limbs, anaesthetics), space probes and advances in intercontinental travel.

However while these devices are new to Man, the bases from which they have been developed have existed since creation, as Solomon declared: “*it hath been already of old time, which was before us*”—their development at this time is due to God revealing to mankind the knowledge of His creation which in turn has enabled mankind to develop them. Such revelation is in stark contrast to the time when Daniel received visions from God: “*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*” (Daniel 12:4). The direction to Daniel to “*shut up the words and seal the book*” implies that the means by which the present day developments are derived were present in Daniel’s day, but it was not God’s time to reveal them to mankind—to enable Man to “invent” the modern day phenomena. The difference between Daniel’s time and 2011 A.D. is that God has now opened “the book” and given mankind some insight into more of the mysteries and secrets of His creation.

Vanity

Solomon called the activities of his day “vanity”. Strong’s Concordance defines “vanity” as “emptiness, transitory and unsatisfactory” (#1892), which is an apt description of the repetitive nature of events on the earth, including all the events which have transpired between creation and 2011 A.D. For some individuals, life has seemed so lacking in purpose that they have concluded there is no purpose in living, and rather than continue the struggle to survive, they have voluntarily ended their lives.

In order to find some purpose in life it is necessary to consider the rest of Solomon’s conclusion—that God has given this “*sore travail to the sons of man to be exercised therewith*”.

Strong’s Concordance states that the Hebrew word translated “*exercised*” (#6031) has wide application and includes the concepts of “looking down or browbeating; depressing”, in either a literal or figurative sense. In the King James Version the same word is translated by several different English words, including “afflict” (Genesis 15:13; 31:50; Exodus

1:11-12; 1 Kings 11:39) and “humble” (Exodus 10:3; Deuteronomy 8:2, 3, 16; 26:6). The concepts of “afflict” and “humble” are closely related—affliction often leads to humility. Thus Solomon concluded that God’s purpose in subjecting mankind to the presently seemingly vain experience is to afflict them so that they are humbled.

However, unless God has planned some period of prosperity and longevity to follow the present time of vanity, it is inconsistent to consider God as a God of love. If there is no enduring benefit it would be totally improper for a “God of love” to inflict such agony on His creation, particularly in view of the fact that many are “good people”.

Consequently, in order to understand God’s purpose in subjecting mankind to the present “*sore travail*”, it is necessary to know something of His plan for mankind’s eternal destiny.

Man’s eternal destiny

God’s plan for mankind centres around His plan to establish His kingdom on earth, as Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven***” (Matt. 6:9-10). The significance of that prayer must be fully appreciated—God’s will is to be done **in earth** as it is done in heaven.

A common understanding of “heaven” is that it is a paradise of righteousness—and rightly so because God’s throne is in heaven: “*The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’S throne is in heaven...*” (Psalm 11:4). Thus the Psalmist also wrote: “*Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven*” (Psalm 85:11).

Consequently when God’s will is done in earth as it is done in heaven, righteousness and peace will exist on the earth, as the Psalmist declared: “*The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof... The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods. Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD. For thou, LORD, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods*” (Psalm 97:1-9).

The Apostle Peter confirmed that God’s righteous kingdom will be established on earth: “*Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*” (2 Peter 3:13).

Promises of the kingdom

Peter stated that God has promised a new earth *"wherein dwelleth righteousness"*. Many of the verses which give the details of the kingdom are contained in the Old Testament, with only general references being made in the New Testament. One example of a New Testament reference is 1 Corinthians 15:24-26: *"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death"*. The Apostle Paul refers to the kingdom without giving any details, other than to imply that it will *"put down all rule and all authority and power"*. The Apostle assumed that the Christians at Corinth were familiar with the details recorded in the Old Testament and there was no need for him to repeat them.

Jesus implied that His disciples would know when the establishment of the kingdom was nigh: *"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh"* (Luke 21:28).

The kingdom hope of Israel

The hope of the kingdom being restored to Israel was in the forefront of Jesus' disciples minds, particularly at the time of His return to heaven after His resurrection: *"To whom also he shewed 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: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost 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. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight"* (Acts 1:3-9).

The above verses in Acts 1 contain four significant statements:

- after His resurrection Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God. His preaching gives added assurance that the concept of a righteous kingdom

being established on earth was not a whim which was forgotten when He was crucified;

- Jesus did not deny that the kingdom would be restored to Israel;
- that it was not for Jesus' disciples to know the time when the kingdom would be restored (which time the Father had put in his own power); and
- the disciples would receive the Holy Spirit and be witnesses for an undefined period.

When?

His disciples' request to know when the kingdom would be established was reasonable—the hope of the kingdom was of long standing, being the principal element of Jesus' preaching from the very beginning of His ministry: *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17).

Some have suggested that while it was not for His disciples to know the time, that was because they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and that subsequently the spirit would reveal the time to them and to all believers. Such an understanding has led many to predict precise dates for the establishment of the kingdom, some dates being 1874, 1881, 1914, 1917, 1919, 1929, 1948, 1967, 1984, 2032, and 2044.

The passing of several of those dates without the proponents' hopes being realised has caused many to lose faith that the kingdom will ever be established. However the Christian should not be discouraged by the fact that some of those dates have passed and yet wars, sickness and death continue. In fact such a loss of faith in the hope of the kingdom was foretold by both Jesus and the Apostle Peter: *"I tell you... when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8), and, *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Peter 3:3-4). Hence, in spite of the fact that Jesus' coming to earth was more than 2000 years ago, such scoffing should not cause the Christian to abandon their hope of God's righteous kingdom being established on earth.

Though it tarry

On the contrary the Christian can be doubly confident that the kingdom would be established, in spite of the seeming delay, because the prophet Habakkuk foretold that there would be a seeming delay: *"And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though*

it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

The two words "tarry" in verse 3 have different Hebrew origins:

- the first occurrence is a derivative from the Hebrew **māhahh** (#4102) which Dr Strong defines as "to *question* or hesitate, that is, (by implication) to *be reluctant*". It is variously translated as "delay", "linger", "stay selves", and "tarry";
- The second occurrence of "tarry" is from the Hebrew **'āchar** (#309) which Dr Strong defines as "a primitive root; to *loiter* (that is, *be behind*); by implication to *procrastinate*"; variously translated as "continue", "defer", "delay", "hinder", "be late (slack)", "stay (there)", and "tarry (longer)".

Thus the prophet Habakkuk is saying that the vision is for an appointed time (a fixed time in God's plan) and, though it seems to tarry or hesitate, it will not loiter or languish—that is, it will not delay beyond God's "appointed time". The kingdom will be established precisely when God has planned it, even though it might seem to be tarrying or loitering—it is now 136 years since 1874, 96 years since 1914 and the outbreak of World War 1, and 62 years since 1948 when the nation of present day Israel was established.

Waiting with patience

The current situation is concisely summed up by the Apostle Paul: *"For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. 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"* (Romans 8:20-25).

In summary the points the Apostle makes are:

- God deliberately subjected the creature (creation) to the present "vanity", not willingly (that is, not because He takes delight in their suffering) but nevertheless He has a reason for doing so;
- It was subjected in hope, that is, the benefits of the subjection were not immediately apparent, and indeed are still "unseen" by the majority of mankind;
- The creation will be delivered from the "bondage

of corruption" in which they "groan";

- The test for the Christian is to continue to trust in the promises of God while they wait patiently for their deliverance ("waiting" implies the observer believes everything is ready but the event has not yet occurred).

The promise is assured

In the texts quoted above both the prophet Habakkuk and the Apostle Paul imply that Christians would be conscious of a waiting period. Christians today, in A.D. 2011, may be assured that their hope is not fanciful but assured: *"And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end...which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast..."* (Heb. 6:11, 19), in *"full assurance of faith"* (Heb. 10:22).

And so as Christians today wait for the establishment of the kingdom they must not waver—not be *"tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men..."* (Eph 4:14)—but fully realise that they have *"a more sure word of prophecy...a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts"* (2 Peter 1:19).■

HOPE IN ISRAEL TODAY

On December 1, 2010, *Arutz Sheva*, an arm of Israel National News, reported that a recent survey of 2327 Israelis showed that 29.5% believe the temple will be rebuilt in 2011; 43.8% believe it will be rebuilt during the next decade and 26.5% believe it will be rebuilt within the next 20 years (<http://www.Israelnationalnews.com/more/Poll.aspx/124#>).

And so, even after millennia of desolation, only 2 in every 1000 Israelis do not believe the temple will be rebuilt.

However on the other hand, on December 6, 2010, *The Associated Press* reported that Argentina has announced it recognizes a Palestinian state, calling Palestine "a free and independent state within its 1967 borders"—Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told AFP: "This regrettable decision will not help at all to change the situation between Israel and the Palestinians".

Argentina's announcement came only a few days after Brazil "recognized Palestine" and expressed the hope that Israel and Palestine "will co-exist peacefully and in security". Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay also have announced they will recognize a Palestinian Authority (PA) state next year, according to *Agence France Presse*.■

GOD AND THREE KINGS

“Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his... he removeth kings, and setteth up kings...” (Daniel 2:20-21).

Midst the turmoil of the present world scene the question may justifiably be asked whether there is a God and, if so, what is He doing to bring about the kingdom of righteousness promised so many times in the Bible?—it is 2000 years since Jesus (declared to be the Saviour of the world—John 4:42) came to earth the first time: for how much longer will mankind have to wait?

The “seemingly obvious” alternative answers to the question are that there is no God, or if there is a God, that the world is currently out of (beyond) His control, that is, the nations are a law unto themselves and are doing as they please.

Consequently it is profitable for Christians to remind themselves that Jehovah God is pre-eminent, that is, He is above all—He is the One who has been “*from everlasting*” and will be “*to everlasting*” (Psa. 90:2); He is the all powerful One, the Lord God Omnipotent (Rev. 19:6). As the prophet Isaiah wrote: “*‘To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?’ saith the Holy One*” (Isa. 40:25).

There are several events recorded in the Old Testament which show that, in accordance with Daniel 2:20-21 (quoted above), God has directly set up kings and removed kings. In other words, God has directly controlled their actions and the outcome of their exploits, **even though the exercise of His power was not apparent to them.** In every instance, God was effecting a purpose which was beyond their comprehension. The possibility remains that He is doing the same thing today.

Three kings whom God directly controlled were Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus.

Pharaoh

Moses was commissioned by God to approach Pharaoh and ask him to release the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Since Moses was carrying out God’s command the natural mind would expect Pharaoh to agree to the Israelites’ release. However God had a greater purpose, and He told Moses **in advance** what He was going to do: “*And the LORD said unto Moses, ‘When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go’*” (Exod. 4:21). Pharaoh reacted exactly as God had told Moses: “*And afterward Moses and Aaron*

went in, and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go...’. And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go’” (Exod. 5:1-2).

There were subsequent occasions also during the days before Israel’s exodus from Egypt when God hardened Pharaoh’s heart: “*... And he hardened Pharaoh’s heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said*” (Exod. 7:10-13).

Since the nation of Israel was God’s chosen people (Deut. 7:6), it might be surprising that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he did not release the Israelites. However Exodus 9:12-16 records God’s purpose for hardening Pharaoh’s heart: “*And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken unto Moses. 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. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth’*”.

The Apostle Paul understood the significance of God’s action in hardening Pharaoh’s heart, so much so that he cites it in his letter to the Romans: “*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, ‘Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth’*”. Therefore ... **whom he will he hardeneth**” (Romans 9:17-18). Paul explains that God directed Pharaoh’s affairs **for the purpose of showing His power**, and he then used that event to explain God’s mercy and that His selection of individuals is not unrighteous (Romans 9:14).

One argument which might be proposed by the natural mind to deny God’s direct involvement with Pharaoh is that Pharaoh’s “natural disposition” was to be a ruthless despot. However the only verses which suggest that Pharaoh hardened his own heart are Exodus 8:15 and 9:34: “*But when Pharaoh saw that*

there was respite, **he hardened his heart**, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said”, and “... when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, **he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart**, he and his servants”. It may be contended that those two verses contradict Exodus 4:21, 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 10:27, 11:10 and 14:8, all of which state that it was the Lord who hardened Pharaoh’s heart. However, when viewed in their context, it is apparent that Exodus 8:15 and 9:34 simply record **the effect** of God’s control over Pharaoh and **not the cause** of Pharaoh’s actions—Pharaoh acted precisely as God directed and so he fulfilled God’s purpose. The Bible is harmonious.

It might be difficult to believe that God, the creator of the universe (Isa. 42:5), would harden Pharaoh’s heart just to show His power. However that is the plain statement of Scripture.

Nebuchadnezzar

Nebuchadnezzar was another king over whom God exercised control. The record is in 2 Kings 24 and 25, 1 Chronicles 6, Ezra 5, Jeremiah 27 and Daniel chapters 1 to 5.

2 Kings 24:1 identifies Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon, and verses 7 and 10 outline the boundaries of the land he conquered. Those verses may also be interpreted to mean that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the land, including Jerusalem, by his own power: “*And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken, from the brook of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt...*”. However 1 Chronicles 6:15, Ezra 5:12 and Jeremiah 27:4-6 state that Nebuchadnezzar was merely “*the Lord’s hand*”—it was God who captured the land: “*And Jehozadak went into captivity, when **the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar***” (1 Chron. 6:15); “*But after that our fathers had provoked **the God of heaven** unto wrath, **he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...** who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into **Babylon***” (Ezra 5:12); and “... Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel... ‘I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the face of the earth, by my great power and by my outstretched arm; and I give it unto whom it seemeth right unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant...’” (Jer. 27:4-6).

Seventy years

Just as God “used” Nebuchadnezzar to take Israel captive to Babylon, so He proclaimed before they were captured that their captivity would last 70 years:

“The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah... which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying... ‘Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north’, saith the LORD, ‘and I will send unto Nebuchadnezzar **the king of Babylon, my servant...** and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon **seventy years...**’” (Jer. 25:1-11). Thus is evident God’s direct hand in the affairs of Israel and in the power that the kings of Babylon were allowed to exercise over them.

Cyrus

Ezra 1:1-2 records the events which preceded the Israelites’ return to their land: “*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, **that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, ‘Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, ‘All the kingdoms of the earth **hath the LORD, the God of heaven, given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.** Whosoever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD, the God of Israel, (he is God,) which is in Jerusalem’***”. Thus God directly influenced Cyrus—He “stirred” him up—so that Cyrus would accomplish God’s purpose of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.

It might seem that God has expended an excessive amount of time dealing with a few individuals to achieve ‘very little’; in other words, in today’s language, His operations have been “inefficient”. However the events illustrate how detailed are God’s dealings with His human creation. God’s dealings were summed up by Nebuchadnezzar after he had been humbled and forced to eat grass for seven years: “*And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and **he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth:** and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, ‘What doest thou?’... Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all his works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase*” (Dan. 4:34-37). God did not leave anything to chance and Nebuchadnezzar now realised how intimately God had dealt with him.

New Testament times

God's dealings with Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus are examples of Him using His power to direct the actions of men before Jesus came to earth. The question may be asked: is God still active in directing the affairs of mankind or has He ceased doing so?

The Apostle Paul declared that, in his day, God was still directing the affairs of men. He wrote: "*Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God. Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God...*" (Rom. 13:1-2). Paul's statement is emphatic: that the civil ruling powers of his day were in authority because they were "ordained of God". The concept of being "ordained of God" does not mean that God merely "permits" them—Strong's Concordance defines the word translated "ordained" (#5021) as "to arrange in an orderly manner"—a statement of positive action.

God arranged the powers in Paul's day and there is no Scriptural statement by which to conclude that God has abandoned His influence. Indeed the Scriptures are explicit that in the last days God will direct the

affairs of the nations: "*Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither*" (Jer. 31:8). Also the prophet Joel wrote: "*For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land*" (Joel 3:1-2).

The Christian should not be hasty to dismiss the possibility that, in A.D. 2010, God has been working out a higher purpose than what the worldly governments have realised—the truth recorded in Isaiah 55:8 is not limited to the era before Jesus came to earth nor is it limited to the very last days: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD*". It is conceivable that God is directing and will direct the nations of earth in 2011, even though He might not yet "*rise up to the prey*" (Zephaniah 3:8).■

SAINTHOOD

There was much excitement in religious circles in Australia in 2010 A.D. when it became known that the Pope had agreed to declare Mary McKillop a saint. She would be the first Australian to be canonized and many Australians travelled to Rome to attend the service in the forecourt of the Vatican.

Concept of sainthood

The generally accepted concept of a saint is purity of life style, as the Apostle Paul declared: "*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*" (Eph. 5:3-5).

However the saints to whom Paul referred were not associated with the Roman Catholic Church but were those in Ephesus who believed that Jesus was the Only Begotten Son of God, that He had paid the ransom sacrifice to redeem mankind from death, and who were trying to live according to His example.

Not dead but alive

Neither were they dead nor in heaven, but living on the earth, as shown by Paul's statements: "*But now I*

go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints" (Rom. 15:25); "*All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household*" (Phil. 4:22); "*unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia*" (2 Cor. 1:1).

Called to be saints

However there are two verses of Scripture which, as translated in the King James Version, might give the impression that sainthood is a future (spiritual) reward of the faithful:

- Romans 1:7: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints..."; and
- 1 Corinthians 1:2: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints...".

Even though they are retained by many more recent translations, the words "*to be*" are not in the original manuscripts—they have been inserted during translation—and give an incorrect understanding. Sainthood is not something for which the Christian has to wait until after death—Christians are saints during this life.

A further issue is that Mary McKillop is attributed with performing two miracles after she died. Scripture declares that dead people are lifeless and cannot perform any task (Acts 2:29).■

A MESSAGE TO SAINTS

The following text comprised a message sent to the brethren at a Convention in Melbourne, Australia, held over the New Year weekend 2005-2006, by a brother who had planned to be in attendance to open the Convention. It is reprinted here with the wish that it will be a blessing for all to meditate upon as we enter the year 2011.

It is indeed a privilege and pleasure to welcome you to another year's Convention of the Melbourne Berean Bible Class. We are wonderfully blessed that we can meet confidently on such occasions, and foremost that a spirit of oneness and brotherly love prevails in our midst. We note the Apostle's words in Galatians 3:28: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"*. Surely, this is the motto for all gatherings of the Lord's people—all one in Christ Jesus.

There is always room for greater love and understanding amongst brethren, as the Apostle wrote: *"There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling"* (Eph. 4:4).

In opening the 1969 Convention, the speaker remarked: "It is good to see so many smiling faces so obviously rejoicing in the Lord". There have been vast changes in our world since then affecting every aspect of life, including Christian worship in activity. Are we still 'obviously rejoicing in the Lord', as the Brother put it? If not, why not? Our study of God's word, the fellowship of His people and the experience of life under His faithful hand should surely have increased our joy and our confidence. We should certainly expect this in the company of fellow Christians as now, and as we rejoice together in the beauty of the Gospel—the Plan of God for the blessing of all mankind and the rich privilege of the present call of the church.

But does this joy and confidence show to others when we go out into the world? Despite external changes, the message of the Gospel does not change: *"Our Father is the Father of Lights with whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). *"What He has promised He is able and willing to perform; you have need of patience that after you have done the will of God you might receive the promise. For yet a little while and He will come and will not tarry"* (Hebrews 10:36, 37). We will all need faith and patient endurance in the coming year for we do not know what awaits us, but we do know that the everlasting arms of the Father undergirds each of His people.

Revelation 3:14-23 has, as well as an immediate message, a lesson for believers living at this end of the Gospel Age. First, it points out the final stage in

the development of the church, and it rings ever so true. It describes a church that has largely grown materialistic, far from God's heart and unrepentant. It depicts Christ outside the door seeking entry, largely ignored. It also issues a wonderful promise to those who still do love to hear their Master's voice. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man or woman or child hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him, and he will be with me. To him that overcometh I will grant to stand with me on my throne, even as I overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne"* (Revelation 3:21, 22). Have you heard his voice? Have you answered and let him into your heart and life? As the two on the way to Emmaus found, there is no more wondrous guest. The promise he gave his disciples nearly two thousand years ago comes down to us just as clearly today, for *"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age"*.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are richly blessed people. We have a message to delight both heart and mind, a personal message as well as a message of real faith for all people. We are still able to enjoy sweet fellowship with others of the Lord's people and to share a measure of witness to others. How thankful we should be, and assuredly are, for all our Father's mercies towards us. Above all, we have the promise and realisation of our Saviour's presence with his people and with each one individually. Now we await his special blessing upon our time together here. Let each of us co-operate by seeking in all things to build one another up in the most holy faith.

May this New Year for you and for me, for all of us, be one of closer walking with God, of more attentive listening to his voice, of more trusting in his daily care and oversight of our lives, of even more love for his words of truth; of closer fellowship of those who love and seek to serve the same Master. His service is perfect liberty. May God bless and guide, and keep us all in His love and mercy in the year ahead. Amen.■

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

THE RIVER EUPHRATES

“On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.’” (Genesis 15:18 NKJV).

The Bible contains 21 references to the River Euphrates. 19 of them refer to the physical river and two (in Revelation) are symbolic. However none of the passages contains an explicit statement of its symbolic meaning, and so reference to all of its occurrences is necessary to ascertain its symbolic meaning.

Physical characteristics

The River Euphrates is the longest river (approximately 2,780 kilometres) in Western Asia and is one of the two major rivers in Mesopotamia, the other being the Tigris River. It is formed by the union of two branches, the Kara Su (the western Euphrates) and the Murat (the eastern Euphrates), both of which rise in modern eastern Turkey. The Euphrates flows through Syria and Iraq (ancient Babylon), before merging with the Tigris River and emptying into the Persian Gulf.

The Euphrates was a major trade route and the ruins of many ancient cities mentioned in the Bible are located along its course: Babylon (2 Kings 24:7), Kish, Carchemish (2 Chron. 35:20; Jer. 46:2) and Ur of the Chaldees.

Various titles are used to refer to the Euphrates, for example “the River Euphrates” (Deut. 11:24; 2 Sam. 8:3; Jer. 46:2); “the great river, the River Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; Joshua 1:4); and “the River” (Gen. 2:14; Gen. 31:21—in the latter verse the context from verse 1 implies that the River Euphrates is meant; Gen. 36:37; 1 Kings 4:21).

The Euphrates was one of four rivers which rose as the springs of water in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:10-14). Descriptions of the courses of the other three rivers are given, but no description is given for the course of the Euphrates, with no explanation why its course is not described.

Physical significance

The Euphrates defined the northern border of the land promised to Abram: *“In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates”* (Gen. 15:18). Consequently, when the Israelites were preparing to



enter the land after their exodus from Egypt, the River Euphrates was specified as one of the borders of the land from which God would expel the heathen occupiers: *“For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which*

the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea, shall be your territory” (Deut. 11:22-24 NKJV).

The significance of the River Euphrates as one border of the promised land is further reinforced by it being mentioned as one of the boundaries of the land which King Solomon inherited: *“Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt...”* (1 Kings 4:20-21 NKJV).

Symbolic significance

As well as defining the physical border between the promised land and the lands of other nations, “Euphrates” is mentioned twice in the book of Revelation, which implies that it also has some symbolic meaning. Many scholars have researched several aspects of “the Euphrates” in an endeavour to ascertain its symbolic meaning.

Some insight into its symbolic meaning may be derived from the instances where it is mentioned in the Old Testament.

Hints from the Old Testament

As well as defining one of the physical borders of the promised land, the Israelites were told that the Euphrates defined the border between the nations who served the True God and those who “served other gods”: *“And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your*

father Abraham from the other side of **the flood**, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac... And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat. Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and **put away the gods** which your fathers served on the other side of **the flood**, and in Egypt; and **serve ye the LORD**. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of **the flood**, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;...And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel. And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem" (Joshua 24:2-25).

The reference to "*the flood*" in verses 2, 3 and 14 are not to the flood of Noah's day but are an alternative name given to the River Euphrates. Strong's Concordance defines the Hebrew translated "flood" (#5104) in those verses as "*a stream* (including the *sea*; especially the Nile, Euphrates, etc.); figuratively, *prosperity*". The word is translated "flood" 18 times, "river" 97 times and "stream" twice. In each instance where it is translated "flood" the context implies that a river is meant.

Strong's definition includes a figurative meaning and thus admits that the Euphrates may have a symbolic meaning, and it is suggested that one symbolic meaning is that it represented a dividing line between the nations who were serving the true God and those who were serving other gods—whose worship was not permitted on this side of "the river".

Jeremiah's girdle

Another symbolic meaning of Euphrates may be derived from God's action regarding Jeremiah's girdle: "*Thus saith the LORD unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water. So I got a girdle according to the*

*word of the LORD, and put it on my loins. And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, Take the girdle that thou hast got, which is upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. So I went, and hid it by Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. And it came to pass after many days, that the LORD said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there. Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and **walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle**, which is good for nothing. For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear"* (Jer. 13:1-11).

There are some similarities with God's actions regarding Jeremiah's girdle and the demarcation made by the Euphrates as the boundary between the heathen nations and the "god-worshipping" occupants of the promised land. Those on the "other side" worshipped "other gods" which the Israelites were forbidden to do. Likewise with Jeremiah's girdle, He marred the girdle to illustrate to Jeremiah that he would mar the people of Judah and Jerusalem who "**walked after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them**, (they) **shall even be as this girdle**". In both instances the river Euphrates was a common element, which may be broadly interpreted to show that the Euphrates was a dividing feature.

The day of God's vengeance

Jeremiah 46 gives another example which possibly gives some clue regarding the symbolic use of the river Euphrates. The Euphrates is to be the scene of the battle when God avenges Himself against the Gentiles: "*The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Gentiles; Against Egypt, against the army of Pharaohnecho king of Egypt, which was **by the river Euphrates** in Carchemish, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah. Order ye the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle. Harness the horses; and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, and put on the brigandines... Let not the swift flee away, nor the*

mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates. Who is this that cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? Egypt riseth up like a flood, and his waters are moved like the rivers; and he saith, I will go up, and will cover the earth; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof. Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle and bend the bow. For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates” (Jer. 46:1-10).

Just as the Euphrates was the border between God’s chosen nation and the nations who served other gods, and the venue for the decay of Jeremiah’s girdle, it is possible that it is also the site where God has a sacrifice of all those who rise against Him; represented in the above scene by Egypt, Ethiopia and Libya. In this scenario, the region of the Euphrates presents an alternative to the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:12).

The book cast into Euphrates

Yet another event recorded in the Old Testament which may give some symbolic meaning to the river Euphrates is that it was to be the destiny of the book in which Jeremiah recorded Babylon’s evil: *“The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah into Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And this Seraiah was a quiet prince. So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come upon Babylon, even all these words that are written against Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When thou comest to Babylon, and shalt see, and shalt read all these words; Then shalt thou say, O LORD, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever. And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates: And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah” (Jer. 51:59-64).*

Seraiah was to cast the book which recorded all the evil that Babylon had done, bound to a stone, into the Euphrates; the book would sink into the waters of the Euphrates. The Euphrates may be interpreted to symbolise the destiny of the evil of Babylon—again

the Euphrates is associated with the destruction or demise of evil, and thus all three incidents Euphrates distinguishes righteousness and God worship from unrighteousness and the worship of idols—it was the dividing line between God’s chosen land and the Gentile nations; the scene of the final destruction of evil by God’s hand (as recorded in Jer. 46), and the destiny of the evil of Babylon (Jer. 51).

Historical significance

Another approach in an endeavour to ascertain the correct symbolism to be applied to the Euphrates is to consider its historical significance.

Due to its commercial prominence in times past, such observations may lead to the interpretation that the Euphrates symbolises the nations and the commerce between them—in that context it is important to note that the city of Babylon, the very capital of the Babylonian empire, was situated on the Euphrates.

Euphrates in Revelation

The first occurrence of Euphrates in the book of Revelation is in chapter 9: *“saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (Rev. 9:14 NKJV).* Strong’s Concordance simply defines the word “Euphrates” in Revelation 9:14 as “Euphrates, a river in Asia”.

The second occurrence in the book of Revelation is in chapter 16: *“Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (Rev. 16:12 NKJV).*

Any understanding of these two verses requires a symbolic meaning to be attached to the river Euphrates.

Regarding Revelation 16:12, the significance of the drying up of the Euphrates and the consequent preparation of the kings of the east might relate to the fact that ancient Babylon straddled the river Euphrates, a wall surrounded the city and the river Euphrates ran through the middle, entering and exiting through two spiked gates. When the Euphrates was dry, armies could access the centre of the city by passing under the gates, and history records that Babylon was destroyed in Daniel’s time by the drying up of the Euphrates which allowed Darius to take the city.

Whatever might have been its significance in times past, the river Euphrates might yet hold some secrets regarding God’s hand in the affairs of the nations and the establishment of His kingdom.■

LOVE NEVER FAILS

The last characteristic of love listed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 is “*Love never fails*” (verse 8).

There are at least two aspects of the unfailing nature of love: one relates to love standing alone, and the other relates to the context of verse 8.

Love standing alone

Perfect love would always fulfil the attributes listed in the preceding verses in 1 Corinthians 13—it would never complain about any injustice meted out to it by another, it would never be provoked, it would never envy, and so on. Any failure to act contrary to those attributes means that one’s love is less than perfect.

In keeping with the concept of never failing to act aright, the definition of “fail” in Strong’s Concordance includes not being “driven out of its course”. That means love does not swerve right or left but remains “on course” at all times, in every circumstance, always acting in accord with the qualities listed in 1 Corinthians 13.

Such consistency can only be achieved if there is no relaxation from the exercise of love—love cannot “take a holiday”; there can never be an excuse for not acting completely in accord with the qualities listed.

Such consistency requires diligence—a continuous vigilance to ensure one never reacts in a way which is contrary to the qualities of love. The Apostle Peter wrote: “*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, **be diligent** that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless...*” (2 Peter 3:14); diligence (continuous vigilance) is required.

One situation in particular which requires diligence is when one receives criticism. Peter summarised Jesus’ reaction in such circumstances: “*Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*” (1 Peter 2:23). It was Jesus’ compassion (Matt. 9:36) that enabled Him to view His accusers with love and pity: “*Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...*” (Luke 23:34). It is incumbent on all Christians to develop the same level of love.

Love in context

Another aspect of “love never failing” is implied by the context of verse 8: “*whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away*”.

The sense in which prophecy will fail is not that God’s promises will not be fulfilled. On the contrary, the word of God is sure: “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy...*” (2 Peter 1:19-20). For example, the prophecy that Jesus would come to earth (Isa. 7:14) was given centuries before Paul wrote to the Corinthians. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians the prophecy had not failed but had been fulfilled, and in that sense it was no longer a prophecy.

Likewise “tongues” have a “limited life”: “*Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not...*” (1 Cor. 14:22). When the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9) there will not be any need for tongues because all will believe. Tongues (and particularly the miraculous gift of tongues) will cease—there will not be any need for them.

Likewise there will not be any need for anyone to have more knowledge than anyone else because “*all will know Me from the least to the greatest*” (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11). Consequently, in that sense, knowledge also will “fail”.

Likewise all of the other gifts will become redundant. However the exercise of love will never fail—it will never become redundant. Love will permeate the earth in all the ages to come—“*nation will not lift up sword against nation*” (Isa. 2:4); “*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).

Thus the challenge for the Christian of not allowing love to fail in their present life is pre-emptive to the situation which will exist on the earth when God’s kingdom is established. How truly James 1:18 expresses the truth of the matter: “*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*”—the development in the present life of a love that never fails is one aspect of being a firstfruit unto God.■

PEOPLES PAPER

AND HERALD OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM

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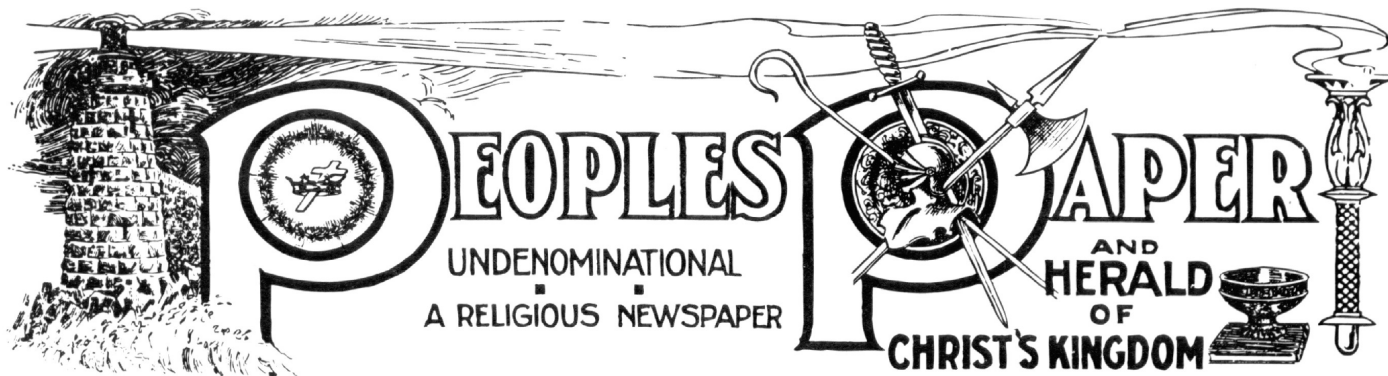
Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.

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

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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 94 No. 2

AUSTRALIA

April—June 2011

JESUS THE NAZARENE

The final days of Jesus' life on earth were indeed a severe test of His faithfulness and commitment to His Heavenly Father. They included physical, mental and emotional anguish, yet He overcame them all. He endured to the end and died a cruel death on the cross. He accomplished His Father's purpose; He fulfilled His ministry. What a Saviour!

Jesus maintained a close relationship with His disciples and in His final hours His love for the human creation was also manifest. In His most trying moment on the cross He asked one of His disciples to care for His mother: *"When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home"* (John 19:26-27). In spite of the agony He was suffering, He had consideration and sympathy for His mother.

Times and Scenes

The four Gospels give detailed accounts of the final week of His life on earth. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each portray a slightly different aspect of the events and when taken together they provide a comprehensive account of the suffering He endured and the sacrifice He made.

Fundamental to understanding the trials of His last days is the realisation that it was the Jewish Passover time. The Passover was a traditional memorial to the great saving power of Jehovah, specifically for the release of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Many Jews travelled from far away countries to congregate in Jerusalem, to offer praise to God and to purify themselves. The Chief Priests and Pharisees were looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus because they were concerned that He, and his followers, might convert many people to believe in Him and thereby destroy their authority.

Nevertheless a few days before His crucifixion Jesus arrived triumphantly in Jerusalem: *"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they*

heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, 'Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord'" (John 12:12-13). *"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Tell ye the daughter of Sion, fear not, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass'"* (Matt. 21:4-5). Jesus riding on an ass is significant—Smith's Bible Dictionary comments: "The most noble and honourable amongst the Jews were wont to be mounted on asses. In the East this animal is especially remarkable for its patience, gentleness, intelligence, meek submission and great power of endurance. The ass was the animal of peace, as the horse was the animal of war". Consequently, from a human standpoint, this greeting by the people might have increased Jesus' strength and enabled Him to endure the suffering He knew awaited Him.

Another event which transpired during Jesus' last days before His crucifixion included casting the money changers out of the temple: *"And Jesus went into the temple and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold*

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doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, 'Is it not written, My house shall be called of all the nations the house of prayer? But ye have made it a den of thieves'" (Mark 11:15-17).

During His last days He also healed people in the temple: "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became indignant" (Matt. 21:14-15).

Jesus knew that the religious authorities had plotted to kill him. Each time He conversed with them He demonstrated a level of understanding superior to theirs: "Tell us then, what do you think? Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, 'Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the poll tax'. And they brought him a denarius. And He said to them, 'Who's likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him 'Caesar's'. Then He said to them: 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's'. And hearing this they were amazed and leaving Him, they went away" (Matt. 22:17-22).

Jesus was forthright in declaring their hypocrisy. He told them that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. However, in spite of the majority not accepting Him, some of them believed Him: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43).

There were many other incidents during Jesus' life on earth which portray His commitment to God and exemplify His love for mankind, with perhaps His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane being the climax. There He prayed that God would glorify Him with the glory He had with His Father before the world was created (John 17:5)—He prayed for nothing more; no reward for His ministry of sacrifice other than to be reunited with His Father in heaven: the hour had come for Him to depart from the earth (John 17:13). He prayed for His disciples and for all his followers—those who would "believe on Him through their word" (John 17:20). He had completed the mission for which His Father had sent Him.

Jesus and His Disciples

During His last week on earth, Jesus continued the activities He had practised during His life: He performed miracles, He taught by parables and set

the perfect example for His followers, how they should serve God. However His imminent betrayal was prominent in His mind and He alerted His disciples: "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over to crucifixion" (Matt. 26:2). John 12:31-33 also records His words to His disciples: "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. This He said signifying what death He should die". Those words foretold His crucifixion—He knew He would be crucified. Thus is evident His love and passion for His disciples—His faithful followers—those who had left everything to follow Him. Verses 35 and 36 continue: "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of the Light".

John 15:12-14 and 15:16-17 record more of His exhortations to His disciples: "This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask in my name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another".

However this love was not developing in Judas: "Truly, truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me" (John 13:21). "Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them" (Luke 22:3-4). His betrayal by Judas was tragic.

Jesus' disciples found it hard to accept his imminent departure, however He offset the despair He knew they would experience by giving them hope. John 14:1-6 records His words to them in the Upper Room: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto

him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”.

Jesus gave them comfort also by giving them the assurance that, after He departed, the Comforter would come: *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. 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”* (John 14:26-27).

Jesus and Pilate

When the moment for His arrest came, Jesus twice asked His accusers: *“‘Whom do you seek?’ To which they said ‘Jesus the Nazarene’”* (John 18:7).

The same hands that had just healed the servant of the high priest (Luke 22:50-51) were then bound, making him look like an evil doer, as they led him to Annas.

The subsequent trial comprised both religious and civil courts. The first was before Annas, who *“sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest”* (John 18:13, 24). Early next morning He was led into the judgment hall and brought before Pilate (John 18:28 to 19:15).

Pilate reasoned with Jesus. He asked Him: *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (John 18:33). Jesus did not answer directly: *“My Kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is My kingdom is not of this realm”* (John 18:36). Jesus’ answer challenged Pilate and led to him exclaim *“What is truth?”* (John 18:38). In spite of his best endeavours to establish Jesus’ credentials, Pilate was uncertain of Jesus’ status and attempted to release Him (John 19:12). The point to be realised is that Jesus was operating on a level far above that of the human authorities and yet He submitted Himself to their judgements because He knew that it was His Father’s will for Him to suffer at their hand and be crucified.

But He was to suffer more ignominy. When he was brought before Herod, Herod also questioned Him, *“in many words; but He answered nothing”* (Luke 23:9). Jesus, the Lamb of God, was then mocked by the Roman soldiers and vehemently accused by the Jews, precisely as prophesied by Isaiah: *“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet He did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep*

that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open His mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

Jesus was then subjected to more humiliation when the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and placed it on His head and mocked Him, proclaiming *“Hail King of the Jews!”* (John 19:3). They smote him and scourged Him (scourging was a flogging by a whip which often had lead embedded in the flails to cause greater pain). For those who have not experienced such brutality it is impossible to imagine the pain inflicted; indeed it might be difficult to even contemplate the terrible suffering.

The cross of Jesus

And then came the final hours on the cross. In contrast to the grand and glorious entry into Jerusalem only a few days previously, the time had come for Him to consummate His sacrifice. It was God’s due time.

Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion, the method used in Roman times for the worst criminals, which means that He was not only unjustly persecuted but He was subjected to the most despicable form of execution.

There is much significance in the inscription that Pilate put on Jesus’ cross: **“JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS”** (John 19:19 NASB). The record is that *“many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek”* (John 19:20). Historians record that the names of those who were crucified were written on the placard above their cross for a witness (or record), similar to the headstones on many graves in the Western World today.

The inscription also recorded the crime for which the victim was crucified. In Jesus’ case there was no case against Him—no crime—except that He was **“THE KING OF THE JEWS”**.

Jesus said: *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must first deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). A review of the life, trial and crucifixion of Jesus should stir all who believe that He was the Son of God, to ponder what little sacrifice they have been called upon to make: *“...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him...He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth...”* (Isaiah 53:5-7). The cross each believer is asked to bear does not equate with the physical cross of Jesus, nor the ignominy and shame which

the Son of God who came down from heaven suffered. While each Christian has a cross to bear it cannot be compared to His sacrifice.

At this season of the year, when Christians specially remember His sacrifice, it is profitable for them to recall the words the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: *“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will keep us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our*

Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39). Paul fulfilled those words; nothing separated him from the love of Christ; he was faithful to the end and finished his course with joy: *“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).

May everyone who looks upon Him as their personal saviour, and as the One who opened the way to eternal life, renew their determination that nothing will separate them from the love of Christ, and the hope of attaining their crown of righteousness.■

BEREA AND THESSALONICA

Berea: *“A city in the south of Macedonia, now called Verria or Kara-Verria and situated on the east slope of the Olympian range”*. So reads both Young’s Concordance and Smith’s Bible Dictionary (the Dictionary adds that the population was about 15000 – 20000). So in world-wide terms Berea was an insignificant place, and in Scriptural prominence also, being mentioned in only three verses in the Bible (Acts 17:10, 13 and 20:4).

However a search of the internet for the usage of the word “Berea” currently yields more than 8,500,000 responses, and a search for “Berean” yields more than 7,000,000 responses. Many of the organisations which incorporate either of these two words into their literature are based in countries other than Macedonia (Greece). Thus it seems that many organisations attach some significance to the meaning of the names “Berea” and “Berean”.

Paul preached at Berea during his second missionary journey: *“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 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. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few”* (Acts 17:10-12). Some of those who believed were Jews and others were Greeks; some were women and some were men.

Thessalonica

Thessalonica was a city situated approximately 45 miles (75 kilometres) from Berea. Acts 17:1-4 records Paul preaching there before he went to Berea: *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a*

synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few”. As in Berea, some who believed were Jews, some were Greek, and some were women.

Nobility

Acts 17:10-12 (quoted above) compares the believers in Thessalonica with those in Berea and states that those in Berea were *“more noble because they searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so”*.

The difference between the assessment of those at Berea and those at Thessalonica might be surprising: it was the same Apostle Paul who preached to both and there were women, Greeks and Jews in both locations—the only difference was that the Bereans searched the Scriptures to prove what Paul said.

The Thessalonians could be deemed respectful for not searching the Scriptures—it was the Apostle Paul who taught them, and to question what he said could be deemed disrespectful. However the Bereans did not accept Paul’s word and insisted on searching the Scriptures to verify what he had told them.

Maybe the reception to Paul’s message contains a lesson for Christians today: they too should not take what anyone tells them just because their teacher is a noted student, author or is highly esteemed in any circle—everyone must prove all things, *“hold fast that which is good”*, and *“be fully persuaded in their own mind”* (1 Thess. 5:21; Rom. 14:5).■

THE NEW JERUSALEM

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:1-5).

John’s vision recorded in Revelation 21:1-5 presents a glorious scene: a city coming down from heaven, as beautiful as a bride when she is dressed for her wedding; God dwelling with men; no more tears; no more death; no more sorrow; no more crying; no more pain. Such a scene constitutes the realisation of the Christian’s hope for the world of mankind—paradise on earth. Such a paradise will be established after *“the first heaven and the first earth were passed away”*.

Cities

The primary focus of the vision is the holy city of new Jerusalem. Historically, building a city has been a benchmark of achievement and authority. The quest started with Babel: *“And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass... they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly... let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven...”* (Gen. 11:1-4).

Nehemiah also wanted to build a city. He was sad because his father’s city lay waste: *“Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?... And (I) said unto the king... why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste... If it please the king... send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it”* (Neh. 2:2-5).

Babylon also was a significant city, although not for virtuous reasons: *“And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen... Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!..., Alas, alas, that great city... What city is like unto this great city!”* (Rev. 18:2, 10, 16-18).

The importance ascribed to cities is further testified by God’s commandment to Cyrus: *“Thus saith the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus... I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city...”* (Isa. 45:1, 13). Cyrus was directed to build God’s city.

It is recorded that Abraham also *“...looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is*

God” (Heb. 11:10), and Hebrews 11:16 records that God has *“prepared a city”* for the faithful mentioned in chapter 11: *“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city”*.

Jerusalem

The city of Jerusalem is one of the prominent cities in Israel’s history:

- The first reference to it is in Joshua 10:1-2: *“Now it came to pass when Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai and had utterly destroyed it...”*. The reference simply establishes Jerusalem as a physical city on earth;
- Jerusalem was specifically mentioned as being part of Benjamin’s inheritance (Joshua 18:28);
- *“God dwelt”* in Jerusalem (Psa. 135:21);
- The ark represented God’s presence (Judges 20:27) and it was taken to Jerusalem on several occasions (2 Sam. 15:29; 1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chron. 15:3);
- Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 3:1; 2 Chron. 3:1), and after the Babylonian captivity God gave specific instructions to Cyrus to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2);
- Several kings of Israel reigned from Jerusalem: David (2 Sam. 5:4-5); Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1); the heads of the Levites (1 Chron. 9:34); Solomon (2 Chron. 9:30); Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:13); Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 19:1).
- Jerusalem was the principal place for the people of Israel to worship: *“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship”* (John 4:20).

Nevertheless Israel failed to recognize the Messiah which led Jesus to declare: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”* (Matt. 23:37). In those verses “Jerusalem” stands for the whole nation of Israel.

New Jerusalem

The city mentioned in Revelation 21 is the new Jerusalem. The adjective “new” implies that the

previous (“old”) Jerusalem will be superseded. It is called “new Jerusalem” in only one other verse—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...”*.

The holy city

Revelation 21:2 also calls the new Jerusalem “*the holy city*”. Israel was God’s holy nation (Exodus 19:3-6), and so God considered Jerusalem, Israel’s capital, to also be holy. The adjective “holy” is appropriate—it would be heretical to regard as unholy any city that came down from God.

There are four verses of Scripture in which Jerusalem is stated to be holy, three times as a city and once as a holy mountain:

- Nehemiah 11: 1, 18. Verse 1 reads: *“And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city...”*;
- Isaiah 52:1: *“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city...”*;
- Daniel 9:16: *“O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain...”*.

City of my God

Revelation 3:12 (quoted above) includes the title “city of my God”. The title occurs in only two other verses: Psalm 46:4 (where it is an alternative name for “*the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high*”), and Psalm 87:3 (where it is an alternative name for “Zion”).

More titles

Revelation 21:9 does not include the title “holy city” but it includes the title “holy Jerusalem”: *“And there came unto me one of the seven angels... and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God”*. This verse ascribes new Jerusalem the additional titles of “the bride”, “the Lamb’s wife” and “Holy Jerusalem”.

The bride: the Lamb’s wife

The concept of a bride is used in several other verses either to describe something, or as a symbol. Five verses in which the attributes of a bride are used to **describe something** are: Isaiah 49:18, 61:10, 62:5, Jeremiah 2:32 and John 3:29. John 3:29 does not

identify the bride but merely uses the difference between the relationship a bride has with her bridegroom, and the relationship a friend has with the bridegroom, to describe John’s role in relation to Jesus. Nevertheless, the use of bride and bridegroom for this illustration is most appropriate, especially in view of the new Jerusalem being compared to a bride.

There are eight verses in which the symbol of a bride is used to stand for something other than a literal human bride. The verses are: Jeremiah 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11; Joel 2:16; Revelation 18:23; 21:9; 22:17. However none of the verses state directly who or what is meant by the bride; some of them might be symbolic language for the new Jerusalem.

There are many characteristics of a bride: 2 Corinthians 11:2 refers to chastity; Revelation 14:4 states “*clothed in white*” and adds that they “*were not defiled with women, for they are virgins*”; Revelation 14:5 refers to her being guileless.

All of these characteristics apply to the New Jerusalem—all confirm that the new Jerusalem will be holy, that is, “*physically pure; morally blameless*” (definition from Strong’s Concordance #40)—the symbolism of a bride to stand for new Jerusalem is apt.

Structure of the new Jerusalem

Revelation 21:10-27 gives some details of the features of the new Jerusalem. Some of them are:

- “*The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*”. This quality reflects Jesus’ words to His disciples: “*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*” (John 8:12); and more specifically: “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:14-16);
- “*The wall had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*”. The apostles are the foundation stones of the church: “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*” (Eph. 2:19-20);
- “*The wall had twelve gates, attended by twelve angels, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel*”. Entry to cities in Old Testament times was through gates in their walls (Gen. 23:10,

18). Entry to the new Jerusalem is through the gate of one of the tribes of Israel: *“And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel”* (Rev 7:4). Each member of the new Jerusalem has been grafted into (spiritual) Israel: *“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree...”* (Rom 11:17). It is by being grafted in that they become *“the Israel of God”* (Gal. 6:16);

- *“The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it”*. As mentioned above, Cyrus’ first assignment when Israel returned from captivity in Babylon was to build the temple (Ezra 1:2), which is consistent with the temple being regarded as God’s house: *“And Jesus went into the temple of God... and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer...”* (Matt. 21:12-13). The statement in Revelation represents a fulfilment of Zechariah 6:12-13: *“And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH... he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”*. Construction of the temple began at Jesus’ first advent, as James explained: *“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written (Amos 9:11), After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things”* (Act 15:14-17).

- *“And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it”*. This statement will be a fulfilment of Micah 4:2: *“And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”*. Also Zechariah 8:22: *“Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD”*.

Jerusalem above

Galatians 4:22-26 reads: *“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the*

freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all”.

The verses contrast the literal city of Jerusalem (which stood for the Law Covenant) and *“Jerusalem which is above”*. The new Jerusalem is the focus of God’s calling of the church: *“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ...In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ”* (Eph. 1:10-12). If it were not for God’s plan to have a bride for His Son, there would not be a new Jerusalem.

Zion

Hebrews 12:22 reads: *“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...”* (Heb. 12:22).

The word “and” is critical in the interpretation of this verse: Strong’s Concordance defines it (#2532) as “having a copulative and sometimes also a cumulative force”. The copulative sense means that the two phrases are saying the same thing (that is, one is a repetition of the other—in this case, coming to Sion is the same as coming to the new Jerusalem), and the cumulative sense means that coming to Mount Sion is additional to coming to the new Jerusalem.

Historically King David ruled from Zion: *“And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem... David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David. And David dwelt in the castle; therefore they called it the city of David”* (1 Chron. 11: 4-9). Christ is to sit on David’s throne (*“the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David”*—Luke 1:32-33), and so Zion (Sion) is the place from which Christ will rule.

Summary

And so the picture is complete: in the previous (earthly) government David sat on his earthly throne in literal Mount Zion in physical Jerusalem. In the new heaven and new earth Christ will sit on His spiritual throne in spiritual Mount Sion with the bride, His wife. They will come down from heaven and be the new government—the new Jerusalem—*“they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years”* (Rev. 20:4).■

A MORNING AT THE SEASIDE

It was the end of a hard and sad night. The sun was starting to illuminate the scene as they sailed into shore. It had been a fruitless attempt to resume their former secular lives.

It was Peter who had said: *“I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee”*. So six others went with him to fish on the Sea of Galilee. *“They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing”* (John 21:3).

There was a man on the shore and he hailed the crew: *“Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No”* (John 21:5).

The time was now ripe for Jesus to perform a miracle and identify himself. They were still a hundred metres or so (200 cubits) from shore, and it would have been difficult for them to identify Him visually in the faint dawn light: *“And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes”* (John 21:6).

John was the first to realise the man was Jesus (verse 7). John announced it to Peter, and true to his impetuous character, Peter leapt into the sea. He could not wait for the ship to reach the shore.

They dragged the net onto the shore. All of them now recognised that it was the Lord. He already had fish cooking on a fire, and bread. Jesus asked them to bring some of the fish they had caught. There were 153 fish in the net, yet the net was not broken (verse 11)—another manifestation to them of Divine involvement in the early morning scene.

He said to them: *“come and dine”* (verse 12). In a practical and kindly sense He was inviting them to break their fast after a long and hard night. It is difficult to be assured of their thoughts as they realised it was their Lord; the One who had been crucified a few days previously. It is possible they were hesitant: it was a strange new world. This was the third time He had revealed Himself to them since His resurrection (John 21:14). He had also appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (when she recognised “the gardener” by His voice—John 20:15-16) and as a stranger on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). That same day He appeared to His disciples in the room even though the doors were shut (John 20:19), and eight days later He appeared as a fleshly being to convince Thomas that He had risen from the dead (verse 29). *“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book”* (John 20:30).

Jesus then took bread and fish and served them. This occasion might be one of the occasions to which Peter referred later: *“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth...Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead”* (Acts 10:38-41).

I go fishing

There is no Scriptural record regarding when this incident occurred, except that it was less than 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). Suffice it to say that there had been a sufficiently long time after His previous appearance that the disciples, and Peter in particular, decided that they should return to their previous occupations.

And so it is with His disciples at this end of the age—there might be an inexplicable delay between significant events and any delay can cause despondency. Just as all the virgins slept (not just the foolish ones) while they waited for the bridegroom to return (Matt. 25:5), so it is a challenge for all Christians to remain awake and alert and not to abandon the wonderful hope which God has extended to all those whom He has called: *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 1:6).

Do you truly love me

After the meal Jesus asked Peter: *“Simon, Son of Jonah, do you truly love me more than these?”* (John 21:15). There are at least three lessons that might be learnt from the timing of Jesus’ question.

Firstly, Jesus’ consideration and kindness in waiting until after the meal before He challenged Peter to declare yet again that he loved Him. He did not challenge Peter immediately they arrived on the shore. Even though it was the third time He had manifested Himself to His disciples, He realised Peter still needed time to fully comprehend that it was “Him”. The importance of time is exemplified: much “harm” can be done by being too hasty to “get to the point” during any conversation, or to expect others to comprehend the majesty of God’s plan. Christians do well to remember that *“the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy...”* (James 3:17).

Secondly Jesus called him “Simon”. There are only two recorded instances when Jesus called him “Peter”: *“... That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...”*—Matt. 16:18; and *“... I tell*

thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (Luke 22:34). The second occasion led to Peter becoming distressed: *"And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly"* (Matt. 26:75). Calling him "Peter" when he had just returned from a fruitless night fishing might have caused him to recall the occasion of his denial. Jesus' purpose now was not to remind him of his previous weakness but to strengthen him for the work that lay ahead of him: feeding the flock of God (John 21:15-17); and to be one of the foundation stones of the church (Eph. 2:20).

Thirdly, Peter's denial was particularly painful for him because he had declared that he would never deny Jesus, even if others did so: *"But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I"* (Mark 14:29). Consequently when Jesus asked Simon (Peter) if he loved Him *"more than these"* (John 21:15), He might not have been asking him if he loved Him more than the boats (and particularly as Peter had just returned from a fruitless

night fishing), but rather if he loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him.

One challenge for the Christian today is to ensure that their love for their Master is so strong that even if others forsake Him they will not follow them. They are to develop a faith as strong as those who have been martyred for their faith: *"... be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10). Jesus is the forerunner (Heb. 6:20) and is the supreme example: *"... 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"* (Phil. 2:8-9).

May all believers help each other remember that they *"... are of God..."* and *"... greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). As Paul reminded the Corinthians: *"He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13).■

LIFE'S EMPTY VICTORIES

The article below was written by a regular contributor to a secular newspaper in USA in 1932. Over the years it has been reprinted in several religious publications.

As a man grows older, yet has not reached extreme old age, when, presumably, all his past is mellowed and softened in the pleasant, tranquil light of sunset, and both mistakes and right acts are equally overspread by the thoughts that nothing has mattered much, since the whole thing will be soon over; when he arrives at the stage of life's journey where he reviews the past, not alone for the gentle pleasure of reminiscence, but also to seek guidance for his remaining future; and while he still imagines that it is possible for him to mould his character into the secret ideal which he has all along vainly struggled to perfect, there comes, at least to the man of average temperament, in this pause to review—this moment of rest before he completes his destiny—the thought of how much happier, and better and altogether pleasanter, his life might have been had he avoided, as he might easily have done, certain complications and conflicts which, at the time, seemed to him mightily important.

When they occurred, he was absolutely certain that the triumph of his opinion was a matter of tremendous consequence; it was essential that he should override the opposition and impress upon his opponent that pre-eminent truth and right of his position; and he went at him, hard and strong, and in the heat of the controversy, which ripened into a feud

and perhaps ended in the permanent estrangement of one who might once have been counted a friend, he said or did things which were hard and bitter, and better left unsaid or undone.

Perhaps he gained his point; beat down his antagonist, and sent him, humbled and mortified from the contest, to nurse his grievance ever after, and nourish to the end of his days a smouldering hate of the man who got the better of him; or worse, to cherish the feeling that he had been hardly used.

Strange it would be that, in his later years, the outcome does not seem to have been of very great consequence. What remains permanently is the memory of the incident, and a regret that it should have occurred. Looking back, he realises the exact moment when he might have refrained from pressing his man to the limit, have perhaps sufficiently satisfied his self-respect without sacrificing a friend.

The assets he counts up with the most satisfaction are the friends he finds about him. What may they—what will they—expect will be his animating spirit in the future? He will endeavour to be true to them and to his own convictions, but he will avoid the useless multiplication of enemies. This is his hope, as he takes stock of what lies before him.■

THE ACCURSED SINNER

"There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isaiah 65:20)

The hope for mankind is that they will be resurrected from the grave. The prophet Hosea wrote: *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction..."* (Hosea 13:14).

In accord with that promise the Apostle Paul declared before the governor: *"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 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 24:14-15).

Paul declared that mankind will be resurrected (Greek: *anastasis*—stand up again) to life on earth as Isaiah had prophesied: *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths': for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* (Isa. 2:2-3).

The earth to which they will return will be "new": *"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind"* (Isa. 65:17), and the Apostle Peter wrote: *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:13). The new earth will be vastly different from the present earth and mankind will need to adjust to the new order.

Isaiah 65:20

Isaiah 65:20 is one of the verses of Scripture which addresses the time frame for mankind to adjust to the new earth. The verse may be considered to imply that the time frame for any individual to amend their ways from the present order to align with the new is 100 years: *"...the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed"* (Isa. 65:20).

However close investigation of the verse might indicate that it does not specify a period of 100 years for people to amend their ways.

The sinner

The Hebrew word from which "sinner" is translated (Strong's #2398) is *châtâ'*, defined as "a primitive root; properly to *miss*; hence (figuratively and generally) to *sin*; by inference to *forfeit*, *lack*, *expiate*, *repent*, (causatively) *lead astray*, *condemn*". It is translated by more than 14 different English words and phrases of widely varying meaning. However all words and phrases mean a transgressor, and so the verse is dealing with mankind as sinners.

Accursed

The word "accursed" in Isaiah 65:20 is translated from "qâlal" (Strong's #7043), which Dr Strong defines as: "a primitive root; to *be* (causatively *make*) *light*... figuratively (*easy*, *trifling*, *vile*, etc.)". It is translated as: abate, make bright, bring into contempt, accurse, curse, despise, be easy, easy, easier, light (in several senses), slight, swift, vile, whet.

Young's Concordance defines "qâlal" as "to be lightly esteemed", which is consistent with the definition in Strong's Concordance.

In an endeavour to ascertain its meaning some verses in which "qâlal" occurs are listed below (the words translated from "qâlal" are those in **bold type**).

- Genesis 16:4: *"And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was **despised** in her eyes"*. The meaning of "qâlal" in this verse is not condemnation to death but that Sarai looked upon Hagar with contempt.

- Exodus 18:22: *"And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be **easier** for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee"*. Again "qâlal" does not imply condemnation to death but that the referral of the simpler cases to the "*able men*" whom Moses was to appoint would lighten Moses' workload and thus enable him "*to endure*".

- Exodus 21:17: *"And he that **curseth** his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death"*. To curse another does not mean to condemn them to death, but to make light of them; to treat them with disdain. The instruction to put to death those who dishonoured their parents was consistent with the Law because the Law required them to "*honour thy father and thy*

mother” (Exodus 20:12). However cursing one’s parents did not put the parents to death, so “qâlal” does not mean condemnation to death. Additionally, the offender was to be put to death, but not by means of his cursing.

- Leviticus 20:9: “For every one that **curseth** his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath **cursed** his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him”. Comment as above for Exodus 21:17.

- Leviticus 19:14: “Thou shalt not **curse** the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD”. Again “qâlal” does not mean condemnation to death: the instruction was that a deaf person was not to be despised.

- Leviticus 24:14: “Bring forth him that hath **cursed** without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him”. His death was by stoning, not by cursing (“qâlal”).

- Leviticus 24:23: “And Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had **cursed** out of the camp, and stone him with stones”. See comment for Leviticus 24:14 above.

- 1 Samuel 2:30: “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be **lightly esteemed**”. The verse does not condemn to death those who despise God, but that they will be not given any regard or esteem.

- 1 Samuel 18:23: “And Saul’s servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, ‘Seemeth it to you a **light thing** to be a king’s son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and **lightly esteemed**?’” There is no mention nor suggestion in this verse that “qâlal” means condemnation to death.

- 1 Kings 16:31: “And it came to pass, as if it had been a **light thing** for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat...”. There is no mention of condemnation to death in this verse.

- 2 Kings 3:18: “And this is but a **light thing** in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand”. God deemed the matter “trifling”.

- 2 Kings 20:10: “And Hezekiah answered, It is a **light thing** for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees”. Hezekiah was taunting Isaiah, challenging him to ask God to make the shadow go backward ten

degrees. Intrinsic in Hezekiah’s taunt was the implication that it was “easy” for God to make the shadow advance ten degrees, and therefore doing so did not prove anything about God’s power.

In the light of these Scriptures it is apparent that “qâlal” does not mean condemnation to death.

The question remains: what is the meaning of “qâlal” in Isaiah 65:20?

The child shall die an hundred years

Isaiah 65:20 contains the clause “the child shall die an hundred years”. That clause might give the impression that the time frame for mankind to amend their ways will be 100 years. However the clause gives rise to two questions: why will children have to die; and why at 100 years?

One aspect of the new earth will be that children will not inherit the sins of their parents—“all will die for their own iniquity” (Jer. 31:30). Thus children will not have to die as they do in the present age.

The word “child” is translated from the Hebrew “na’ar” which means “a boy (as active) or girl from the age of infancy to adolescence” (Strong #5288).

The definition of “na’ar” implies that in the new earth a 100 year old person will be regarded as a child (or at least no older than a present day adolescent).

An alternative interpretation

The context of Isaiah 65:20 suggests another interpretation. Verses 17-25 describe the contrast between the present situation and the conditions in the new earth. At the present time infants die, and numerous men die before they fill their days (“three score years and ten”—Psa. 90:10). Hence verse 20 contrasts the present situation in which a 100 year old person is regarded as a very old man whereas in that day they will be still in their “childhood”. The contrast will be so stark that “the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind” (Isa. 65:17), and it is in that context that, in that day, sinners at the age of 100 years will be lightly esteemed.

Regardless of whether the above alternative interpretation of Isaiah 65:20 is correct or in error, the clause “the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed” does not suggest that there will be only 100 years for individuals to “make progress” towards perfection. On the contrary, other passages such as Isaiah 11:9 indicate that mankind will have the full 1000 years to amend their ways and reach perfection: “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”. ■

LOVE: THE GREATEST

The Apostle Paul concludes his exposition of the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13 with the words: “*And now abideth faith, hope, charity (Greek: *agape*; love), these three; but the greatest of these is charity (love)*” (1 Cor. 13:13).

There are several senses in which love can be considered to be greater than faith and hope. The Greek word translated “greater” is “*meizōn*” which Dr. Strong defines as (#3187): “larger (literally or figuratively, specifically in age)”. In the King James Version it is variously translated as “elder, greater, greatest, more”. Its use elsewhere in the New Testament bears out Dr Strong’s definition, and illustrates that the word may be used in a very wide variety of senses. However the context of 1 Corinthians 13 does not provide any firm guidance regarding the particular sense Paul had in mind so a liberal application of “*meizon*” is warranted—in other words, there are many ways in which love is greater than faith and hope.

Larger

The simplest meaning of “*meizon*” is “larger”, and it has that meaning in Luke 12:16-18: “*And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build **greater**; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods*”. The barn the rich man planned to build would be bigger (larger; greater), and have greater capacity to store his harvest.

In the same sense, love is larger (bigger; greater) than faith and hope in that faith and hope are centred in the individual—one cannot possess (or accommodate) another’s faith or hope. One can have faith that another will act in a certain way, and have hope for another’s future, but faith and hope in themselves are the sole province of the individual. In that sense, love is larger, broader, greater than faith and hope because love may be exercised for another by practising the qualities Paul mentions previously in the chapter (such as “*bearing all things, enduring all things, not being provoked, never failing*”).

Age and endurance

Another sense in which love is greater is age. There are several aspects of love which make it the elder of faith and hope. It was God’s love for His creation and His ultimate objective for them that led Him to send His only Son to earth: “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...*” (John 3:16).

Since Jesus’ sacrifice is the only means of salvation for mankind, without it there would not be any hope beyond the grave. Love existed before Man could exercise hope. At the other end of the spectrum, love will continue to exist into eternity whereas when all things have been restored to perfection mankind will not require hope—their every desire will be fully satisfied: “*How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men... shall be **abundantly satisfied** with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures*” (Psa 36:7-8). There will not be any cause for mankind to hope for anything better. Logic dictates that if there will not be any need for hope, there will not be any need for faith because “*faith is (simply) the substance of things hoped for*” (Heb. 11:1). And so love, being eternal, is greater than faith and hope which will be rendered redundant.

Power and authority

Love is greater than faith and hope in that it has power to initiate action whereas faith and hope are inert—they cannot initiate action. The inability of faith and hope to initiate action is shown by the fact that, at the present time, the whole creation—and indeed Christians also—can do nothing more than hope for their deliverance; they cannot do anything about alleviating their suffering: “*... the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together... And not only they, but ourselves also... groan within ourselves, waiting for... the redemption of our body*” (Rom. 8:22-23). In other words, the whole world, wittingly or unwittingly, is hoping for better times—their hope is their reaction to the situation in which they find themselves.

On the other hand love can take action to offset pain and suffering: “*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister*” (Heb. 6:10). In that way love is greater (more powerful) than faith and hope which can be only “watchers”.■

PEOPLES PAPER

AND HERALD OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM

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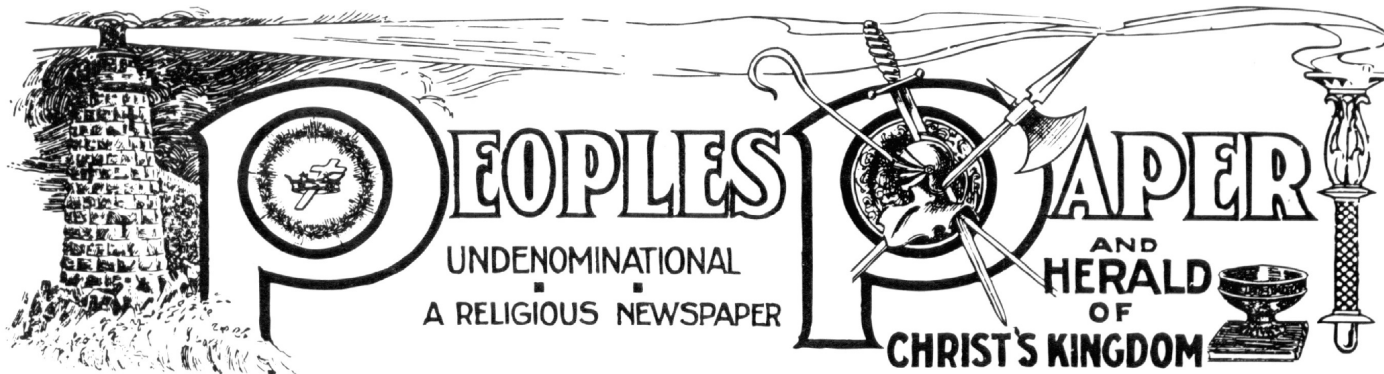
Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.

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

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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 94 No. 3

AUSTRALIA

July—September 2011

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Pilate was in a dilemma: he “*knew that for envy they had delivered him*” (Matt. 27:17-18; Mark 15:10), there was no evidence of sedition—Jesus had told him that His “*kingdom was not of this world*”—and his interrogation had not given him any other reason to convict Him. Nevertheless, in spite of him declaring: “*I find in him no fault*” (John 18:38), Jesus’ countrymen demanded he release Barabbas and send Jesus to be crucified.

When Pilate asked Jesus: “*Art thou a king then?*” Jesus replied: “*Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth... Pilate saith unto Him what is truth?*” (John 18:37-38).

Absolute origin of “being”

Pilate is not the only one who has asked that question. In Old Testament times, Solomon gave his “*heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven...*” (Eccl. 1:13-14). Solomon desired to know “the truth”, that is, the truth regarding the origin and purpose of life.

However despite Man’s best endeavours, the question remains unanswered. The theistic religions (those that teach there is a supreme being—a “god”) are based on the assumption that there is a god, even though they do not know his origin. Christianity—a theistic religion—defers to the Biblical declaration that God is “*from everlasting to everlasting*” (Psa. 90:2)—He is believed to be the Ultimate Cause, even though the Bible does not explain His origin.

Atheists (those who do not believe there is a supreme being) cannot answer the question either. The theory of evolution starts with “something” (“matter” or “anti-matter”); where did the “something” come from? The question remains unanswered.

Hence no-one knows the absolute truth about the origin of “being”, and consequently mankind is left to formulate hypotheses based on their observations. It is in that context that the authority of the Bible as the source of truth has to be established.

The Bible

For four centuries the King James Bible has been the foundation of the Christian world. Its teachings have been the basis of the legal and ethical frameworks of Western Societies. Referring to the King James Version, England’s Queen Elizabeth II, in her 2010 Christmas address to the nation said: “*Over four hundred years ago, King James the Sixth of Scotland inherited the throne of England at a time when the Christian Church was deeply divided. Here at Hampton court in 1604, he convened a conference of churchmen of all shades of opinion to discuss the future of Christianity in this country. The King agreed to commission a new translation of the Bible that was acceptable to all parties. This was to become the King James or Authorized Bible, which next year will be exactly four centuries old... The King James Bible was a major cooperative endeavour that required the efforts of dozens of the day’s leading scholars. The whole enterprise was guided by an interest in reaching agreement for the wider benefit of the Christian Church, and to bring harmony to the Kingdoms of England and Scotland*”.

The result of their studentship comprises 66 books, written by 40 authors over a period of many centuries. Several other books were considered, in

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particular 13 which refer to matters similar to those in the current Old Testament, and an undefined number relating to the New Testament; together they are commonly referred to as the Apocrypha (or “secret”), and are included in some of the “more liberal” Bibles.

The title “Authorized Version” is significant as indicated by the preface to a version published by Collins Clear-type in 1839: *“Translated out of the Original Tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by His Majesty’s special command, appointed to be read in churches”*. It was *“Printed by Authority”* with the licence which authorized the printing restricting the print run to 50,000. The licence remained effective until 1948, but without the 50,000 limit.

Its influence

The Bible’s influence was greater in times past than presently, particularly when the British Empire dominated a significant portion of the globe. Since the demise of that Empire, some of its edicts have been abandoned by some administrations in the belief they have “greater light” (for example, marriage as an exclusively heterosexual arrangement is now being challenged by the concept of same-sex marriage). Nevertheless, the philosophy pronounced in the Bible continues to be the most plausible regarding Man’s origin, history, current plight and destiny. Indeed it is the only Book which contains a plausible explanation of all those aspects of Man’s existence—triumphs and tragedies alike.

The Biblical record

The Bible contains much prophecy and records much history. The Apostle Paul encouraged his readers to accept the Old Testament as the truth. He 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 premise of the Apostle’s argument was that the fulfilment of the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament testified to its authority, and therefore constituted a sound basis for hope that the promises that had not yet been fulfilled will yet come to pass.

The situation has not changed. Observation of world events, and their correlation with Bible prophecy, testifies that the Scriptures are the word of God, in contrast with false predictions (Deut. 18:21-22).

One prophecy recorded in the Bible which has been fulfilled is the sequence of the kingdoms that dominated Europe. The prophecy is recorded in the book of Daniel. In summary the prophecy was that the kingdom of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:36-38), would be

superseded by the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:5-28), then by Greece (Dan. 8:1-21) and finally by a fourth kingdom (Dan. 7:1-28), after which the kingdom will be given to *“the saints of the most high”* (Dan. 7:18). Several details of the transitions from kingdom to kingdom are given but suffice it to say here that the rise, fall and sequence of the kingdoms as prophesied in the book of Daniel are testified by secular records. In 2011 the world is in transition between the fourth kingdom and the kingdom of *“the saints of the most high”*.

Two prophecies being fulfilled at this time are recorded in Daniel 12:4—*“many running to and fro and knowledge being increased”*.

One evidence of the fulfilment of this prophecy is the increase in the number and use of motor vehicles. Numerous roads and “freeways” have been built to accommodate them, but the increase in traffic is such that they are frequently congested and even more freeways are required.

Air travel has also expanded dramatically in both the size and number of aeroplanes flying. Approximately 60 years ago the average aeroplane carried less than 100 passengers and travelled at approximately 300-350 kilometres per hour. Today many airline aircraft carry 300-400 passengers at speeds of almost 1000 kilometres per hour, travelling non-stop from Australia to USA.

The increase is stark when it is remembered that for centuries mankind was limited to walking, or using horses, donkeys or camels to move from one location to another. The increases in the number of people travelling, the speed at which they travel and the distances covered are phenomenal and are a fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Daniel 12.

From beginning to end

The first and the last books of the Bible contrast Man’s origin and destiny. In Genesis, the earth is created; in Revelation, it passes away. In Genesis, the sun and moon appear; in Revelation there is no longer a need for the Sun or the Moon. In Genesis there is a garden, a home for man; in Revelation there is a city, a home for all the nations on earth. In Genesis, the marriage of the first Adam; in Revelation the marriage of the Second Adam. In Genesis, Satan the enemy appears; in Revelation Satan and all his cohorts are destroyed. In Genesis, tears, pain and death afflict mankind; in Revelation, sorrow, pain, tears and death are destroyed. In Genesis the ground is cursed; in Revelation there is no more curse. In Genesis, Man is driven from the tree of life; in Revelation Man returns and eats from the trees of life. The story is complete!■

THE BOOK OF LIFE

“... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The purpose of Jesus' coming to earth was to enable mankind to have life. The right to live forever was lost when Adam transgressed in the Garden of Eden: *“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... 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... And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden...”* (Gen. 3:17-23).

Since that time, many have sought to regain life, not just a temporary existence, but eternal life—to live forever. The Apostle Paul was one whose hope was to obtain eternal life, as he wrote to Titus: *“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began”* (Titus 1:2). Likewise Paul exhorted Timothy to *“fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called...”* (1 Tim. 6:12). And so it is that the purpose of every Christian's calling is to obtain eternal life, because *“there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling”* (Eph. 4:4). The hope of eternal life is not limited to Christians, but has been the hope of many throughout history, to all *“... who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life”* (Rom. 2:7).

The book of life

However Revelation 20:12-15 implies that not everyone will gain eternal life: *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is (the book) of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works”* And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12-15). Those whose name is not in the **book of life** will be destroyed in the lake of fire, that is, second death. Consequently the qualifications

required to gain entry into the book of life are crucial to the attainment of eternal life.

Qualifications

Revelation 3:5 specifies two qualities that are necessary to gain entry into the book of life: *“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”*. The two qualifications of those in Sardis whose names were in the book of life and would not be blotted out were to have *“not defiled their garments”* and to have *“overcome”*.

Another qualification is given in Revelation 13:1-8: *“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns... and all the world wondered after the beast... and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast?... And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. 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”*. Those whose names **are not** in the book of life wondered at the beast (wondered; admired; worshipped—Strong's Concordance #2296; 4352). Those whose names **are** in the book of life did not wonder—admire, worship—the beast.

Time frame

The visions in the book of Revelation relate to events that *“must shortly come to pass”* (Rev. 1:1), that is, that would occur after Jesus' ascension. Since all the texts quoted above relating to the book of life are in the book of Revelation, it may be assumed that entry into the book of life was not possible before Jesus' first advent. However Revelation 17:7-8 states: *“...whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world...”*. The expression *“foundation of the world”* refers to the creation of the world as Hebrews 4:3 states: *“... the works were finished from the foundation of the world”* (Heb. 4:3). Hence all who have ever lived have been eligible to have their name written in the book of life, from Adam onwards.

Thus, although not named, the Book mentioned in Exodus 32:31-32 might be the “book of life”, and Moses’ name is in it: *“And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written”*. Moses must have known that his name was in the book of life in order to ask that it be “blotted out”.

Moses’ request also implies that his name was entered into the book of life while he was alive. Entry during one’s earthly life is confirmed by the Apostle Paul: *“And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life”* (Phil. 4:3). The names of Paul’s fellowlabourers were in the book of life during their lifetime.

In the same vein Psalm 69:27-28 reads: *“Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous”*. The implication is that only the righteous have their name written in the book of the living—the book of life (“living”: Strong’s Concordance #2416—alive).

Entry into the holy Jerusalem

Only those whose names are in the book of life will be granted entry into the holy Jerusalem: *“And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God... And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or*

maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:10-27).

However the nations of earth will be granted entry to the holy Jerusalem: *“And the nations shall walk in the light of it* (the holy Jerusalem—Rev. 21:10) *and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life”* (Rev. 21:24-27; interpolations deleted).

Those verses show that entry of names into the book of life will continue until the nations are righteous—the two conditions which must be met before one may enter the holy Jerusalem are that they must not be defiled or work abomination, and they must be written in the book of life. Consequently, for the nations to enter the holy Jerusalem their entry will not occur until they are made righteous.

The nations will not be righteous until the Lord’s “judgements are in the earth”, at which time “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isa. 26:9). At that time God will “turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph. 3:8-9).

Consequently entry to the book of life has been available from the foundation of the world and will continue to be available until the nations are restored to harmony with God.■

PROVERBS

“*T*o know wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:2). The book of Proverbs enshrines a great deal of what is called the “Wisdom” literature of Israel. In Old Testament days, an equivalent term to the “Word of God” was the expression “the Wisdom of God”. Nine chapters are devoted to the words of the “Wisdom of God”, transmitting His counsel to men upon earth. Within these verses there is what amounts almost to an autobiography of the Word of God, a personal explanation or definition of His relationship both to the Father and to the world in which men live. *“So Wisdom, the Word, speaks, saying ‘the Lord possessed (acquired) Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up (anointed) before the earth was.....’”, and “When there were no depths, I was brought forth... before the mountains, before the hills, was I brought forth, while He as yet had not made the earth... When*

He prepared the heavens I was there, when He set a compass upon the face of the depth... then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him” (Prov. 8:22, 24-30). The investment of His Wisdom, His Word, with attributes of personality, as implied in this chapter, was evidently prior to any work of creation. Jesus always claimed continually that Divine Oneness subsisted between Himself and his Father, a unity which was in Jesus’ mind when He said *“I and my Father are one”* (John 10:30). Furthermore, this association of personality with the Word marks the dividing point between the eternity in which God dwelt without creation and the time span during which His creative power brings into existence the creation, comprehended in time and space as we understand those terms.

—From “The Almighty” by Albert Hudson■

AT MOUNT SINAI

Romans 8:24 implies that hope is essential for a Christian to gain salvation. The verse reads: *“For we are saved by hope...”*. Thus all influences which increase a Christian’s hope aid their salvation.

One such influence is learning about the things that are recorded in the Old Testament—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 events which transpired at Mount Sinai and which are recorded in the Old Testament are part of those things which *“were written aforetime”* and therefore meditation on them is profitable for the Christian’s hope.

The record reads: *“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice”* (Exodus 19:16-19).

Earthquakes

The earthquake was only one of the seven phenomena that occurred at Mount Sinai when Moses brought the Israelites to meet God, and as such it should not be given undue emphasis. However earthquakes can be dramatic events; are amongst the signs that Jesus listed as indications that the end of the age was near (Matt. 24:7; Luke 21:11); feature in the prophecies included in the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18) and occur today (which means they are in the public eye).

For example, the earthquake which struck Indonesia on December 26, 2004 killed more than 200,000 people, either by collapsing buildings or being drowned in the ensuing tsunami. The power of the earthquake has been estimated as 23,000 times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War 2. It caused Planet Earth to wobble on its axis, some small islands southwest of Sumatra were displaced 40 metres (66 feet) and the northern tip of Sumatra moved 75 metres (118 feet).

God’s purpose in earthquakes

A fundamental question which may be asked is why does God use earthquakes to accomplish His purposes—what characteristics of an earthquake make them such a powerful tool?

Part of the answer to that question is that earthquakes make people realise that a force exists which is greater than anything mankind has engineered. Nevertheless earthquakes do not bring everyone to realise there is a Superior Being, frequently being glibly termed the “force of nature”, or a “natural disaster”. Nevertheless, for those who acknowledge the existence of God, earthquakes remind them of the truth expressed in Hebrews 10:31: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”*.

Spiritual significance

The events which occurred at Mount Sinai are of particular significance to the Christian because the writer to the Hebrews explains the lessons which should accrue from a consideration of them. The lesson is one of contrast—He wrote: *“For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded... so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels...”* (Heb. 12:18-22).

While the earthquake at Mount Sinai caused Moses and the people to fear, Christian’s should not be fearful of the Mount they approach. On the contrary, approaching Mount Sion should engender confidence and peace because it is the city of the living God, and will be the fountain of blessing for all the world: *“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem... they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:3-4).

The Christian should not forget the privilege of coming to Mount Sion, *“for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (2 Tim. 1:7).■

MINISTERING SPIRITS

“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

Hebrews 1:13-14 states that the role of angels is to minister to those who will inherit salvation.

Three questions arise: who or what are angels, what is the role of a ministering spirit, and who will inherit salvation?

Angels

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for “angel” is “malak”, which Dr. Strong defines (#4397) as “to despatch as a deputy; a messenger; specifically of God”. It is variously translated into four English words: ambassador, angel, king, messenger.

In the New Testament, “angel” is translated from the Greek word “angelos” (Strong #32) which is defined as “a messenger”; especially an “angel”; by implication a pastor. It is translated as “angel” or “messenger”.

Those definitions of “angel” mean that any being or influence which brings a message to one or more of God’s people is an angel. One such angel was Gabriel: “*And the angel answering said unto him (Zacharias), I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph...*” (Luke 1:19, 26). Gabriel was God’s messenger who brought messages to Zacharias and Mary.

Angelic forms

In the majority of cases angels are spirit beings, that is, of the spirit nature, not having a material body: “*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*” (Luke 24:39). As such they are invisible to the human eye.

Changing nature

On some occasions angels have “materialized”, that is, they have transformed themselves into visible form, sometimes as a human being. Such was the case with Jesus after His resurrection as mentioned above (Luke 24:39).

An instance in the Old Testament of an angel materializing is when the angel came to Gideon: “*And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah... And Gideon*

said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us?... Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face” (Judges 6:11-22). The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon as a human being and vanished when he had delivered his message.

The Spirit that released Peter from prison also transformed himself into a human being: “*And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision*” (Acts 12:6-9). Initially Peter thought he had had a vision—a vision is an imagination in the mind; a mental impression that is not real. However Peter did not have a vision—it was an angel which shed the chains that had bound him. The angel changed into human form, became visible and Peter followed him.

Human beings as “angelos”

On occasions God uses human beings who are not spirit beings to be His messengers. One such was John the Baptist: “*But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*” (Matt. 11:9-11). John the Baptist was one of God’s messengers—an “angelos”.

Ranking

However the purpose of Hebrews 1:13-14 is to establish Jesus’ superiority above the other angels.

In God’s realm angels rank between Jesus and human beings. Originally Jesus was above the angels, being the “beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 3:14),

the One by whom God created the worlds (Heb. 1:2). He is the archangel: *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first”* (1 Thess. 4:16).

Angels rank above mankind, as implied by Hebrews 2:9: *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Heb. 2:9). Jesus was made lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that is, He became a man—flesh and blood—and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Thus flesh and blood (mankind) is lower than the angels.

As an aside, consistent with that ranking is the fact that some angels have “materialized” (as was the case with Gideon’s messenger) whereas mankind does not have that power.

Ministers

Hebrews 1:13-14 states the angels are sent forth to minister for those who will be heirs of salvation. A minister’s role is to “attend as a servant” (Strong #1248) and thus all of God’s messengers came to minister to those who are *“heirs of salvation”*.

Heirs

Although the angels are spirit beings and above mankind in God’s ranking, nevertheless they are servants and not heirs—they merely serve God’s greater purpose—they do not inherit.

On the other hand an heir receives something for which they have not laboured—something which is given to them purely on the basis of the position they hold and not because they have laboured.

However, the Apostle Paul wrote: *“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all”* (Gal. 4:1). There are no grounds for the heir to claim self-aggrandizement—their inheritance is purely a gift—before they receive their inheritance they are of the same nature and rank as servants.

It is likewise with the Christian: *“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, **Not by works of righteousness which we have done**, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which **he shed on us abundantly** through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs*

according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7). Initially the Christian *“differed nothing from the servant”*—they were foolish, disobedient, deceived, but God has showered upon them His grace and they have become heirs, and as such are ministered to by the angels as Hebrews 1:1-14 states—the role of angels is to serve those who are heirs of salvation..

Salvation

The meaning of “salvation” is “rescue or safety” (Strong’s #4991).

The Apostle Paul wrote that, in the ultimate sense, salvation is an inheritance and not a reward: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph. 2:1-10). He declares that the Christian is God’s workmanship and the grace they enjoy now is not the work of any individual.

The world of mankind

In one sense the whole world of mankind are heirs of salvation because all of them will be saved from the present death sentence: *“...there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust”* (Acts 24:15). Additionally they will be resurrected to a place of safety: *“No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there”* (Isa. 35:9).

Nevertheless the salvation of the whole world of mankind is not the point of Hebrews 1:13-14: the point of Hebrews 1 is that the angels are the servants of the heirs—the servants of those who are the heirs of salvation and who, if obedient at that time, will live forever: *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23).

The angels

The angels are not heirs of salvation—there is no promise of their salvation, but rather those who have transgressed face destruction: *“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment”* (2 Pet. 2:4). That judgement involves being cast into the lake of fire: *“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:40-41).■

ISAIAH 35

Isaiah chapter 35 presents a wonderful scenario. Verse 1 reads: *"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"*. In view of approximately one third of the earth currently being desert (the proportion varies with the definition of desert—the proportion is greater if the frozen areas of the Arctic and Antarctic are included) the concept of the desert being fertile and bearing vegetation conjures mental images of prosperity and fruitfulness.

That image is endorsed in the succeeding verses. Verse 2 reads: *"It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God"*. Verse 2 states that the desert will *"blossom abundantly"*—not merely *"blossom"* as in verse 1—which expression is complemented by the symbolic clause *"and rejoice even with joy and singing"*.

Adding to the grandeur of the scene is the expression: *"the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it"*. The term *"the glory of Lebanon"* occurs in only one other place in the Scriptures: *"the glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious"* (Isa. 60:13).

The glory of Lebanon

Isaiah 60:13 implies it was the trees which grew in Lebanon that gave rise to the expression *"glory of Lebanon"*. Although it is not mentioned in Isaiah 60, its cedar trees were the most greatly renowned, as exemplified by Solomon specifying the cedars of Lebanon as the source of the timber required for the temple he was going to build in Jerusalem: *"And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the LORD his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon..."* (1 Kings 5:2-6).

Lebanon is remote from Jerusalem and transporting the cedar trees from Lebanon to Jerusalem was not an easy task. The procedure adopted is described in 2

Chronicles 2:16: *"And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem"*. After floating the cedars on the sea to Joppa, they had to be transported overland to Jerusalem, a distance of approximately 60 km (40 miles). In view of the lack of roads and the means of transport available in those days that was a challenging task. Nevertheless Solomon considered the cedars of Lebanon to be the only trees acceptable for the Lord's temple, regardless of the difficulty in transporting them to Jerusalem.

More changes

Isaiah 35 also prophesies vastly better health for mankind. Verses 5 to 7 read: *"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert"*. Anyone who has had an association with blindness, deafness or lameness will appreciate the blessing of the affliction being removed—the restitution of sight to a blind person, hearing to a person who has been deaf, and a lame person being able to walk again are wonderful blessings.

The eyes of the blind

In the Scriptures, blindness is used in a symbolic sense also. Isaiah 44:18 reads: *"They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand"*.

The Apostle John quoted Isaiah's statement and applied it to Israel in Jesus' time: *"That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him"* (John 12:38-41).

The Apostle Paul continues the symbolism. He wrote: *"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their*

sins” (Rom. 11:25-27). Paul uses the same metaphor as Isaiah and John—Israel’s “blindness” will be removed. The language is symbolic because there is not necessarily any connection between physical blindness and an inability to understand.

The same symbolic language is used today—the expression “do you see the point” refers to mental perception and not physical sight.

Ears to be opened

In the same sense Isaiah 35:5-7 prophesied “*the ears of the deaf will be unstopped*”—not just their physical ears so that they can literally hear again, but their symbolic ears so they may “hear” (perceive) God speaking to them. The situation will be the opposite of the message Isaiah was given to convey to Israel in the days after king Uzziah died: “*And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed*” (Isa. 6:9-10). God used both hearing and seeing in a symbolic sense to convey that, in spite of their physical senses operating normally, they were not able to understand.

Isaiah 35:8

Coming now to verse 8, several additional concepts are introduced. Isaiah 35:8 reads: “*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called ‘The way of holiness’; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein*”.

A highway and a way

Firstly Isaiah 35:8 states there will be a “highway and a way”, called “The way of holiness”.

Human reasoning suggests that “*the highway*” and the “*way of holiness*” are symbolic. In spite of the fact that “*ten men shall take hold... of the skirt of him that is a Jew saying we will go with you*” (Zech. 8:23) it is inconceivable that there will be one literal highway and one literal way for the unclean and wayfaring men—there are billions of wayfaring and unclean men who have died and it is implausible that there will be only one or two roads for them to travel along and not err whilst doing so.

Isaiah 35:8 is the only instance where the Hebrew word translated “highway” occurs, and so its meaning cannot be ascertained directly from Scripture.

Addressing the definition of the Hebrew word, Young’s Concordance states that “highway” is translated from the Hebrew word “maslul” which it

defines as “highway” with no expanded explanation. Strong’s Concordance defines “maslul” (#4547) as “*a thoroughfare (as turnpiked)*”. A turnpike is a tollhouse, which implies a way along which there will be “check points” with a toll to be paid at each point. That definition is strengthened a little by the word from which it is derived (Strong’s #5549—to mound up, especially a turnpike). However, whether that definition, and the detailed interpretation flowing from it, are sustainable is a matter of opinion—the significance of turnpike being mentioned is unclear.

Another possibility of the significance of the term “highway” is that it contrasts the ease of passage at that time with the sojourn of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt: “*Then came the children of Israel... into the desert of Zin... And there was no water for the congregation... and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink... And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border: Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: **we will go by the king’s high way**, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders. And Edom said unto him, **Thou shalt not pass by me**, lest I come out against thee with the sword. And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet. And he said, **Thou shalt not go through**. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him. And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor” (Num. 20:1-22).*

During their exodus from Egypt, Israel was prevented from travelling along their preferred route—the

“king’s high way”. The picture to be gleaned from the “highway” in Isaiah 35:8 is the opposite—in the new earth the people will have free passage along the “king’s highway”.

A way

The word “way” in Isaiah 35:8 is translated from the Hebrew “derek”. Young’s Concordance defines “derek” as “a trodden path or way” while Strong’s Concordance defines it (#1870) as “a road (as trodden); **figuratively** a course of life or mode of action”. Several different English words are used to translate “derek”, some of which are: along, away, because of, conversation, custom, journey, manner, passenger, through, toward, pathway, way.

Although several different words are used to translate “derek”, in the King James Version it is most often translated “way”. One instance where it is used in a **literal sense** is Genesis 16:7: “*And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur*”.

“Derek” is used in a **figurative sense** in Genesis 6:12: “*And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*”. Mankind had not corrupted God’s physical pathway, nor their own physical way—the meaning of “derek” in this verse is figurative.

While the significance of there being both a “highway” and “a way” is unclear, one clear implication is that they are figurative terms which provide for mankind’s progress.

Wayfaring man

On the other hand, the expression “wayfaring men” in Isaiah 35:8 clearly means anyone who is travelling along a road, either literally or figuratively. Strong’s Concordance states that the term is a combination of two Hebrew words (“halak”, #1980—to walk; and “derek”, #1870—a road), both of which may be used in either a literal or a figurative sense.

“Halak” (“to walk”) is used in a literal sense in Genesis 13:17: “*Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee*”. The verse records God’s instruction to Abram to physically walk through the land.

Some instances where “halak” is used in a figurative sense are Genesis 5:22 and 24: “*And Enoch walked with God*”, and Genesis 6:9: “*...Noah walked with God*”. The meaning in those verses is figurative—neither Enoch nor Noah physically walked with God. The conclusion drawn from the expression “wayfaring man” is that it embraces mankind of all ranks—everyone will be travelling along “the road”.

Though fools

Isaiah 35:8 states that wayfaring men, “*though fools*” will “*not err*”. Young’s Concordance defines the Hebrew word translated “fools” (“eviy”) as “evil”. Strong’s Concordance defines “eviy” (#191) as: “From an unused root (meaning to be *perverse*); (figuratively) *silly*”. It is translated by the English words “fool”, “foolish” and “foolish man”.

Looking more closely at Dr. Strong’s definition of “eviy”, the English word “perverse” is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “persistent in error, different from what is reasonable or required”. The use of “eviy” in Psalm 107:17-21 gives some support for that definition: “*Fools (eviy) because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted... Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses... Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*” The implication of that verse is that fools are persistent in error, and when they consequently become distressed they cry to the Lord to save them. In today’s language it would be said “fools do not learn from their mistakes”.

Dr. Strong gives the **figurative** meaning of “eviy” (“fools”) as “silly”, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as “innocent” or “simple”. It is difficult to imagine that perverse and silly men “will not err”, at least in the beginning of their travel along the “highway of holiness”.

Shall not err

Consequently the meaning of “not err” becomes significant. Strong’s Concordance gives the meaning of “err” as (#8582: tâ’âh): “A primitive root; to vacillate, that is, reel or stray (literally or figuratively); also causatively of both”. It is translated variously into many English words, all of which imply making mistakes. Consequently a situation in which mankind will not err will be a stark contrast to the present situation as described in Isaiah 53:6: “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...*”.

When

The next question regarding Isaiah’s prophecy is when will it be fulfilled, when will this glorious situation eventuate?

One indication may be derived from an overview of the book of Isaiah. There is no obvious demarcation between chapters 34 and 35. Isaiah 34:1-4 reads: “*Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his*

fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter... And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree”.

At that time God will call the nations to hear—that is, their “ears will be unstopped”—the Lord’s indignation will be upon all nations and the host of heaven shall be dissolved.

That time is also prophesied by Zephaniah: *“Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent”* (Zeph. 3:8-9). The prophecy also defines the time as when God pours His “fierce anger” upon the nations and turns to the people a “pure language”.

Isaiah’s and Zephaniah’s prophecies use different words to describe the same time period: Isaiah states that their blindness will be removed and the heavens will be dissolved; Zephaniah states they will be given a pure language so that they may call upon the Lord to serve Him with one consent and *“the earth shall be devoured”*.

The literal earth will not be devoured—it will abide forever: *“And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever”* (Psa. 78:69). The Apostle Peter explains the sequence thus: *“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:5-13).

Peter explains that the first heaven and earth have already passed away and the second heaven and earth (the present heaven and earth) will also pass away. The physical earth and physical heavens were not

replaced at the time of the flood of Noah’s day and the present literal heavens and earth will not pass away in the day of judgment; the language is symbolic. The term “world” in 2 Peter 3:6 is translated from the Greek “*kosmos*” which means arrangement or order of things, and it was the order of things that passed away in Noah’s flood and which will do so again in the day described in Isaiah 34, Zephaniah 3 and 2 Peter 3.

Time will be required

Isaiah 2:2-5 describes a time when peace and harmony will pervade the earth. The verses read: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD”*.

Several expressions in those verses imply that mankind’s restoration to perfection will occur over a period of time. The implication arises from the expressions that the nations will “*flow unto it*”, they will say “*let us go to the mountain of the Lord*”, where they will be taught. All of those processes currently require a period of time and there is no indication that a period of time will not be required at that time. Indeed it will be as Isaiah 26:9 states: *“... for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness”*. The learning process requires time.

Not pass over it

The expression “not pass over it” has a wide variety of meanings. Dr Strong (#5674) defines it as “to cross over; used very widely of any *transition*”. One contrasting situation was when the angel of death passed over the land at the time of Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:12). The unclean will not pass over the highway, that is remain unclean, but will be changed.

A glorious scenario

Notwithstanding it is not possible to form firm conclusions regarding some aspects of Isaiah 35:1-8, the scenario described therein is so glorious that, as the prophet went on to write: *“the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”* (Isa. 65:17).■

THE PALM TREE

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" (Gen. 1:29). God has provided mankind with many varieties of trees that produce edible fruit: fig, palm, almond, chestnut, mulberry, olive, pomegranate.

As well as being a source of edible fruit, the date palm tree has several uses: its leaves can be woven into mats, baskets or rigging, and its trunk provides timber suitable for buildings and furniture.

Characteristics

The palm trees which grew in Palestine had a smooth, straight trunk which was also tall and slender. It had deep roots which reached into a hidden supply of water and therefore it was able to survive a severe drought and withstand strong winds. Its sap channel was in the centre of the trunk, not just under the bark as in other trees, and thus damage to the exterior bark did not result in the tree dying. The palm tree does not bear fruit until it is approximately six years old; it continues to bear for another 70 years with the fruit becoming sweeter as the tree ages.

Another characteristic of the palm tree is its longevity. A seed from a date palm was discovered about thirty years ago during archaeological excavations on Mount Masada on the shores of the Dead Sea. It is probable the seed had been there since the Roman siege approximately 1900 years ago. It was planted in a kibbutz in the Arava Desert, it germinated and grew into a normal, healthy tree. It is the oldest seed known ever to do so.

Similarities for the Christian

Several of the characteristics of the palm tree are similar to the characteristics which a Christian should develop. Firstly their source of life—their sap channel—is deep within, not just under the surface, and consequently it can withstand outward scarring. The Christian also must withstand “scarring”: *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”* (Phil. 1:29). The “outer man” can be abused and scarred by circumstances without affecting the “inner man”.

Its deep roots enable the palm tree to withstand strong winds. It is his deep love of God and his fellowman that enables the Christian to withstand the winds they encounter during life: *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love...”* (Eph. 3:17-19). Deep roots are also required to withstand the battering of erroneous doctrines:

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...” (Eph. 4:14). The resilience of the palm tree provides a model for the Christian to emulate.

Maturity

In Psalm 92:12-14 the righteous are likened to a palm tree, bearing fruit in their old age: *“The righteous will flourish like the palm tree ... Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.”* Just as the palm tree yields its most prolific crop when it is approximately thirty years old, and continues to bear fruit for seventy years, the fruits of the Spirit also mature (and become sweeter) with age.

Leaves and branches

The palm tree holds special significance because the people used its branches to welcome Jesus when he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem one week before His crucifixion: *“On the next day much people ... when they heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord”* (John 12:13). The palm tree was used to herald Jesus’ victorious arrival; the Christian should herald the coming of their King.

Beauty

In spite of its inner qualities, the palm tree is not renowned for beauty. Likewise the Christian should not strive for outward glamour but rather should concentrate on bringing forth *“fruits meet for repentance”* (Matt. 3:8):

A little seed lay in the ground, and soon began to sprout. “Now which of all the flowers around”, it mused “shall I come out?

The lily’s face is fair and proud but just a trifle cold; The rose, I think, is rather loud, and then its fashion’s old. The violet is very well, but not a flower I’d choose, Nor yet the Canterbury bell - I never cared for blues And so it criticized each flower, this supercilious seed, Until it woke one summer hour and found itself a weed■

PEOPLES PAPER

AND HERALD OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM

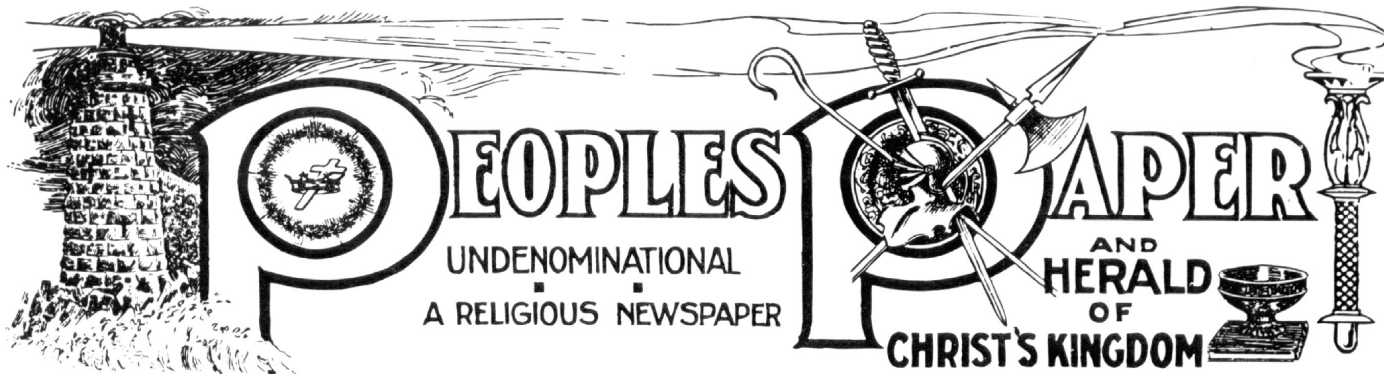
ABN 23 734 654 922

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

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Volume 94 No. 4

AUSTRALIA

October—December 2011

THE FULNESS OF TIME

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians 4:4)

Time is an abstract quantity, that is, it cannot be detected by the human senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing or smell. Nevertheless humans do have a sense of time in that they can sense how long ago an event occurred—was it a minute ago, an hour ago or a year ago?

On the other hand God is the master of time. He works to a precise schedule, one of the first evidences of which is His promise to Noah regarding the rain which resulted in the flood: *"For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights..."* (Gen. 7:4). *"And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth"* (Gen. 7:10). It started to rain precisely at the time God declared—seven days later—even though it had not previously rained on the earth (Gen. 2:5-6).

Seven days is only one week and so it may be contended it was easy for God to predict when the rain would start to fall. However God also works to a much longer time span, an example of which is His statement to Abraham regarding the birth of Isaac: *"But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year"* (Gen. 17:21). God set a time 12 months hence. Sarah laughed at the suggestion that she could bear a child in her old age, and so God confirmed His promise: *"Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son"* (Gen. 18:11-14). God's promise was fulfilled at precisely the time He had nominated: *"And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare*

Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (Gen. 21:1-2).

Captivity

God's plans span even greater periods. His plan for Israel was that they would be in captivity in Babylon for seventy years: *"And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon..."* (Jer. 25:11-12). *"For thus saith the LORD, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place"* (Jer. 29:10).

So great was the faith of the patriarchs in God's ability to carry out His plans and promises at the time He had nominated that Daniel believed Jeremiah's prophecy: *"In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem"* (Dan. 9:2).

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Centuries

While seventy years was the accepted life-span of human beings (Psa. 90:10), God's plans extend over even greater periods—indeed centuries—as was the case of Israel's slavery in Egypt: *"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"* (Gen. 15:13).

So remarkable was the fulfilment of that prophecy that several centuries later Stephen recounted it as a testimony of God's omnipotence: *"Then said the high priest, Are these things so? 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 God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years"* (Acts 7:1-2, 6).

God's Omnipotence

All of the previous events testify to God's ability, power and authority to orchestrate world events and it is impossible for mankind to change His schedule. One example of mankind's failed attempt to change God's schedule is that of the *"king of the north"* and *"the king of the south"*: *"And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end shall be at the time appointed... And some of them of understanding shall fall... because it is yet for a time appointed"* (Dan. 11:9, 13, 27, 35). Nothing the kings could do would alter God's time frame: it would be at the *"time appointed"*.

The Messiah

Earlier in his book Daniel records his vision with the angel Gabriel: *"Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning... And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding... for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself.: 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, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate" (Dan. 9:21-27).

Thus Daniel was given precise details regarding when God would send the Messiah—69 weeks after the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. In view of this prophecy, and the time scale of a day for a year (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6), it is not surprising that, when John the Baptist came preaching the prophecy of Isaiah and urging the people to repent (Luke 3:2-6), they wondered if he were the Messiah: *"And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not"* (Luke 3:15). For those to whom God revealed Him, subsequent events left no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah: *"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them"* (Matt. 11:2-5). Likewise Peter referred to the miracles Jesus had performed to convince the Israelites that Jesus was indeed the Messiah: *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know"* (Acts 2:22).

Since then those who believe that Jesus was the Son of God have rejoiced in the hope of salvation from death which His death and resurrection have facilitated: *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind... 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. 1:7-10).

Paul's testimony

It was in that context and with that understanding of God's time frame that the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians: *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law"* (Gal. 4:4). Paul confirms that God had a predetermined time at which He would send His Son to Earth. He did not do so until that predetermined time had come, and it is in that event that Christians now rejoice: *"And Joseph*

also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. 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 2:4-11). Jesus’ birth was reason for much rejoicing—the long-promised Messiah had come!

Star in the east

One of the phenomena that accompanied Jesus’ birth was the star in the east which directed the wise men to Jerusalem and then to Jesus’ birthplace in Bethlehem: “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... And when he (Herod) had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet... When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was” (Matt. 2:1-9).

Such a star may be regarded as a miracle, that is, that God created it at that time specifically to fulfil His purpose. However some astronomers believe that it was an even greater miracle than what a spontaneous creation might imply, and its existence at that very time was further testimony that the fulness of time had come for the Messiah’s advent.

The suggestion is that the star of Bethlehem might have been caused by the movement of planet Jupiter. Using historical records and computer simulations that allow the position of the stars and planets to be charted back to around the time when Jesus is believed to have been born, some astronomers claim there was an unusual astronomical event: between September 3BC and May 2BC there were three “conjunctions” where the planet Jupiter and a star called Regulus passed close to each other in the night sky. The planet passed Regulus travelling first in its

usual easterly movement, before then appearing to reverse and pass it again in a westerly direction and then changing direction once more to resume its normal direction to the east to pass the star for a third time. En route for Bethlehem the miraculous star which they had seen in the far east appeared to them again, apparently as a ball of light or of fire travelling near the earth, and serving as a guide until they reached the very place where Jesus lay.

Another explanation offered by astronomers is based on the “second retrograde conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and at the point where the planets reached the opposition of the sun”. The “opposition” was at its height and directly south in the skies for the elected **moment of birth**. In other words the Star of Bethlehem stood directly above the place where Jesus was born at the moment of His birth.

Such explanations do not denigrate the Biblical account but rather they accentuate it. The heavenly bodies were created and set in their paths at least 4000 years previously (Job 9:1-9). And now, at the moment of Jesus’ birth, they are in a rare and spectacular orientation. Is it possible God pre-planned their alignment centuries ago, and He sent forth His Son at precisely His pre-arranged “instant” of time when that rare orientation would occur? It is a remarkable coincidence, especially given the speed at which the heavenly bodies are considered to be moving. Thus it was indeed in the fulness of time that God sent forth His Son!

Into the future

Consequently the Christian can look forward fully assured that God’s promises relating to the future are sure and steadfast. The ransom sacrifice of Jesus will be “testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:6), that is, when all the world will be resurrected, both “the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15).

Meanwhile the Christian can but wait for God’s predetermined time to bless all the families of the earth: “And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for **an appointed time**, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. 2:2-3). “And he shall send Jesus Christ... Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20-21). “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:19-20).■

OUR FATHER ABRAHAM

"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:16).

Abraham's importance in God's plan is evident from the references to him in the New Testament. Of particular significance is his faith. So significant was his faith that it is to those who, not being of the law, exemplify a similar faith that *"the promise is sure"*.

Initially Abraham's name was Abram. Later God changed it to Abraham: *"And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (Gen. 11:26). "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee" (Gen. 17:5).*

Get thee out of thy father's house

Abram married Sarai after which he left the land of his birth, Ur of the Chaldees, with his father Terah. The text states that Terah set out for the land of Canaan but he died *en route* at Haran: *"And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran" (Gen. 11:31-32).*

Genesis 11:31 may be understood to say that Terah was the initiator of the expedition and Abram merely went along with his father. However Genesis 12:1 reveals that, while that might appear to be the case, it was God who was directing their affairs: *"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee"*. And so it was that, regardless of whether he realised it, Terah was fulfilling God's plan. Further, the fact that Terah was not aware of God's direction of their affairs was consistent with his worship of false gods: *"And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time (that is, before they left Ur of the Chaldees—"the flood" means the river Euphrates), even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Joshua 24:2).*

Not knowing whither He went

Genesis 11:31 may also be interpreted to say that Terah knew, before he set out, that his destination was the land of Canaan: *"... they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of*

Canaan..." However Hebrews 11:8 reads: *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went"*. Consequently, at first glance, Hebrews 11:8 might appear to be at variance with the record in Genesis 11. The seeming contradiction illustrates the perspective with which the Scriptures are written: Moses wrote Genesis 11:31 several centuries after Terah left Ur of the Chaldees and hence Genesis 11:31 is a retrospective and large scale view.

Regardless of how Genesis 11:31 is interpreted, after Terah died at Haran Abram was the decision maker, and he did not know his destination other than it was a land which God would later give him.

Separation

The way in which God exercised His hand in Abram's departure from Ur of the Chaldees has lessons for the Christian. In some respects Abram's position was similar to that of the Christian while in others it was very different.

One of the similarities is the instruction to Abram to leave his family and his father's house. One may imagine that it would have been a wrench for Abram to leave that environment. The Christian may relate that requirement to the pilgrimage upon which they are required to embark. They must look for the Lord's hand in all their doings and respond to His command without question, as exemplified by Jesus' disciples: *"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-22).*

Likewise Barnabas and Saul left their homeland environment to serve the Lord: *"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy*

Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:1-4). The Christian must also be prepared to leave all they have, including family, to follow Him if He so requires.

Emotional separation

Not every Christian is called upon to leave their home environment. However they might be called upon to separate themselves emotionally from those dear to them, as Jesus said: *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37): “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-33).*

The expression *“hate not his father, and mother...”* has to be interpreted in the wider context of the Scriptures. In some instances “hatred” means vitriolic feelings as was the animosity towards Jesus which ultimately led to His crucifixion: *“...they hated me without a cause” (John 15:25).* However the over-riding principle for the Christian is not to hate anyone, not even their enemies: *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:43-44).* Thus the expression relating to hating one’s parents illustrates the supreme position the Master must occupy in the mind of every Christian—the Christian’s love for Him must exceed that for his temporal family.

Such a priority of affection might lead to the family divorcing themselves from the Christian and thus it might be necessary for the Christian to emotionally separate themselves from their family. Such standing apart should not be a surprise to the Christian because Jesus foretold such situations will occur, and the Christian must be prepared to pay the price: *“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:34-37).*

In all of life’s experiences the Christian must be ever mindful of the exhortation: *“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:16-18).* While the Christian might not be called upon to separate themselves physically from their earthly family they might need to “stand apart” from those around them.

Destination

In one sense the Christian’s destination is the opposite of Abram’s in that the Christian’s destination is defined and assured before they set out: *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).* A crown of life is also promised to the faithful in the church of Smyrna: *“...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).*

The Apostle Paul termed his reward a “crown of righteousness” which he was assured was set aside for him: *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).*

The terms crown of life and crown of righteousness are synonymous: eternal will be offered only to the righteous: *“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46).*

The promise of eternal life should be an inspiration to every Christian: *“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise... Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath... Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:11-20).* The example of

Abraham's faith is held up for the Christian to emulate. Moreover the Christian has a forerunner—"even Jesus"—which Abraham did not have, and therefore the Christian can be doubly confident their reward is sure and steadfast. Such an assured hope is to be an anchor of the "Christian's soul".

The Christian should be feel doubly assured of their reward because God has shed forth His Holy Spirit. It is testimony to the success of Jesus' sacrifice upon which all of God's promises are based: "*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses... Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. Therefore let **all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ***" (Acts 2:32-36).

The only uncertainty regarding the Christian's reward is their future nature: "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*" (1 John 3:2). The Scriptures do not reveal the minute details of the spirit nature which the over-comers will inherit, but that does not detract from the surety of the reward.

The way

While the Christian's destination is known and assured, the obstacles along the way are not known. However that should not be an insuperable obstacle—neither Abraham nor Paul knew what lay ahead of them: "*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there*" (Acts 20:22). Just as Paul did not know what awaited him in Jerusalem, neither does the Christian know precisely what lies ahead of them. Consequently their resolve must be the same as Paul declared: "... *What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 21:13).

In terms of facing and overcoming the obstacles which will be encountered along the way the Christian should take great comfort from the promise recorded in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*". God will provide the strength necessary for every believer "to overcome".

Justification

Another inspiration which the Christian should glean

from the example of Abraham is that his standing before God was God's prerogative. It is likewise for the Christian: "*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth*" (Rom. 8:33). It was God and God alone who deemed Abraham to be just. And so it is with the Christian: "*To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*" (Rom. 3:26).

God deemed Abram to be righteous before Abram had performed any ritual, that is, specifically, before he was given the sign of circumcision: "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect*" (Rom. 4:8-14).

Circumcision was given to Abraham as a seal (a sign or assurance) that God had deemed him righteous. Likewise the antitypical circumcision of the Christian is also a seal or assurance of their standing before God: "*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart...*" (Jer. 4:4). The Christian must cast away their pride—the foreskin of their heart—and realise that their standing before God is due to His grace: "*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*" (Rom. 2:28-29). "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 3:24).

Further, Abraham's justification might shed some light on the sequence of events as they are listed by the Apostle Paul: "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also*

justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:29-30). If the verses are interpreted to reflect the sequence of the Christian’s pilgrimage, the sequence begins with God’s foreknowledge of them, followed by Him choosing them to be a joint-heir with His Son, which is then followed by God justifying them. In other words, the verses confirm that the Christian’s justification is not a result of their works but is a gift of God, just as it was with Abraham, and the Christian’s works are a testimony to their faith and justification: “Seest thou how faith wrought with his (Abraham’s) works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:22-24).

Father of the church

Paul attributed the ancestry of the church to Abraham stating that the believers of his day were the children of Abraham: *“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, **the same are the children of Abraham.** And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham... That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ... Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made... And*

*if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:6-29). The verses state that the blessing which Gentile believers receive today (that is, the gift of the holy spirit and justification) are part of the blessing which God gave to Abraham, and it is in that context that Abraham is held up as the father of the church: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man... For it became him... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings... For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but **he took on him the seed of Abraham**” (Heb. 2:9-16). The ancestry of Christians, both Jew and Gentile, could have been described in a number of ways—for example, as the descendants of Noah—but the writer to the Hebrews refers to them as **the seed of Abraham** (which confirms that Christian belief is part of the blessing given to Abraham—Gal. 4:28).*

There are several other aspects of Abraham’s life which can be held up as examples for the Christian to follow, but maybe it will not be until the prophecy of Isaiah 40:4-5 is fulfilled that the full value of his life and witness will be apparent to the Church and to all mankind: *“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa. 40:5).■*

TISHA B’AV

Tisha B’Av, also known as “The Ninth of Av,” is a fast day in Israel that commemorates the destruction of the two Temples. It falls on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of *Av*, which usually coincides with late July or mid-August on the secular calendar. It is regarded by the Jews as a tragic day in Jewish history

The First Temple was built by King Solomon and was the most important place in ancient Judaism. It was destroyed when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. The Second Temple was built on the site of the First Temple and was completed in 516 B.C.E. Sadly, the Second Temple was also destroyed, this time during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

The destruction of the two Temples took place on the same day – the ninth of *Av* - about 656 years apart. These two events were so tragic that the ancient rabbis declared the anniversary of the Temples’ destruction a day of mourning. This is the origin of *Tisha B’Av*. On the 17th of *Tammuz* in 70 C.E. the

Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem, then spent the next three weeks ransacking the city until the Second Temple was burned on the ninth of *Av*. In remembrance of this event Jews fast on the 17th of *Tammuz* and observe a time of mourning during the three weeks leading up to *Tisha B’Av*. No weddings are permitted during this period.

During the evening service in the synagogue a sombre text from the book of Lamentations is read regarding the destruction of the First Temple and the siege of Jerusalem. Because people are in mourning, they don’t greet each other at the synagogue and they sometimes sit on the floor instead of in seats.

On July 27, 2011, Arutz Sheva (IsraelNational News) reported that more than 100,000 Jews flooded the Kotel (Western Wall) on July 25 and 26 to say traditional *Tisha B’Av* lamentations for the loss of the First and Second Temples. Also thousands encircled the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem to mark the day of mourning.■

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

God has sprinkled promises throughout the Scriptures. Matthew 6:33 contains one of them, although it might be veiled a little by the exhortation that accompanies it: “*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you*”.

The verse gives rise to at least five questions:

- What does it **mean** to seek the Kingdom of God?
- Why did Jesus say, “*seek ye first **the Kingdom of God***”?
- **How** does one seek the Kingdom?
- What does it mean to “*seek His **righteousness***”?
- What are “***these things***” that will be added?

Meaning

From early times people have been exhorted to seek the Lord God. One example is when Moses instructed the nation of Israel during their exodus from Egypt before they entered the Promised Land: “*Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you... When thou shalt... corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image... and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God... The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen... but if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God... if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them*” (Deut. 4:1, 25, 27, 29, 30-31). In Israel’s case, seeking the kingdom meant doing all that God had commanded them, including not making any graven image. They had to be totally devoted to God’s ordinances—to seek Him with all their heart.

The same requirement applies to the Christian today. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*Brethren... **this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you***” (Phil. 3:13-15). Paul’s focus was on one thing and one thing only—the prize of the high calling—and so must it be for all Christians.

The kingdom

Matthew 6:33 also stipulates seeking the **kingdom** of God. Jesus was making a distinction between the future for mankind in general (which is to be citizens

of the kingdom on earth), and the hope held out to His followers of the current era (which is to be joint heirs with Him).

The prophet Isaiah wrote of the hope for all mankind to be citizens of the kingdom on the earth: “*And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*” (Isa. 2:3). In that day the people on the earth will happily—willingly—go to the house of Jacob (that is, Israel) to learn of God’s ways.

On the other hand the Apostle Paul wrote of the superior hope for Jesus’ followers: “*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*” (Rom. 8:17). Their heirship involves reigning with Christ, not just being a citizen in the kingdom: “*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years*” (Rev. 20:4). Those who will reign with Christ will have fulfilled the same requirements as was imposed on the Israelites of old—they will not have worshipped any false god but, on the contrary, will have devoted their whole lives to His service—they will have been “*beheaded for the witness of Jesus*”. It is to this group who will reign with Him that Jesus was referring when He told His disciples to seek the kingdom—He was telling them to seek to be joint-heirs with Him.

The offer of being heirs in the kingdom was first offered to the Jews and it was only because they failed to realise Jesus was the Messiah that the offer was extended to the Gentiles: “*Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles*” (Acts 13:46).

However the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Messiah did not mean God’s plan had failed. As Paul explains, He planned the grafting in of the Gentiles from the beginning of time: “*As he saith also in Osee (Hosea 2:23), I will call them my people, which were*

not my people... And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God" (Rom. 9:25-26). Through the prophet Hosea God recorded that it was His plan to graft in the Gentiles, those who initially were "*not His people*", to become the children of God. The Apostle Paul explained it to the Galatians in these terms: "*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*" (Gal. 3:8-9). It was in God's plan—He "foresaw"—that He would justify the heathen (the Gentiles) which implies He knew (planned) the Jews would reject Jesus as the Messiah.

John the Baptist

Jesus used the same concept of membership of the kingdom being a lower honour than being an heir of the kingdom when He spoke of John the Baptist: "*For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*" (Luke 7:28). John also knew he was not a joint-heir: "*John answered and said... I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled*" (John 3:27-29). John the Baptist was a friend of the bridegroom but not a member of His bride, even though, as Jesus said, John was the greatest prophet that ever lived. It was not John's province to be a joint-heir—John the Baptist will be in the kingdom but not as a joint-heir.

How to seek the kingdom

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus was also exhorting His disciples to put aside every other pursuit in their life and follow in His footsteps, to live a life of dedication, a life of devotion to service and sacrifice. That is what Paul also said in his letter to the Romans: "*Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*" (Rom. 12:1). The meaning of "service" is worship (Strong's Concordance #2999), and so the Christian's worship to God comprises complete dedication to His commands, forsaking all other aims and ambitions—presenting their very bodies to Him for use as He wishes.

Thus seeking the kingdom does not mean merely "dressing up" and attending meetings of fellow believers (although fellowship is important—Heb. 10:25), nor does it mean merely learning doctrinal facts and participating in discussion of spiritual

knowledge, even though that is very enjoyable. Seeking the kingdom means to live one's consecration, demonstrating by works that one is consecrated to their Lord: "*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*" (Rom. 2:28-29).

Reasoning

For some the decision to seek the kingdom is an intellectual one and not an emotional one. Although he was not striving for a position in the church (the door not yet being open), Solomon was one who used his intellect to "reason things out": "*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...*" (Eccl. 1:12-13). Ecclesiastes 12:13 records his conclusion: "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*".

The Christian must also "reason". Reasoning was one of the bases from which Paul preached to the Jews: "*And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days **reasoned** with them out of the scriptures*" (Acts 17:2). "*For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ*" (Acts 18:28).

Likewise the Christian is to have a reason for their belief and to be able to expound it to others: "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Righteousness

Another exhortation Jesus gave to His disciples and therefore also to those who would follow afterwards, is that they seek God's righteousness.

The Christians' righteousness must be greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees: "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:20). The scribes and Pharisees esteemed themselves righteous because they mechanically observed the ordinances of the Law Covenant. However Jesus knew their heart: "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also*

outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:27-28). The Christians’ desire must be to have a clean heart, not filled with malice or hypocrisy: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa. 51:10).

The belief that God deems anyone righteous because of the faith they hold might be difficult to accept—the over-riding thought might be that one has to earn their righteousness. Nevertheless that is not the case as the Apostle Paul explains: *“For they (the Jews) being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise... The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:3-10).* Those verses do not mean that there is no place for works. On the contrary, one must demonstrate their faith by their works, but it is their faith which instigates their works and not the other way around: *“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?... faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:14-18).*

These things

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7), Jesus taught the multitude that they should not be concerned about their food and raiment because God knows they have need of those things (Matt. 6:31-32). That might seem to teach that His followers will never go hungry or be without clothes. However, Jesus also taught the people about priorities, that those considerations were less important than life itself: *“... Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (Matt. 6:25).* The Christian’s goal should be the attainment of the kingdom of God—that is, as heirs in that kingdom—and not the attainment of food or raiment in this present life. God will provide whatever is needed to enable the Christian to fulfil His plans.

Notwithstanding God will provide, the Christian is not to be reckless or careless with the earthly

necessities that God has provided for them, but they must always acknowledge that they represent the grace of God: *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:10-12).*

All these admonitions give some direction for life, and it’s good to see people moving in a good direction, but there’s no cause on earth, no other pursuit in the history of mankind, no direction for one’s life, that can bring as much joy, as much life experience, as much personal development and fulfilment, as much inward blessing and contentment, as much thankfulness, as much genuine happiness, as much direction, as much strength, as much love, as the promise of being one of those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10), and share the opportunity of blessing all the families of earth. There is no better direction than seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.■

GRACE SUFFICIENT

Bear the burden of the present,
Let the morrow bear it’s own;
If the morning sky be pleasant,
Why the passing night bemoan?

If the darkened heavens lower,
Wrap thy cloak around thy form;
Though the tempest rise in power,
God is Mightier than the storm.

Steadfast faith and hope unshaken
Animate the trusting breast;
Step by step the journey’s taken
Nearer to the land of rest.

All unseen, the Master walketh,
By the toiling servant’s side;
Comfortable, soothing words He talketh,
While His Hands uphold and guide.

Grief, nor pain, nor any sorrow
Rends thy heart to Him unknown;
He today and He tomorrow
Grace sufficient gives his own.

Then bear thy burden with good cheer,
Take promptly up thy daily cross;
Nor hesitate to shed a tear
Nor reckon o’er thy present loss.■

THE INSTITUTE AND ITS WORK

The Berean Bible Institute Inc. (the publisher of this magazine) is an independent organisation incorporated in the State of Victoria, Australia. It was established in Melbourne, Victoria, in 1918.

The Institute is a “not-for-profit organisation”. There are no paid staff; the work is undertaken by volunteers who are sympathetic to the Institute’s mission.

The Institute is managed by a committee of five who are elected by its members at the Annual General Meeting which now is held in January each year.

Membership

Membership is open to anyone who wishes to be associated with the work and the doctrines which the Institute promulgates. The Institute is forbidden by its Rules to solicit members and so the initiative for membership lies with the applicant. All applications have to be made on the official application form which has been approved by *Corporate Affairs Victoria*. The committee has sole discretion regarding the acceptance of applications.

Persons do not need to be members to help with the work; anyone who wishes to assist in the promulgation of the truths of the Bible as understood by the Institute may volunteer their services.

Doctrine

Anyone who is contemplating membership is advised to obtain a copy of the Doctrinal Policy of the Institute (provided free upon request) which sets out the doctrines the Institute promulgates and those which it is not prepared to promulgate.

The Policy does not mean the Institute believes it is the sole custodian of the truths of the Bible, nor does it mean it promulgates all of the truths contained in its pages. The Institute contends salvation is an individual matter and the Institute’s role is merely to provide material which recipients might find helpful in their personal Christian walk.

No specific ecclesia

The Berean Bible Institute is not tied to any particular group. It is not a church in the traditional sense of the word. Its ministry stands alone, nevertheless it co-operates with all individuals and groups of Bible students anywhere in the world who are endeavouring to ascertain the truth of the 66 books of the Bible. Individual Bible study and proving all things for themselves are strongly encouraged: all individuals

are encouraged “*to search the Scriptures daily whether these things be so*” (Acts 17:11), until they are “*fully persuaded in their own mind*” (Rom. 14:5).

Its work

The Institute’s work embraces five main areas:

- **Distribution of printed material and DVD.**

These publications are sent in response to requests arising from advertisements in the print media and the Institute’s internet site. The booklets are published by organisations overseas and are ones which the Institute believes convey an accurate understanding of Biblical truth. The number of items distributed ranges between approximately 650 and 1150 per year.

- **Sponsoring a web site** (www.bbi.org.au). The Institute’s web site is attracting an average of 70 visits per month. It provides a summary of the Institute’s position regarding several issues. It also contains the addresses to which requests for printed items and DVD may be sent.

- **Publishing a quarterly magazine** (this magazine) in January, April, July and October each year. The current distribution is approximately 240 per issue to persons in eight countries.

- **Sponsoring a four day residential convention** once a year; currently in January at Camp Wilkin, Anglesea, Victoria. In January 2011 there were 87 full time attendees.

- **Assistance to brethren.** As resources permit, associates in Australia visit people who are sympathetic to the work of the Institute but who are isolated. Visits are made to people in Australia as well as overseas, and such visits are becoming an increasingly important part of the Institute’s ministry, even though the majority of the costs involved are borne by the individuals who undertake the visit. As well as visiting those in need of fellowship, the Institute provides some financial support to those in material need. This aspect of the work requires prayerful guidance as it can easily consume a significant portion of the Institute’s funds.

Finance

The Institute is financed by bequests, interest earned thereon and voluntary contributions.■

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).■

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE

In his letter to the Philippians the Apostle Paul addresses several aspects of Christian living. In chapter 1:27-29 he exhorts them to *“stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”*. The exhortation was a reminder that they needed to support each other in the narrow way—they needed to *“strive together”*.

On the other hand, in chapter 2:12 he exhorted them *“to work out their own salvation”*. The exhortation was applicable in both an individual sense and a collective sense. In an individual sense it was consistent with his exhortation to the saints in Rome: *“... Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”* (Rom. 14:5). In the collective sense the exhortation was relevant because he had left them, having sailed to Troas (Acts 20:4-6). As an ecclesia they had to sustain themselves.

Chapter 3 begins with the exhortation to *“rejoice in the Lord”*. Rejoicing in the Lord necessitates counting one's blessings. However that does not mean that *“everything in the garden is lovely”*. On the contrary they were to be aware of the dangers that surrounded them: he exhorts them to beware of *“dogs”*. No verse specifically identifies who the *“dogs”* were; Jesus also used the term (Matt. 7:6) but He did not provide any clue as to whom He meant.

Paul further warned the Philippians to *“beware of evil workers”*. These were they who were aggressive opponents, acting in ways which were both deceitful and destructive. Paul describes them in his letter to the Corinthians: *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:13).

Paul further warned the Philippians to *“beware of the circumcision”* (chapter 3:1). The circumcision were self-righteous Jews who not only rejected Jesus as the Messiah but who also opposed all those who did recognise Him as their Saviour: *“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness”* (Matt. 23:27).

The mind and heart

The mind determines the nature of a man: *“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...”* (Prov. 23:7). Likewise Jesus said to the Pharisees: *“O generation of vipers... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil*

things...” (Matt. 12:34-35). Proverbs 4:23 contains the exhortation: *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”*.

And so it is that Paul concludes his letter to the Philippians with some exhortations regarding the protection of their mind. He lists several things and exhorts them to *“think on these things”* (Phil. 4:8).

Things that are true

Paul writes that the first safe-guard of the mind is to think on *“whatsoever things are true”*.

“Truth” is wide ranging—the root meaning of the Greek is “not concealing”, that is, not deceitful, not frivolous, and not fictitious.

Fiction and deceit go hand in hand in that both strive to lead one to believe things to be true when they are not true. Both conceal the truth; they distort one's vision. They present something that is not factual as though it were fact. Once fiction enters one's intellect, the mind becomes clouded and it becomes difficult to distinguish truth from error—how does one know where the fiction ends and the truth begin? The difference between the effects of truth and fiction is illustrated by Peter's experience when the angel released him from prison: *“And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision”* (Acts 12:7-9). The incident illustrates the confusion and uncertainty which a vision (or fiction—something which is not real) causes in the mind.

As Paul exhorted, the only safe way for the Christian is to eradicate all falsehood from their minds and think only on those things which are true.■

PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

ABN 23 734 654 922

Reg. No. 0022186J

Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.
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