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LOOKING BACK

Hindsight is a wonderful thing: it is so easy to be wise with hindsight.

Hindsight involves looking back. It enables a comparison of the present and the past; it enables the changes that have occurred to be identified; and it enables a decision to be made whether things should have been done differently. It also enables progress to be measured, that is, what stage of development has been reached.

Detecting change

The Apostle Paul explained the importance of identifying changes: *“This know also, that **in the last days perilous times shall come**. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (2 Tim. 3:1-7). He continues: *“But evil men and seducers shall wax **worse and worse**, deceiving, and being deceived”* (2 Tim. 3:13). Mere discernment of the conditions listed by the Apostle (men loving themselves; covetousness; boasting; pride; blasphemy) does not require hindsight but only observation—such conditions are manifest without any knowledge of the past; without any need to look back. However discernment of change requires comparison of the past with the present: discernment of change requires looking back.

Importance of discerning change

Jesus told His disciples that discernment of change would be important because it would be a source of encouragement for them: *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken... **And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh”*** (Luke 21:25-28). The disciples were to look for the **commencement** of the things Jesus had told them about—in other words

they were to be aware of the differences between the situation in the past and that which would eventuate.

Falling away

Some significant changes have occurred during the last 50 years or so and they provide first-hand knowledge of where the world is on God’s time-line.

One such change is the falling away foretold by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: *“...that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first...”*.

One evidence in Australia of the falling away is the discontinuation of the broadcast of church services by radio and television stations. In the mid-1950s, the then Australian Broadcasting Commission (the federal government broadcaster—now the Australian Broadcasting Corporation) broadcast a church service every Sunday during prime time, as well as “Sunday School of the Air”. Neither of those services is broadcast today. Additionally, some of the commercial radio stations made provision for individual religious groups to broadcast their own programs, some of which were broadcast on Sundays. Today many of those opportunities have been withdrawn and the time devoted to entertainment for the younger generation.

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Going back a little further, to approximately 1900 AD, the change is more stark. Reports are that the sermons of Charles Taze Russell were published in more than 300 newspapers in the United Kingdom alone, with a readership of approximately 12,000,000. Attendances at his lectures in the Albert Hall in London tallied in the thousands—it is estimated that the attendance at one meeting in 1910 was 7,500. For most people, travel in those days was more onerous than it is today, so their mere attendance was a witness to their spiritual fervour.

On another front it is reported that in 1905 Charles Russell despatched his co-worker Mr. M. L. McPhail to undertake pilgrim visits throughout the U.K. Mr. McPhail's mission established 70 churches (groups) who subsequently met regularly to study the Bible. Also 27,000 books, explaining the Bible as it was understood at that time, were sold during his mission.

Such observations highlight the “*falling away*” in spiritual interest which has occurred during the last 100 years or so. The falling away is more stark when it is remembered that the population today is greater than it was then and so the proportion of the population attending spiritual services is significantly less. Although the declining number of Bible students is reducing the opportunities for fellowship, the recognition of this change should be an inspiration to those who are looking for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth—the “*falling away*” has commenced!

Consequences

Failure to perceive the changes occurring in the world has the potential to cultivate the mind-set which beset the scoffers of whom Peter wrote: “*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*” (2 Pet. 3:3-6). Peter's statement relates to changes that occurred in the distant past—the flood of Noah's day. Those of whom Peter wrote had not forgotten the flood but they had deliberately chosen not to allow it to have any influence in their lives—they were “willingly ignorant”. Similarly it behoves the Christian today to remember major events of the distant past and to be aware of other changes which have occurred in more recent times. Observation of the changes gives a clear indication where the present generation is in God's timetable, and so looking back is a necessary part of Christian awareness.

2011

In that context it is profitable to look back at some of the events of 2011.

One significant event was the unrest which swept through the Middle East. The unrest began in Tunisia and spread to Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. One characteristic of the unrest is that it did not arise from an invasion such as did World War II but it was an uprising from within.

In that context the prophecy recorded in Ezekiel 38:21 might be relevant: “*And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man's sword shall be against his brother*”. The conflict in the Middle East was, in large measure, Arab fighting Arab, Palestinian fighting Palestinian, Muslim fighting Muslim. The question may be asked whether the uprisings were a fulfilment, even in part, of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Travails

However in attaching any significance to those events it must be remembered that there have been civil wars in the past: the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487 A.D.), in which direct descendents of king Edward III fought each other, and the American Civil War (1861-1865) being two significant examples. Hence when making inferences it must be remembered that the time of the end will be characterised by “travails”: “*For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child...*” (1 Thess. 5:3). At this stage it is unknown whether the changes which occurred during 2011 will be of long standing or whether they are transitory “travails”.

Nevertheless the uprisings in the Middle East heighten the need “to watch”. The fact that there have been “wars and rumours of wars” (Matt. 24:6) in the past might lull some into thinking that indeed “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:3-4), and that the events of 2011 are insignificant, being merely repetitions of previous struggles. Consequently it is necessary to note the other events and conditions which are occurring simultaneously.

Finance

Another feature of 2011 was the volatility of the international stock markets and how movements in one market affected many others. In the past there was a period of time between the changes in one market (country) affecting the market in another country, but today the effect of any change almost immediately impacts on another. Such a rapid effect is facilitated by the means of communication available today: information can be transmitted

around the globe at almost the speed of light with many investors having interests in several countries.

Another noteworthy characteristic of the present stock markets is their interdependence, the concepts of an “International Monetary Fund” and a “G20 Summit” bearing testimony to their interdependency. In that vein the question may be asked whether the events of 2011 A.D. indicate that the prophecy of Isaiah 34:4 is in process of fulfilment: “*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*”. Is it possible the events of 2011 A.D. indicate the (financial) heavens are already (being) rolled together?

Another example of the heavens being rolled together is the advent of the “euro”, and the potential of its present precarious value to affect many countries.

The occupations

At a different level of physical violence, but at what might yet prove to be of almost equal significance, is “the occupations” that have occurred in some Western countries in October 2011. The occupations began with “Occupy Wall Street” in USA and quickly spread to New Zealand, England, Australia, Japan, Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy. While these demonstrations are seemingly comparatively innocuous, their root cause is, in large measure, the same as those in the Middle East: the weak rising up against the strong; the poor against the rich; the have-nots against the haves. From an egalitarian perspective the uprisings are justified—estimates vary but it has been reported that 1% of the population of USA own or control 40% of the country’s assets, and 10% control more than 85%. The imbalance is deemed unacceptable by the underprivileged and they are not going to continue to tolerate it. At this stage the duration of the effect of the occupations is uncertain—is the disposition a spasm (travail) or is it something of longer standing?

In a nutshell the uprisings in the Middle East and the “occupation campaigns” in the West are shaking the heavenly powers. Just a few decades ago such demonstrators would have been imprisoned for treason—the ruling governmental powers would have quickly suppressed such protests.

Hand to the plough

The admonition to look back must be kept in context. From another perspective, “looking back” can be detrimental to the Christian. Jesus said: “*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62). However Hebrews 10:32 reads: “*But call to remembrance the*

former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions”. Thus the purpose of looking back must be clearly identified: on the one hand it can increase one’s zeal but on the other it must not excite a desire to return to the things which have been cast off.

Yet another aspect of looking back is that doing so must not cause discouragement. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*...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*” (Phil. 3:13-14). Had Paul continued to look back on his previous deeds he could have become very remorseful: “*For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it*” (Gal. 1:13). Paul put his previous life behind him, looked forward and embraced the ministry the Lord had given him: “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?... I therefore so run...*” (1 Cor. 9:24-26).

Looking forward

Looking at the events of 2011 should encourage the Christian to more earnestly pray “*thy kingdom come*” because no earthly government can claim or promise a fully peaceful and prosperous society.

Indeed the yearning for the establishment of the kingdom has been so keenly held in times past that there have been several predictions about when it will be fully established. However, in spite of history showing the predictions were incorrect, the Christian is to continue to look forward with confidence to the establishment of the kingdom: “*For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*” (Hab. 2:3).

Nations to look back

Yet another perspective is that, at some time in the future, the nations will “look back”. A knowledge of history will be one of the means by which the world of mankind will be instructed: “*And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies...*” (Ezek. 39:23). The heathen will look back at the history of Israel and thereby realise that they cannot continue to indulge in iniquity and retain God’s favour. However, on the other hand the conditions then existing will be so wonderful that “*...the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind*” (Isa. 65:17). When the kingdom of God is fully established on earth there will not be any looking back.■

IN DIVERS MANNERS

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

In Old Testament times, God used a variety of methods to communicate with His people. In New Testament times His methods are still varied but they are significantly different from previously.

The Old Testament is comprised of what would be expected of a sacred volume. There are legislative works such as that of Moses, songs expressive of religious feelings such as the Psalms, predictions of the future and histories in a continuous series which trace the fortunes of the chosen people.

On the other hand a large proportion of the New Testament is taken up with correspondence. It lays what may be regarded as the foundation of Christianity in narrative, with the first and greatest development of Christian theology not being in any set and formal treatise, not in liturgies and cannon, not in works of devotion but in a collection of letters.

Means

The prophets of the Old Testament frequently either appeared in person or sent messengers to speak for them by word of mouth. Such personal presentations were possible because, inter alia, Palestine was a small country. However there were occasions when they sent letters, such as the letter of Elijah to Jehoram (2 Chron. 21) and the king of Syria sending a letter to the king of Israel (2 Kings 5).

Personal presentation was not always possible after the Christian Church spread and consisted of a number of scattered posts stretching from Mesopotamia in the east to Rome or even Spain in the west. Consequently it was only natural that the Apostle Paul, who had founded the majority of the churches, had to communicate with them by letter. Doing so was made possible by the general diffusion of the Greek language and also by the world being at peace at that time, held together by the organised rule of Imperial Rome.

Delegates

In order to appreciate the reasons for the variety in the ministry it is necessary to also consider the manner by which the church was established and organised by Paul. He travelled with a small band of co-workers who, as the occasion arose, he despatched as delegates to the churches. Sometimes they faced the task of bringing order into the churches, as the challenges which confronted Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 1:3; 2:1; Titus 1:5), and sometimes to admonish

the believers because of their conduct (1 Cor. 4:17). On another occasion he sent Tychicus to comfort them by assuring them of his welfare (Eph. 6:21-22).

Many ministers

Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in every city, which was the arrangement in the Jewish synagogues. However there were also touring teachers, whose understanding was not always mature, such as those mentioned in Galatians 2:12-13. Their action in persuading the Jewish believers, including Peter, not to eat with the Gentiles was incorrect: *“For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation”*.

2 John 10 also implies there were other “teachers” who did not present the truth accurately: *“If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed”*. So it was a varied scene.

Further, there was a variety of workers who each had a part to play in the building up of the spiritual life of the church: *“apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers”* (Eph. 4:13). Consequently the unity of purpose which existed amongst them is remarkable.

Structure

The components of the New Testament may be classified into types of literature: personal letters, letters of thanks, letters in deep distress at failures in the church and formal statements of doctrine. In summary it contains:

- 4 synoptic gospels (summary accounts);
- 1 narrative account (Acts of the Apostles);
- 5 letters, written primarily to give instruction regarding personal conduct;
- 6 letters of exhortation or encouragement;
- 3 writings setting out in a logical order an explanation of what God has done for mankind;
- 4 letters of a personal nature, written to friends;
- 3 letters, written to instruct the apostolic delegates; and
- 1 apocalyptic writing which uses images of vivid symbolism (Revelation).

The books and letters of the New Testament were written by eight or nine different authors, and

consequently some variations in the records are to be expected due to the personalities of the authors; they observed different aspects and gave different emphasis to some events. When viewed this way the various accounts do not contradict each other—the message of salvation is sustained throughout.

Such harmony, yet diversity, is consistent with the oversight God exercised over the writers of the Old Testament—they were *“Holy men who spake as they were moved by the spirit of God”* (2 Pet. 1:21); they wrote over a period of several centuries, yet they proclaimed a message consistent with God’s plan.

Individuality

Another fact which signifies that a common spirit (and not dogma) pervades the writings is that individuality of style of the authors is not suppressed. Some examples of the differences in expressions are:

- The phrase “The kingdom of God” occurs 15 times in Mark’s gospel and 33 times in Luke, but only 5 times in Matthew and twice in John;
- The phrase “kingdom of heaven” occurs only in Matthew and not in any of the other gospels;
- “Eternal Life” (or “life eternal”) occurs only twice in Matthew, nine times in John’s gospel and in only 30 verses altogether in the New Testament (which may be surprising in view of the fact that the purpose of Jesus’ coming to earth was that mankind could have eternal life: *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:14-15); and: *“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life”* (John 6:67-68).

Another example of the preservation of the individuality of the writer, yet their messages being harmonious, is the **events** they recorded. One example is the appearance of the angel to Mary (Luke 1:30)—only Luke recorded it; the other gospel writers did not—whereas the incident when a woman touched the hem of Jesus’ garment is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke but not by John.

The individuality of the writers is also evident from the **details** they recorded—only Matthew and Mark recorded the names of the women at the cross.

And so it is evident that the Christian message has been given in a diverse set of writings by people with different backgrounds and interests, each recording in their own way incidents from a diverse set of circumstances.

Indeed God has provided a source of information which addresses every aspect of human life, with the lesson that no part may be disregarded—it is fallacy to concentrate only on the writings which explain Christian philosophy (such as the letter to the Romans, Hebrews and maybe Ephesians) and to ignore the other testimonies—the Word must be considered in its entirety.

No creed

There is no set of mechanical rules by which one can gain an understanding of the Bible: insight into the secrets of God’s plan are reserved for those to whom He has given His Holy Spirit: *“... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit....”* (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

The fellowship

Consequently, as is to be expected, the fellowship of the Lord’s chosen is comprised of persons with widely differing experiences and talents, and none can be ignored—each has an understanding of some aspect of the Word, or manifests some quality of character, which is profitable for encouragement and enlightenment of the other members of the body.

A unique message

The message of salvation is unique. The Bible is consistent throughout, but to appreciate the wonderful harmony of the message requires Bible study and recognition of the differences in emphasis given by its writers, including the lessons to be learned from the analogies and parables articulated in its pages. In all the spirit of God permeates the message. However when the collapse of the Roman Empire resulted in the loss of public education and the rise of widespread illiteracy, all learning and study of the scriptures was restricted to the monasteries, which in turn led to scholars producing massive volumes of dogma and morality statements which claimed to explain the scriptures but which in reality had little connection with the Biblical text. In that context the believers at Berea were privileged in that they were able to *“search the Scriptures”* (Acts 17:10-11).

So then, a review of the ways and means by which God has brought the message of salvation to mankind should result in one marvelling at His majesty. He has revealed His purposes to those whom He has called, but at the same time He has concealed His purposes from those whom He has not called. As the Apostle Paul wrote: *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and His ways past finding out”* (Rom. 11:33).■

PETER'S LAST MESSAGE

The Apostle Peter filled James' specification of being "a doer of the word and not a hearer only" (Jas. 1:22). However in both the physical and mental senses, at times he acted impulsively, one incident being when he saw One, who claimed to be Jesus, walking on the water. The record reads: "And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, 'it is a spirit'; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, 'Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid'. And Peter answered him and said, 'Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water'. And he said, 'Come'. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, 'Lord, save me'. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'" (Matt. 14:26-31).

In like fashion it was Peter who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant at the time of Jesus' arrest (John 18:10). It was Peter who proclaimed he would never deny the Master but who did so before the cock crowed three times (Matt. 26:34). Consequently it is understandable that, after Jesus' resurrection, the angel specifically instructed the women at Jesus' tomb to tell Peter that He was risen: "Go your way, tell his disciples, **and Peter...**" (Mark 16:7).

It was Peter who "rose up" and disputed with the Pharisees at Jerusalem regarding the need for the Gentiles to be circumcised after Paul and Barnabas had experienced "no small dissension and disputation" (Acts 15:2, 7, 14).

After Saul's (Paul's) conversion it was Peter who Paul contacted first, and with whom he stayed "fifteen days" (Gal. 1:17-19).

However, on the other hand, it was Peter who led Barnabas astray at Antioch regarding eating with the Gentiles—when "certain came from James he withdrew and separated himself", with the result that "other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation" (Gal. 2:11-14).

It was after such a virile ministry that Peter wrote his two epistles. He knew his work was done but he ministered until his last: "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the

present truth. Yea, I think it meet, **as long as I am in this tabernacle**, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; **Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle**, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Pet. 1:12-15). He knew his remaining time on this earth was short, nevertheless his major concern was for the welfare of the believers after his demise.

Second epistle

Peter's second epistle is his final message to the saints. It reflects his lifetime of hard lessons, humility, steadfastness, the joy of the truth and his efforts to feed the Lord's sheep.

He commences his letter with a prayer: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you" (2 Pet. 1:2). After all the experiences of his ministry, he acknowledges that it is only by God's grace, and the peace which God gives to those whom He has blessed with a knowledge of His plan, who are able to develop the characteristics he lists in the following verses: faith, virtue (valour, maturity), knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. Further, it is only if those fruits are "in them and abound" that they will not "be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:8).

His message concludes with warnings of three assaults believers would experience.

False prophets

Firstly he warned them of false prophets: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as **there shall be false teachers among you**, who privily shall bring in damnable **heresies**, even denying the Lord that bought them... And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

There is much evidence which testifies to the veracity of Peter's prophecy. Ever since Peter wrote his epistle there have been teachers who have preached doctrines contrary to the gospel, turning it into a message of fear rather than a message of "good news of great joy which shall be unto all people" (Luke 2:10). Additionally, consistent with the meaning of the Greek word "heresy", they have created their own sect, just as it was in Peter's day: "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the **sect** of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation" (Acts 5:17).

Scoffers

Peter also told them there would be scoffers in the last days. In some senses scoffers are directly opposite to false teachers—false teachers proclaim what they understand to be “the word of God” but, as it was in Jesus’ day, they err, “...teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9).

However scoffers discredit the Word, saying: “Where is the promise of his coming, for all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Pet. 3:3-4). The scoffers deny there has been any change and that there will be any change—everything will remain as it is “today”. However Peter reminds his readers that the same attitude existed before the Flood came and destroyed the world that then was, and that the scoffers were not to cause them to lose faith in the prophecies given in the Old Testament: “But the heavens and the earth which are now are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment of the perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7).

Time frame

Thirdly, Peter reminded his readers of the assault which would be mounted by those who would not understand God’s time frame. The reminder remains pertinent in 2012. While it may be contended the “heavens” are currently being destroyed—the demise of the ruling powers during the last 12 months, and the decrease in Christian church attendance during recent decades particularly, bearing testimony to the

fact—Peter reminds his readers not to forget the time frame of God’s plan: “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that the day of the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). A realisation of God’s time frame is necessary to thwart the contention of the scoffers that God’s plan has failed (assuming they admit there is a God). On the contrary, the believers were to reassure themselves that “the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness” (2 Pet. 3:9), but rather it is as the prophet Habakkuk declared: “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. 2:3). In spite of the scoffers, the Christians’ focus is to be on the future: “nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). The fulfilment of the promise is assured because “he is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:23).

Peter’s last words do not require any explanation. They are words of exhortation for every believer and have been relevant all down the Age: “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless... beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:14-18).■

GOD AND ISRAEL

The nation of Israel is God’s chosen nation: “For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure” (Psa. 134:4). Consequently God’s dealings with Israel are a significant feature of His plan for mankind.

Matthew 23:37 records Jesus’ feelings for Israel: “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...”. The action of a hen gathering her chickens under her wings is perhaps the utmost expression of love and protection amongst all earthly creatures, and hence it portrays Jesus’ deep love and affection for Israel.

The Apostle Paul echoes Jesus’ sentiments: “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:1-3). Paul also had deep affection for

Israel, and their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah caused him to have “great heaviness and continual sorrow” in his heart.

Origin

In order to understand Israel’s privileged position and destiny it is necessary to understand its origin.

The nation of Israel was born when God told Abram to leave his home country: “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 I will make of thee a great nation...” (Gen. 12:1-2). The LORD promised Abram he would have a son and through his son a nation would be formed.

However the LORD also made known unto Abraham that his descendants would be in a country not their own and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years: “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). However God also promised He would deliver them and give them a land which they would possess forever—the land of Canaan: *“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee... all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”* (Gen. 17:8). The promise was not dependent upon Abraham fulfilling any conditions—the promise of a land of their own was unconditional.

As God promised, Isaac was born to Abraham. Subsequently Isaac’s wife Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob, although the younger, received Isaac’s blessing and God changed his name to Israel (Gen. 32:28). Jacob had three wives who bore him twelve sons who became the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus God’s promise to Abram to make of him a great nation was fulfilled.

History

Egypt was the country which *“was not theirs”* and in which they were *“enslaved four hundred years”*. When God delivered them out of Egypt He brought them to Mt. Sinai where, by the hand of Moses, He gave them the laws and commandments they were to obey. They agreed to do so and thereby entered a covenant relationship with God (Exodus 19:16).

From that time the nation of Israel was held accountable for their actions. If they obeyed God’s laws, He would bless them and they would live safely in the promised land. If they disobeyed Him they would be severely punished. As a nation they disobeyed and consequently, historically, the nation has been in turmoil and, at times, oblivion.

Nevertheless during that time the prophets continued to speak a message of comfort to the people even though God was pouring His anger upon them. Although some of the prophecies were unclear, when the time came for God to send their leader (His only begotten Son) they were in expectation of Him and they wondered if His fore-runner (John) was their leader: *“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).

Their religious leaders rejected Jesus and handed Him over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. As Jesus was being taken to be crucified a large number of people followed Him, including women who mourned and wailed for Him. *“But Jesus turning unto them said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck’. Then shall they begin to say to the*

mountains, ‘Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us’. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?’” (Luke 23:27-31). Jesus was foretelling the punishment that would soon come upon the nation of Israel: Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the land was laid barren and the people scattered to the four corners of the earth.

God’s plan for the future

Nevertheless God’s plan was that they would not be dispersed forever but that He would gather them again into their own land: *“... behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers”* (Jer. 16:14-15). However it was not until the nineteenth century (the 1800s) that God began to gather them. The process God planned took a considerable period of time, involving two world wars and terrible persecutions. Nevertheless the nation of Israel was reborn in May 1948 in spite of severe opposition from its Arab neighbours.

The establishment of the nation of Israel after so many centuries is a remarkable testimony of God’s omnipotence. That it was part of His plan is testified by the revelation He gave to the prophet Ezekiel long before it began: *“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And He said unto me ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD”* (Ezek. 37:11-14).

Ezekiel was shown several aspects of God’s plan for Israel and how He will fulfil His promises to them:

- The bones were very dry, beyond which any human being would imagine could live again;
- The bones pictured the house of Israel;
- God will put His spirit in them;
- Israel will be placed in their own land; and
- Then they will know their true God.

One aspect of the vision given to Ezekiel was that God would place His spirit in them. The Apostle Paul referred to this as removing their blindness: *“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 fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion 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). Just as certainly as the nation of Israel has been re-established and the Jews have a homeland (the land promised to their fathers), so will their blindness be removed: it is God’s covenant with them and God keeps His promises.

Just as certain as the promises that Israel would be returned to their own land and have their blindness removed is the promise that Israel will be the channel through which God will bless the whole world of mankind: *“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). Today it seems improbable that other nations will go to Israel for spiritual enlightenment, but it will be so.

Troubled times ahead

It is also prophesied that Israel will experience more troubled times before the nations will come to them to learn God’s ways. Bible students differ slightly regarding precisely which elements of the trouble have passed and which are still future, but one period is called “Jacob’s trouble”: *“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them”* (Jer. 30:7-9). However the time of trouble will be firmly under God’s control: *“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).

In a word, God’s dealings with Israel testify that He is both omnipotent and faithful (Heb. 10:23).■

ISRAEL’S WATEC EXHIBITION

The sixth annual WaTec (Water Technology) Exhibition and Conference was held in Tel Aviv from November 15 to 17, 2011. It drew thousands of people from all over the world who came to see Israel’s ‘water miracle’ first-hand. There were large contingents from Africa, Asia, South America, Europe, U.S.A., Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Dubai.

The previous (fifth) exhibition in 2009 was attended by more than 20,000 visitors from 94 countries, including some from countries with which Israel does not have official relations. A common reason given by them for their attendance was “we are here to learn how to better manage our water economies”.

A Vietnamese representative commented: “What you are doing with water technology is amazing; if we could have a tenth of the technology you have here we would be fine” (Vietnam has a copious supply of water but they are battling contamination.)

A visitor from mainland China is reported as commenting: “We believe Israeli companies can help

us”. China is setting up a Water Treatment Industrial Park to attract Israeli companies to go to China and establish facilities to work on water management projects in partnership with Chinese companies.

One of the reasons for Israel’s pursuit of water technology is the shortage of water in Israel—they cannot develop their agricultural industry without water. In another area one company is working on removing sludge from sewage and turning it into fuel; while another company has developed a method of generating power using water flowing in a pipe.

For more information visit the WaTEC website:
<http://www.watec-israel.com/>

Comment: Are these events fore-tastes of the fulfilment of Zechariah 8:23: *“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, ‘In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, ‘We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you’”*?■

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

In bygone days, in some parts of the world, salt was the medium used to pay employees; that is, many employees were paid with salt. The contemporary term “salary” is a legacy of the practice. Hence the contemporary expression “he’s not worth his salt” is symbolic language meaning the person’s output is less than what it should be for the salary (salt) they are being paid.

In the English language salt is used in other symbolic ways, one of which relates to a person’s speech. The expression: “you can take what he says with a pinch of salt” is a derogatory statement meaning the person is known to frequently distort the truth.

To His disciples Jesus said: *“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men”* (Matt. 5:13). Salt that has *“lost its savour”* is salt that has become insipid, that is it has lost its flavour, as Luke 14:34 states: *“Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?”* (Luke 14:34). The function of seasoning is to add flavour, and so the question arises in what sense were the disciples (and those *“who believe on Him through their word”*—John 17:20) to “season” (flavour) the earth?

Present heavens and earth

In answering that question it is necessary to keep in mind the destiny of the present order: *“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”* (2 Pet. 3:7). Consequently any thought of the church influencing the world for good is contrary to God’s plan. Indeed *“evil men will wax worse and worse”* (2 Tim. 3:13) until the present order is destroyed. However that will not occur until the time has come for God to replace them with a new heavens and earth as the Apostle continues: *“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:13). The new heavens and earth will be so superior to the present that *“... the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind”* (Isa. 65:17). Hence any involvement in secular affairs with the objective of preserving the present order is contrary to God’s plan—the Christian’s focus should be as expressed in Hebrews 13:14: *“... here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come”*; and Jesus’ words to Pilate: *“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight...”* (John 18:36).

The day of visitation

Having reached that point it may be assumed that the Christian does not exert any influence at all in the world. However the ultimate benefit God might have in His plan for the small influences of a Christian must not be dismissed—a seed sown now, if it does not bear fruit in the present time, might bear in the new heaven and earth. The Apostle Peter wrote: *“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Pet. 2:12). The Apostle was declaring that although words spoken today might bring slander they might be fruitful in the next Age. Consequently a word in season now, although seeming so little, might be very important in God’s plan. It was in that vein that Paul instructed Timothy to *“preach the word, be instant in season and out of season”* (1 Tim. 4:2), and to leave the results to God—*“Paul planted, Apollos watered, God gives the increase”* (1 Cor. 3:6). Many of God’s works start with small beginnings: *“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little”* (Isa. 28:10).

The Christian perspective

The question then arises regarding the Christian’s attitude towards society today. In view of the fact that the present heavens and earth are to be dissolved to make way for the new heavens and earth, should the Christian co-operate with the laws of the land (and thereby run the risk of being allegedly supportive of the current regime) or should they agitate towards the dissolution of the present order? The Apostle Paul answers the question in his instructions to the Romans and his letter to Timothy.

Romans 13:5 reads: *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God... for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake”* (Rom. 13:1-5). While his instruction is clearly not to orchestrate the demise of any ruling power, it also does not suggest the Christian is to positively support any regime either.

Paul’s letter to Timothy

To Timothy Paul wrote: *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet*

and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Tim. 2:1-3). They were to pray for a quiet and peaceable life because such conditions best enable a Christian to develop godliness and honesty: “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (Jas. 3:18).

Praying for the powers that be means the Christian should not participate in any activity the purpose of which is to overthrow the powers God has sanctioned, but to abide the regime. However it is acknowledged that is easier said than done under some of the present dynasties.

Popularity

One of the prerequisites to exercise any persuasive power in the world is to be popular with the people. However popularity with the world is fraught with danger for the Christian. Jesus warned His disciples: “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). As Jesus petitioned His father at the end of His earthly life: “I have given them thy word; and **the world hath hated them**, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth...**” (John 17:14-18). Sanctification means set apart.

Thus the appropriate mind-set for the Christian in the present environment is that of a stranger, as it was in Old Testament times: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and **confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth**” (Heb. 11:13). Likewise for today the Apostle Peter wrote: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). To this the Apostle Paul adds: “...*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).

Lessons from the Law Covenant

The significance of salt is also apparent from a consideration of God’s ordinance to the Israelites regarding their sacrifices—all of them had to be offered with salt: “No meat offering, which ye shall

bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the LORD made by fire. And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt” (Lev. 2:11-13). Leaven was prohibited; salt was prescribed.

One significance of salt was to remind the Israelites their sacrifice was binding: “... *All the heave offerings of the holy things... , which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee... **by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee***” (Num. 18:19). However Jeroboam rose up against God and broke the covenant: “Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David **for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?** Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord” (2 Chron. 13:5-6). The kingdom of Israel was given to David by a covenant of salt—signifying it was for ever—however Jeroboam’s rebellion broke the continuity (but not the promise) of the kingdom.

The Christian’s covenant of salt

The Apostle Paul exhorted “masters”: “Let your speech be alway with grace, **seasoned with salt**, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6). Such speech necessitated having “salt in yourselves” (Mark 9:50) because “for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). Speech that is seasoned with salt will reflect:

- Maturity of vision; that is, it will not be fanciful about the beauties of the present order (and thereby mislead some) but will emanate from a heart filled with faith and conviction in the promise of a new heavens and earth;
- Respect for the authorities of the land, realising that God has ordained them;
- Sobriety; not seeking popularity, but will be conscious they are strangers in the present order;
- Sincerity; it will not be frivolous or foolish.

The Christian’s thoughts, words, affections and actions must all be seasoned with salt.

Isolation

Finally, the Apostles were sent forth as sheep amongst wolves (Matt. 10:16). Although not preserving the earth, they were not to let their witness (savour) diminish; they were not to lose their savour. They were always to remember they were “unto God a sweet savour, making manifest the savour of the knowledge of Christ in every place” (2 Cor. 2:14). It is in that sense that they were the salt of the earth.■

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST

After exhorting the believers at Philippi to think on things which were true (one corollary of which is that they were not to dwell on fiction), the Apostle Paul exhorts them to think only on those things which are honest: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest... think on these things"* (Phil. 4:8).

In secular circles truthfulness and honesty may be regarded as synonymous, and hence the question arises why did the Apostle mention both?

The reason for him mentioning both is that there is a difference in the fundamental meaning of the parent Greek words used in the Scriptures to refer to truthfulness and honesty. The difference is that, in the Greek text, honesty means not only truthful but also honourable, that is, worthy of praise. Consistent with this definition the New King James Version uses "noble" instead of "honest" in Philippians 4:8.

And so the Apostle instructed the Philippians that it is not sufficient to merely occupy oneself with things which are true, but they should restrict their thinking to those things which are also honourable.

There are many aspects of human experience which are true but not honourable. One example is murder. Murders occur in society and the fact that they occur cannot be denied. However they are not honourable deeds and meditation on them does not cultivate the Christian mind.

One application of thinking only on things which are honest and not on other things is the amount of time a Christian should spend patronizing the entertainment media. Much of what is promulgated in the cinema, theatre, television, radio and printed media is based not only on fiction but also on crime and deceit. Consequently, if the Christian takes the Apostle Paul's admonition to heart, they cannot spend time dwelling on them. The Christian's battleground is the mind, as the Apostle Peter wrote: *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober... as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation"* (1 Pet. 1:13-15).

Gravity

The Greek word translated "honest" in Philippians 4:8 occurs in only three other places in the New Testament: 1 Timothy 3:8, 11 and Titus 2:2. In the King James Version it is translated "grave" in all three instances, and in the New King James Version it is translated "reverent". The New International Version uses the phrase "worthy of respect" in

Timothy and "temperate" in Titus 2:2. The qualities listed subsequently in 1 Timothy 3:8 and 11 specify the qualities which were to be regarded as "grave", "temperate" or "respectful": *"not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre"*.

Double tongued

The first characteristic of deacons is that they were not to be double tongued. Today the term "forked tongue" is often used; it means varying one's "story" to appear palatable to those with whom they are communicating. Such variation is not honest (honourable) and the Christian is exhorted not to practise it. In the ultimate sense, pretence and fiction are in the same category, and hence the Christian is not to indulge in such activities.

Sobriety

Drunkenness also is not honourable and hence the Christian is exhorted to a life of sobriety: *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:13).

Filthy lucre

The third characteristic the Apostle specifies is *"not greedy of filthy lucre"*. The emphasis is on the adjective "filthy"—there is nothing wrong with accumulating noble gain, including unearned gain (that is, interest). Jesus referred to such gain in the parable of the talents, and deemed failure to make it as a short-coming: *"Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury"* (Matt. 25:27).

In the sight of all men

Further, it is not sufficient to merely satisfy one's own conscience regarding what is honest; the Christian must also ensure that their behaviour appears to be honest to all men: *"... Provide things honest in the sight of all men"* (Rom. 12:17). That standard does not require any outward show but conduct which is beyond reproach or suspicion. ■

PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

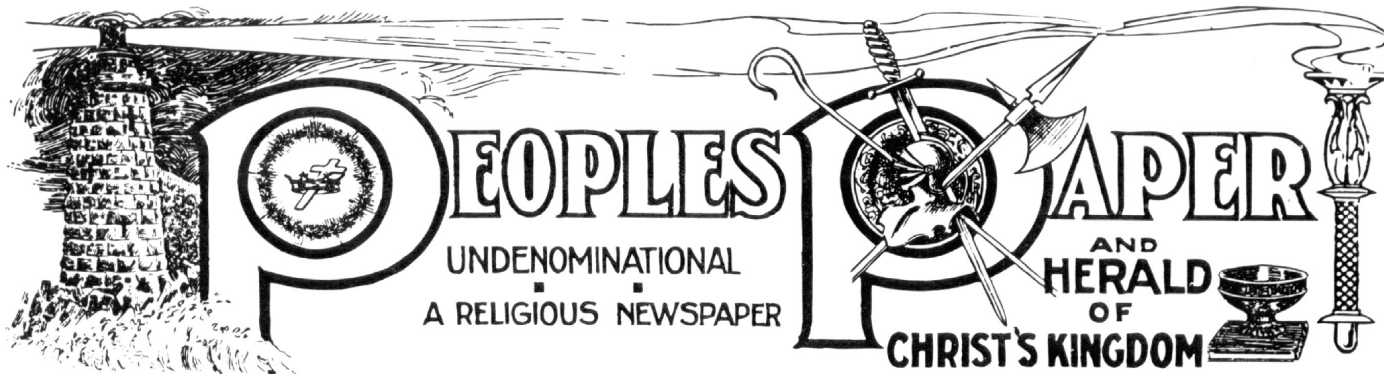
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IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK

"Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:7-8).

At this season of the year the Christian focus is on the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. And rightly so, because those events were crucial to the future of mankind, as the Apostle Paul explains: *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures... Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain..."* (1 Cor. 15:3-14). Paul declares that if Jesus had not died and been resurrected there would not be any hope of life after death.

Prophecy fulfilled

The Apostle states that Christ's death and resurrection were *"according to the scriptures"*. That statement implies that Jesus' coming to Earth, His life, His crucifixion and His resurrection were prophesied by Old Testament writers.

One such prophecy is Psalm 40:7-8: *"Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"*. The writer to the Hebrews quotes those words and adds: *"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Heb. 10:7-10). Psalm 40:7-8 was a prophecy of Jesus' coming to Earth.

There are several other prophecies in the books (volumes) of the Old Testament which detail various aspects of Jesus' coming to Earth. Isaiah is one such book: *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and*

the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn" (Isa. 61:1-2). Jesus confirmed Isaiah's words were prophetic of Himself: *"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee... And he came to Nazareth... and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord'. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears"* (Luke 4:14-21). Jesus declared He was the One to whom Isaiah's prophecy referred.

Virgin birth

There are several other prophecies in the Old Testament which foretold specific details of Jesus'

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birth, life, death and resurrection. One example is that Jesus' mother would be a virgin: *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isa. 7:14). Matthew confirms the prophecy was of Jesus and that His mother was a virgin (Matt. 1:18, 23-25).

Further, the prophet Malachi foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and again it is Matthew who confirms that the prophecy related to Jesus (Matt. 2:6).

Several other aspects of Jesus' early life were prophesied by the writers of the Old Testament:

- Joseph being warned in a dream of Herod's intent to slaughter the children in Bethlehem and Joseph consequently taking Mary and Jesus to Egypt (Jer. 32:15; Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:13-18);
- On leaving Egypt Joseph did not return to Bethlehem but went to his home city of Nazareth in Galilee (a greater distance than to Bethlehem), again fulfilling the words of the prophet that *"he shall be called a Nazarene"* (Matt. 2:23).

John the Baptist

Jesus' ministry was heralded by John the Baptist, whose ministry was prophesied by both Isaiah and Malachi. Isaiah wrote: *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"* (Isa. 40:3). Isaiah's prophecy is attributed to Jesus by Matthew (3:1-3), Mark (1:2) and Luke (3:4).

Malachi wrote: *"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me..."* (Mal. 3:1). Both Matthew (11:10) and Luke (7:27) confirm Malachi's words were prophetic of Jesus.

Triumphal entry

One of the events shortly before Jesus' crucifixion was His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was prophesied by David and Zechariah and confirmed by Matthew: *"And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem... then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me... And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. **All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them.... And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the***

multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee" (Psa. 118:25-26; Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:2-11; Mark 11:9).

Betrayal

Jesus' foreknowledge of His entry into Jerusalem is evidence that He knew what lay ahead of Him, including not only that He would be betrayed, but who would betray Him: *"But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning... who should betray him"* (John 6:64). *"I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me"* (John 13:11, 18). Again this event was a fulfilment of prophecy: *"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me"* (Psa. 41:9).

Although the amount Judas would be paid for betraying Jesus is not recorded in the Old Testament, Matthew confirms that Jeremiah prophesied it would be thirty pieces of silver: *"... Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that **which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet**, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me"* (Matt. 27:2-10).

Crucifixion

Several other details of His crucifixion were also prophesied in the Old Testament:

- That He would be crucified with sinners (Isa. 53:12; Luke 22:37);
- Some of the last words He would speak before He died (Psa. 22:1; Matt. 27:46);
- His legs would not be broken (the legs of the others were broken) (John 19:31-36);
- That His side would be pierced (Zech. 12:10; John 19:37);

- That they would cast lots for His vesture (Psa. 22:18; John 19:23-24).

Length of time in the grave

Matthew 12:39-40 records Jesus' words before His death regarding the length of time He would be in the grave: "*But he answered and said unto them... For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*"—Jesus referred to Jonah 1:17: "*Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights*".

Israel's failure

In spite of so many Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled during Jesus' life-time, Israel as a nation failed to realise He was the Messiah.

Additionally it was not only the fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies but also the miracles He performed that provided evidence of who He was: "*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). These remarks imply that the miracles Jesus performed were convincing evidence of His identity, yet Israel at large did not identify Him.

The Apostle John explains the reason: "*But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: 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*" (John 12:37-40). Thus it was God's overruling that prevented them from recognising Jesus.

The Apostle Paul further explains that they were unable to recognise Jesus because the time had not yet come for God to open the door of faith: "*But before faith came, we were **kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed***" (Gal. 3:23). It was not until Jesus had been resurrected, the Law taken out of the way—"nailed to His cross" (Col. 2:14)—and the Holy Spirit given that their eyes were opened so they could understand the mysteries God had woven into His plan: "*And he*

*said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. **Then opened he their understanding**, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day... And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high* (Luke 24:44-49)—the "power from on high" was the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit could not be given until Jesus' sacrifice was completed, He had been resurrected and had returned to His Father in heaven—that is, until He had been glorified (John 7:39). Now that that work is complete the words of Peter apply: "*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables... **We have also a more sure word of prophecy**; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place... Knowing this first, that **no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation**. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1:16-21). And they wrote "*the volume of the book*".■

THINGS THAT ARE BROKEN

The sacrifices God accepts most are broken and contrite hearts. It was the thorough breaking down of Jacob's natural strength at Peniel that got him where God could clothe him with spiritual power. It was by breaking the surface of the rock at Horeb by the stroke of Moses' rod that it let out the cool waters to thirsty people. It was when the three hundred elect soldiers under Gideon broke their pitchers, a type of breaking themselves, that the hidden lights shone forth to the consternation of their adversaries. It was when the poor widow broke the seal of the little pot of oil, and poured it forth, that God multiplied it to pay her debts and supply means of support. It was when Esther risked her life and broke through the rigid etiquette of a heathen court that she obtained favour to rescue her people from death. It was when Jesus took the five loaves and broke them that the bread was multiplied in the very act of breaking, sufficient to feed five thousand. It was when Mary broke her beautiful alabaster box, rendering it henceforth useless, that the pent-up perfume filled the whole house. It was when Jesus allowed His body to be broken to pieces by thorns and nails and spear, that His inner life was poured out like a crystal ocean for thirsty sinners to drink and live.■

JESUS AND THE LAW

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus’ relationship to the Law presented the scribes and Pharisees with a challenge: on the one hand He declared He had not come to destroy the Law, but on the other some of His actions were contrary to explicit statements in the Law.

Jesus’ fulfilment of the Law.

Three examples of Jesus fulfilling the Law are His reactions to Satan in the Mount: *“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, ‘If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread’. But he answered and said, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:1-4).*

The Law does not contain a direct statement that *“man shall not live by bread alone”*—such a statement would have directly refuted Satan’s temptation—however Jesus understood not only the letter of the Law but also the principles of God’s dealings with Israel, and those principles surpassed mere compliance with the letter. Deuteronomy 8:3 reads: *“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that **man doth not live by bread only**, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live”*. Jesus understood that God’s dealings with Israel in the wilderness during their exodus from Egypt established a principle and He applied that principle to refute Satan’s temptation. In that sense Jesus not only fulfilled the Law but He demonstrated a level of compliance with God’s will that exceeded mere physical compliance—it was the application of the principle that helped Him overcome Satan’s temptation.

The second temptation Satan put to Jesus was to display His Divine authority and God’s protection: *“... If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matt. 4:6-7)*. Satan’s second temptation was cynical and more devious than the first because it was based on a quotation from the Old Testament (Psa. 91:11-12). However again Jesus did

not falter but responded with a direct quotation from the Law: *“Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah” (Deut. 6:16)*. Jesus did not succumb to vindictive retaliation but fulfilled the Law in the highest sense—He did not tempt God.

Satan’s third temptation was for Jesus to “inherit” *“the kingdoms of the world”* if He would but worship Satan. Jesus responded: *“... Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10)*. Although the wording is slightly different from Deuteronomy 6:13, the gist is the same: *“Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him... Ye shall not go after other gods...” (Deut. 6:13-14)*.

Upholding the Law

As well as personally complying with the provisions of the Law, Jesus taught His disciples that He had not come to destroy the Law: *“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying... Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matt. 5:1-2, 16-17)*.

Jesus went on to give a specific example how they were to fulfil the Law: *“Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?... Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:9-12)*. There is no direct instruction in the Law that they should do unto others as they would have others do to them, and so again Jesus is exemplifying His greater understanding of the principles of the Law—He is more than fulfilling the letter of the Law but also the spirit. Indeed such teaching is consistent with His statement to the Pharisees: *“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets**” (Matt. 22:35-40)*. Jesus’ instruction complied with the (unexpressed) principles of the Law—it fulfilled the Law in the highest sense.

Confusion

Notwithstanding Jesus' clear statements about the necessity to comply with the Law, certain of His actions caused confusion amongst the scribes and Pharisees: *"And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem... And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy... he (Jesus) said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God"* (Luke 5:17-25). They attributed such acts of healing to God alone and hence they deemed Jesus to be a blasphemer—nevertheless the miracle could not be denied.

On another occasion Jesus not only healed a man who had been blind from birth but He did so on a Sabbath day: *"Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them"* (John 9:16). After questioning the man the Jews declared: *"we are Moses' disciples"*, thus confirming their confusion about Jesus' origin and authority.

Two other events which caused confusion amongst the Pharisees are Jesus condoning His disciples plucking corn on the Sabbath day (Matt. 12:1-12) and, also on the Sabbath day, healing a man who had a withered hand (Luke 6:6-11). He justified both of these actions by declaring that *"the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day"* (Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5). With their limited understanding of the principles of the Law, and the time frame of God's dealings with mankind, a claim to be Lord of the Sabbath indeed seemed blasphemous: *"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates"* (Exod. 20:9-10).

Higher standard

The foregoing examples illustrate Jesus' authority and superiority above the Law. However His ministry did more than that—He also introduced a higher standard:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment..." (Matt. 5:21-22). The standard Jesus articulated was higher than physical action—now even to be angry with one's brother was sinful, and was to be considered as seriously as physically killing one's brother. Jesus did not merely fulfil (comply with) the Law, but He fulfilled it in its highest sense in that He introduced a standard that was based on its spirit. Thus the Apostle Paul wrote: *"the Law is spiritual"* (Rom. 7:14).

Another example of Jesus introducing a higher level of the Law—the spiritual—is recorded in Matthew 5:43. The requirement under the Law was that an Israelite must not take revenge against a fellow Israelite (*"his neighbour"*)—they were to love their neighbour as themselves (Lev. 19:18). However Jesus now introduced the higher standard of not taking revenge on their neighbour only, but loving their enemy. Thus was established the truth proclaimed by John: *"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17).■

CRUCIFIED AND RISEN

At this time of the year, the thoughts of every Christian turn particularly to those momentous events in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified at Golgotha.

There it was that the only perfect Man who had ever lived, the One who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, was cruelly put to death.

It was a case of the Just One dying for the unjust—in the simplest sense He was not guilty of the charges brought before Him, but on a more comprehensive scale He died for the sins of every human being: it was in His wisdom that God *"laid upon Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa. 53:6).

In the short term His followers were distraught and confused: *"...we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel..."* (Luke 24:21). They had left all to follow Him. But now He was dead.

Consequently there was great joy when the angelic messengers proclaimed to the two Marys: *"He is not here, He is risen"* (Matt. 28:6).

Today it is His resurrection that brings the greatest joy to the Christian: *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death"* (Rev. 1:18).■

THE PRIESTHOOD

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

There are many lessons that may be learned from the Apostle Peter's words quoted above. The concepts of "lively stones", "a spiritual house", "spiritual sacrifices", and "acceptable by Jesus Christ" are all applicable to the church of God during the present era. Midst all of them is the concept of "an holy priesthood".

Meaning of priest

In the Old Testament, the term "priest" is translated from the Hebrew "*kohen*" which means "to mediate in religious services". "*Kohen*" occurs more than 700 times, almost 300 of which are in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As implied from the definition of "*kohen*", the priest was a mediator, that is, he was the "go-between"—specifically between the Israelites and God: "*For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins*" (Heb. 5:1).

In the New Testament "*priest*" is translated from the Greek "*hiereus*". Bible dictionaries do not elaborate on the meaning of "*hiereus*". "Priesthood" is translated from the Greek "*hierateuma*", the meaning of which is simply given as "a body of priests". 1 Peter 2:5 states that the priesthood is "holy" (Greek: *hagios*) which means "separated"—separated from the world and consecrated to God.

History of priesthods

The first priest recorded in the Bible is Melchizedek: "*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God*" (Gen. 14:18). Other priests in early Old Testament times include "Potipherah, priest of On" (Gen. 14:18), and Jethro "priest of Midian" (Exod. 3:1). The Bible does not contain any record of the appointment of either of those priests.

After He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and before He appointed Aaron as a priest, God chose the firstborn of Israel as His own: "*And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine*" (Exod. 12:51-13:2).

When God gave instructions to Moses regarding the structure and furnishings of the tabernacle He also

appointed Aaron and Aaron's sons to serve Him as priests in the tabernacle: "*And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons*" (Exod. 28:1). Thus Aaron and his sons were the inaugural priests of the tabernacle arrangement.

An additional part of the tabernacle arrangement was the selection of the tribe of Levi to service the tabernacle: "*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle... And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel*" (Num. 3:5-9). Thus the tribe of Levi was installed as the special servants of the tabernacle and the priests under Aaron have become known as the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood.

However there was greater significance in their selection and appointment than merely servicing the tabernacle—Numbers 3:11-13 explains: "*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel **instead of all the firstborn**... therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD*". Thus God chose the tribe of Levi to represent the firstborn of all the tribes of Israel.

Exclusive

Not only were the Levitical priests specifically chosen to perform the service of the tabernacle, they were the only ones allowed to do so: "*Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations...*" (Num. 18:22-23).

Thus the only persons who were permitted to perform the priestly work of the tabernacle were those who were born into the tribe of Levi (which, in effect, was solely determined by God).

A testimony

There was still greater significance in the tabernacle arrangement than merely providing a means by which the Israelites could worship God. Hebrews 3:5-6 explains: *“And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, **for a testimony** of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end”*.

There are at least two important points to be noted in Hebrews 3:5-6. Firstly the tabernacle was a testimony of things which were to be *“spoken after”*, and Christ has more merit than Moses.

A testimony is something which either provides information regarding a forthcoming event or bears witness to a past event—that the tabernacle and its priesthood were a prelude to the arrangement to be implemented under Christ and His house is evident from Hebrews 7:11-14: *“If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise... and not be called after the order of Aaron?... For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood”* (Heb. 7:11-14). Thus it was God’s plan that the Levitical priesthood would be superseded—it was merely *“a testimony of those things which were to be spoken”*; that is, it testified (or bore witness to) the arrangement God would institute later.

Similarities and differences

Consequently it is not surprising that there are several similarities and contrasts between the orders of the two tabernacle arrangements and their priesthoods.

One difference is that the later tabernacle is not constructed by mankind. Hebrews 8:1-2 reads: *“... We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the **true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man**”* (Heb. 8:1-2). Not only is the later tabernacle *“pitched by the Lord”*, it is also superior in that it is *“more perfect”*: *“But Christ being come an High Priest to good things to come, by a greater and **more perfect** tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building”* (Heb. 9:11). It is *“not of this building”* because it is not made with physical curtains but is a *“spiritual house”* (1 Pet. 2:5).

Another difference is the nature of its High Priest. Christ is not a descendant of a human being as were Aaron and his successors, and even His human ancestry (via the virgin Mary) was not as a descendant

of the tribe of Levi but was from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14): Thus the later tabernacle arrangement is distinguished and separated from the Aaronic tabernacle: it is not a physical place where people go to worship; but it is the congregation of Christian believers as the Apostle Paul explains: *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are”* (1 Cor. 3:16-17). (In the context of Paul’s letter “temple” and “tabernacle” are synonymous, and thus, regarding the believers collectively, Peter wrote: *“But ye are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”*—1 Pet. 2:9).

Chosen by God

Peter also writes that the royal priesthood (the body of believers of the Christian era) is *“a chosen generation”*. Thus the present priesthood is similar to the Aaronic priesthood in that both are chosen by God. Paul also wrote of them being chosen by God: *“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because **God hath from the beginning chosen you** to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”* (2 Thess. 2:13). It is in the same vein that Jesus told His disciples: *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you... I have chosen you out of the world...”* (John 15:16-19). And not just them, but all *“which believe on Him through their word”* (John 17:20). As the Apostle Paul wrote: *“Put on therefore, as the elect (select; chosen—Strong #1588) of God, holy and beloved...”* (Col. 3:12); and as he also wrote: *“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election (selection—Strong #1589) of God”* (1 Thess. 1:4). Consistent with this selection, Jesus prayed to God *“not for the world but for those Thou hast given me”, “out of the world”* (John 17:9, 6).

Human qualifications

Just as the tribe of Levi did not of themselves have any quality which made them more worthy than any other tribe to perform the priestly service, so the members of the royal priesthood of this Age do not have any special merit of their own: *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty... That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Ancestry

However, a difference between the two priesthoods is that the Aaronic priests came from the tribe of Levi

only, whereas the priests of the royal priesthood come from all nations: “Go ye therefore, and **teach all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son...” (Matt. 28:19). The privilege of priesthood is not restricted to any human ancestry—indeed it includes some who are classed as heathen: “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” (Gal. 3:8)—“the heathen” being anyone who is not a direct descendant of Jacob.

The firstborn

Just as God chose the tribe of Levi to be His special tribe, in lieu of the firstborn of all the tribes, so also those whom He has chosen to comprise the royal priesthood are regarded as the firstborn: “To the general assembly and church **of the firstborn**, which are written in heaven...” (Heb. 12:23).

Washed with water

One further picture which can be derived from the procedures the Old Testament priests had to follow is the requirement to be washed with water: “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations” (Exod. 30:17-21).

The royal priesthood of this era also needs to be “washed”. However whereas the washing by the Levitical priests was physical, the washing of the royal priesthood is symbolic: “... even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with **the washing of water by the word**, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing...” (Eph. 5:25-27). The writer to the Hebrews adds: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

Sprinkled with blood

Hebrews 10:22 introduces the additional concept of being sprinkled. The Christian’s sprinkling is also symbolic, and stems from the procedures required of the Aaronic priests: “Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood... and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and

upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him: and he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons’ garments with him” (Exod. 29:20-21). The sprinkling with blood “hallowed” Aaron, that is, it “pronounced him clean”. Likewise the Christian is sprinkled—made clean—by the blood of Christ: “For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water... and sprinkled both the book, and all the people... And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year ...” (Heb. 9:19-25). The “patterns of things in the heavens” were the original material tabernacle and the Aaronic priesthood.

Sacrifices

Additionally Aaron and the priests who followed him had to offer a sacrifice before they could offer the sacrifices for the people: “Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering... And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house” (Lev. 16:3-6).

However Christ—the high priest of the church—did not need to offer any sacrifice for Himself: He was “holy, harmless and undefiled, separate from sinners...”; therefore He “needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s... For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity...” (Heb. 7:27-28). Jesus did not need to offer a sacrifice first for His own sins—He was sinless.

And not only did He not need to offer a sacrifice first for His own sins, but as Hebrews 9:25-26 states He only had to offer Himself once and not to enter in year after year: “Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now **once** in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”.

The priests’ garments

God gave Moses precise details of all the priests’ garments—the specifications of the high priest’s garments are detailed in Exodus 28:2-39: “And thou

shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty...".

The garments were a token of the office and were handed down to successive priests: *"And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them. And that son that is priest... shall put them on... when he cometh into the tabernacle of the congregation to minister in the holy place"* (Exod. 29:29-30).

God also specified the garments to be worn by the "under-priests" (Aaron's assistants): coats, girdles, and bonnets (Exod. 28:40-43). They had to wear *"linen breeches to cover their nakedness... when they come unto the tabernacle of the congregation or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place; that they bear not iniquity and die"*.

Just as the linen breeches covered the Aaronic priests' nakedness so also linen symbolically covers the imperfections of the holy priesthood of the present era: *"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude... saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints"* (Rev. 19:6-8).

No inheritance in the land

Another aspect of the Levitical priesthood was that they sojourned without an inheritance in the land of Israel: *"But the Levites shall do the service of the*

tabernacle of the congregation... among the children of Israel they have no inheritance... Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance" (Num. 18:23-24).

Likewise the present priesthood does not have any inheritance in "the land": *"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come"* (Heb. 13:14)—the Christian's inheritance is in heaven: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which... hath begotten us... to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

God's Providence

The Levites were totally devoted to the service of God, their material needs being provided by the tithes of the other tribes. Likewise the royal priests should consider themselves totally devoted to the service of God, trusting that God will provide for their material needs also: *"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on... But seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you"* (Matt. 6:25-33). However that does not mean they will live in material luxury but maybe God will allow them to suffer deprivation as did the apostles (1 Cor. 4:11-13).

Summary

There is much similarity between the physical Levitical priesthood and the spiritual holy priesthood of the present era, and reflection upon the physical is a source of strength and encouragement for the personal pilgrimage of all members of the royal priesthood.■

SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21-22).

Although there are more than 30 instances in the Scriptures where "seven times" is specified as the critical measure, its significance is not defined.

However one instance from which an inference may be drawn is Leviticus 14:7: *"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest... And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean..."*. The leper was pronounced clean after being sprinkled seven times.

Likewise 2 Kings 5:1-14: *"Now Naaman... was a leper. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh*

shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean... Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean".

In a different context Psalm 12:6 reads: *"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times"*.

In all three instances, "seven times" resulted in cleanliness or purity.

"Seven times" occurs only four times in the New Testament—Matthew 18:21, 22 and Luke 17:4. Both passages relate to forgiveness but there is a difference

between the exhortations: Matthew 18:21-22 does not mention repentance by the offender whereas Luke 17:4 reads: *"And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him"*. Luke's record includes repentance by the offender.

The phrase **"seventy times seven"** does not occur in the Old Testament and it occurs only once in the New Testament—in Matthew 18:22 (quoted above), from which it may be inferred "never ending"—the one who is offended is to continue to forgive.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness involves recognition of a fault and not merely denial of a wrong-doing. Denial does not invoke forgiveness because if there is no fault there is no cause for forgiveness. The challenge is to acknowledge the offence and then to forgive.

One example of forgiveness is related in the story of the prodigal son: *"A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all... He... came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found"* (Luke 15:11-24).

The father acknowledged the errors of his son: *"For this my son was dead"*—but he dismissed the error. Such is the standard the Christian must practise.

Strategy

The Scriptures provide some advice by which the Christian is helped to achieve that standard.

One very powerful strategy is to adopt the advice Paul gave to the Colossians: *"If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Col. 3:1-2). If one's mind is focused on heavenly things the attraction of the earthly will diminish, and the less attractive (or important) the earthly becomes the less will be the impulse to demand one's just rights.

Nevertheless all Christians are in the flesh and so they all fail at some time or other. An antidote for despair in such cases is to recall the words in 1 John 1:8-9: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*. The first part of this strategy is to acknowledge one's own sins—not deny them—followed by confession to God and belief that He will forgive the errors. Constantly reminding oneself of one's own weaknesses helps to also keep in mind that the other is also suffering from the weaknesses of the flesh and such realisation helps to suppress the demand for justice when one feels they have been wronged.

Mercy

Forgiveness involves mercy, and in that vein it is profitable to remember the words of the Apostle Paul: *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ..."* (Eph. 2:4-5). And God's mercy is multitudinous—it is not a one-off occasion. Perhaps things go well for a time, but eventually one will fail. The Lord's grace and mercy never fail, and such a continuous reminder helps the Christian to forgive those who defraud them. As the Christian grows more mature they realise more fully the mercy God has shown to them and therefore how more gratuitous they should be towards others.

It should not be expected that all actions of mercy will be recognised at this time. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *"That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:7). It will not be until the Kingdom Age that God's mercy will be appreciated—and it is likewise with His children.

Additionally the Christian must always be mindful of the mercy they receive in the present life: *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:15-16). The Christian's High Priest does not deny the failings of His people but is always available to be their High Priest and Advocate before God—the Christian must always exercise the same spirit towards all men, both to those who are in their fellowship and those who are not.

Israel

Much strength can be gleaned from considering Israel's experiences: *"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red*

like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). Both scarlet and crimson are intense colours so the standard of forgiveness is apparent. God has not "turned a blind eye" to Israel's transgressions but in His mercy He will forgive them: "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool". God forgives to the uttermost and the Christian must do likewise.

Sanctification

Another aid in developing forgiveness is to heed the words of the prayer Jesus taught His disciples: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Certain environments are not helpful to the Christian who is trying to develop the capacity to forgive, and, consistent with the prayer the Lord taught His disciples—"not to be led into temptation"—it is advantageous to remove one-self from such environments. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "...ye are the temple of the living God... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:16-17).

Failure

Personal failure may also be an influence which helps the Christian to forgive because it highlights their own weaknesses and heightens their realisation of their own need for forgiveness, provided it does not overthrow one's zeal for and confidence in the Lord—after David's fall he was still "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22). His state of mind is summed up by the words of Psalm 51:1-2: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin". The realisation of one's failure enhances their sensitivity to the failures of others, and to the fact that all mankind is "shapen in iniquity" (Psa. 51:5).

The lesson was brought home to David even more pointedly when God sent Nathan to him and gave him the parable of the one who stole his neighbour's sheep. David's conclusion was: "That man shall die!" "And Nathan said unto David: Thou art the man!" (2 Sam. 12:5-7). God's forgiveness is expressed simply in verse 13: "And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin...". The example conveys the magnitude of forgiveness—nothing is too big that it cannot be forgiven.

Forgetting those things behind

Having forgiven one, the next step is to act as Paul exhorted: "Forget those things which are behind" (Phil. 3:13). While Paul's admonition related to his own weaknesses and transgressions, the same principle applies to those whom the Christian deems have wronged them—forgive and forget is good

advice, and is the application of Jesus' prayer: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors... For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:12-15).

Judgement

However forgiveness brings with it the danger of overlooking or avoiding the need for judgement. The situation is challenging because Jesus exhorted His disciples: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Acting out this advice requires judgements to be made—who or what is a wolf? Consequently there is a need to recognise the wolves, and not be injured by them. The balance is provided by exercising pity—to pity those who are caught up in the throes and wiles of the evil One.

However selfishly "coming out from among them" has the potential to destroy the "weak in the faith" (Rom. 14:1) due to too suddenly making them aware of the narrowness of the way. Paul's admonition to the Ephesians provides the proper course: "And be ye **kind one to another, tenderhearted**, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

Personal issues

There are times when issues should be addressed directly with the offender. However in such cases it is essential that proper procedures be followed: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:15-17). The overriding principle must always be: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18), which includes fellow believers.

In that vein, one source of antagonism amongst brethren is differences of understanding doctrine. In such cases, it should never be forgotten that, while studentship has great rewards, in the final analysis it is God who "gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:5).

The overall lesson is summarised by Luke 6:35-36: "Love your enemies and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful". ■

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians concentrates on the warfare of the Christian's mind. It might be considered to be the out-working of James' statement "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*" (Jas. 4:7). And so it is that in Philippians 4:8 Paul gives advice that is intended to enable his readers to resist the devil by guarding their minds against the threats with which they would be confronted: firstly, thinking (only) on things that are true and honest and now "*things that are just*".

"Thinking on things" implies deliberation, that is, not just a momentary or passing thought, but rather enduring or sustained thought. The Greek for "think" means to "take an inventory". An inventory is a document which contains records of possessions or property, the purpose of which is for future reference, to enable the items listed to be recalled and accessed. It is the same for the Christian—their spiritual inventory should contain the things which they can reflect upon and which will provide their minds with a safe-guard against the Adversary in the future. Paul's admonition to think on things which are just is an admonition for them to make an inventory of just things and reflect upon them as a source of protection from the wiles of the Adversary.

Equity

One characteristic of things that are just is that they are fair; they do not attempt to defraud. The necessity to deal justly was dictated explicitly to Israel of old: "*Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have...*" (Lev. 19:35-36). If the Christian continually remembers to think on such fairness and equity they will guard their mind against the temptation to exploit or defraud another.

Equity and fairness do not always mean one's actions will be seen to be just, but the over-riding principle is adherence to the original contract. Jesus used a parable to explain this principle to His disciples: "*So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the*

burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Matt. 20:8-13). To the natural mind it might appear the lord of the vineyard exploited the early workers, however as the Scripture states, he did not do any wrong—he was just; he kept his word with all the labourers, he paid them the amount they had agreed. While the parable has application to rewards for the Christian, it can also be applied directly to the present life: the Christian must always acknowledge what is their just portion and not covet more. "*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have...*" (Heb. 13:5). Thinking on things which are just, and thus being content with such things as one has, is a powerful weapon against the Satan's temptation to exploit, to defraud and to deal unjustly.

The same criterion of dealing justly applies to employers: "*Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*" (Col. 4:1-2). The admonition to continue in prayer, thinking always on those things that are just assists the employer also to thwart Satan's temptation to deal unjustly.

Bribes

Another aspect of guarding one's mind against unjust actions is to reject bribes and gifts of favours, just as Moses commanded Israel: "*Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates... and they shall judge the people with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*" (Deut. 16:18-20). Thinking on things that are just helps guard one's mind from the temptation to accept bribes, which is another of the wiles of the Adversary. ■

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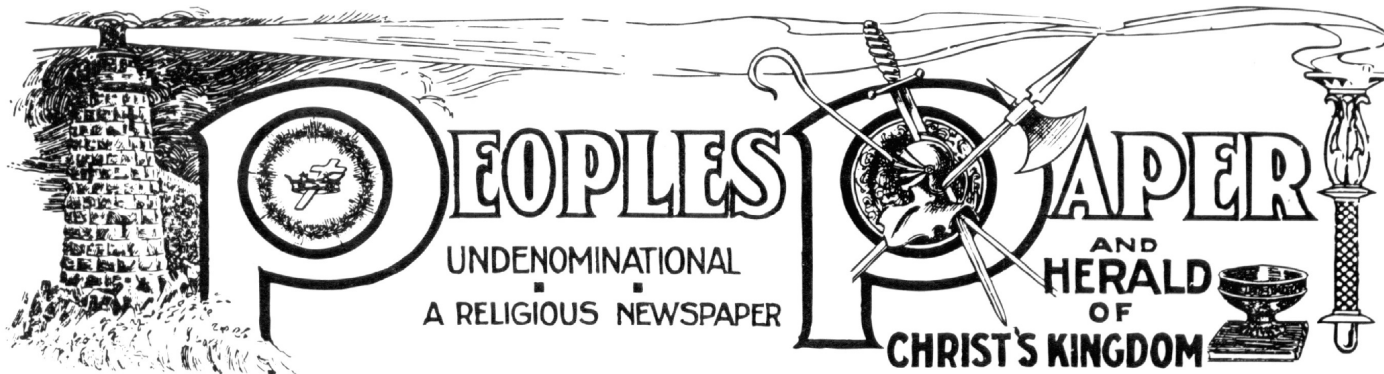
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COME AND REST AWHILE

“And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately” (Mark 6:30-32).

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the working week in the Western world has been reduced from seventy or more to less than forty hours each week. Many businesses now provide rostered days off, so that employees are free on one or two days every fortnight.

The changed working environment has been made possible by at least two factors. One factor is the development of fuel technology. The utilization of energy sources such as coal, oil and now nuclear fission, has freed mankind from much physical exertion. In many cases tasks that required man to earn his living by the sweat of his brow (“*face*” Gen. 3:19)—that is, physical labour—are now accomplished by engines of one kind or another: internal combustion engines as in most transport vehicles, and steam turbines to produce electricity which powers electric motors.

Also the need for human beings to be employed performing repetitive tasks has been reduced by the development of automated machinery. Some examples of recent devices are machines that assemble many parts of motor cars, computers and many household appliances. Additionally there are devices that provide for individuals to “check out” their personal shopping and “check in” for airline flights, thus relieving an employee of the task of repeating these processes for customers.

However these automatic devices have reduced the number of jobs available and hence they have had the potential to increase the unemployment rate. Indeed for several decades now the replacement of human labour with machines has promoted the unemployment rate to the fore-front of government policy: the unemployment rate is now regarded as a critical measure of the “economic health” of many developed nations.

Consequently leisure ranks as one of the modern dangers facing the human race, particularly in Western (developed) nations. It may not be considered to pose as large a threat as environmental pollution, nuclear war or over-population and famine, but it is a danger nevertheless.

Idleness

While unemployment does not directly produce any social problems, it results in idleness which presents challenges to human well-being, mentally and emotionally, and such disorders at an individual level can lead to wider problems at society level. As the Psalmist wrote: “*The transgression of the wicked... He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good...*” (Psa. 36:4). When one’s body is idle—when he is lying on his bed—one’s mind is likely to be occupied with mischief.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in a similar vein, : “*And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they*

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ought not" (1 Tim. 5:13). While Paul's words related directly to women, the essence of his message is applicable to all who have "time on their hands". Idleness has the potential to lead to gossip and meddling in the business of others, about which the Apostle Peter warned: "*But let none of you suffer... as a busybody in other men's matters*" (1 Pet. 4:15).

Enterprise

In some technologically advanced countries the provision of facilities by which people can fill their leisure time is a fast-growing business. White Hutchinson, (<http://www.whitehutchinson.com/>) is "*a multi-disciplinary feasibility, design, production and consulting firm that creates compelling and financially successful leisure, entertainment, retail, dining, play, recreation and learning experiences and venues for... clients*". In their August 2009 "*Leisure eNewsletter*", White Hutchinson published data that may be interpreted as showing that, in the average American household, the total expenditure on leisure time activities, or goods designed to provide entertainment in leisure time, increased by 9.8% between 2000 and 2007. However many are still ill-prepared to cope with leisure time; they become bored, and are faced with nothing to do and the need to "kill time". Thus it is not surprising that education for leisure is now receiving the attention of educationists all over the world.

Frantic activity

At the other end of the spectrum are those who engage in such frenzied activity that they seem to have less leisure time than their forebears. They become slaves to the acquisition of possessions: expansion of property and increasing their assets and investments—the lifestyle often referred to as the "rat race". But they deem such acquisitions necessary to "keep up with the Joneses". Superimposed on all that is the waste of time caused by traffic congestions, supermarket queues, thronging department stores, and time spent watching mediocre and even childish television programs. Consequently the mix confronting Christians in the Western world in the twenty-first century is complex.

The Christian must always bear in mind that a disposition of increasing one's possessions is contrary to what should be the Christian's aspiration: "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced*

themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things..." (1 Tim. 6:6-11).

The Christian's work

The necessity to work for one's living certainly has Scriptural support, as the Apostle Paul wrote: "*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat*" (2 Thess. 3:10). The Apostle also practised what he preached, working in Corinth as a tentmaker with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:3). Consistent with the example of his own life, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "*And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to **work with your own hands**, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing*" (1 Thess. 4:11-12). In a nutshell the Apostle exhorted the brethren to not be dependent on others for their material needs.

In addition to providing for themselves Christians should assist others, particularly their brethren, as Paul wrote: "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love... Not slothful in business... **distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality***" (Rom. 12:10-13). In order to provide hospitality and to help others with material goods it is necessary to have accumulated more than is essential for one's own sustenance. Consequently, if one has the capacity and opportunity to accumulate more material wealth, the challenge arises whether to avail oneself of it so that one may distribute the excess to other brethren or to forego the opportunity and avail oneself of some leisure time—time away from work.

The issue is partly resolved by remembering that the Christian's concept of work is different from that of those who are not running for "*the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 3:14). For the believer, leisure does not mean free time from the requirements and commandments of Jesus Christ. Believers cannot take time off from living the Christian life, and pleasure and enjoyment must not conflict with Christian morals and ethics. Nor is the Christian life something to be followed only in leisure time, that is, time away from work. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians: "*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but **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). The Christian must try to avoid all activities that detract from his or her consecration to do all to the glory of God, and consequently the Christian should make no separation

between leisure and other time. Christians are accountable to God at all times, whether working or relaxing. Christianity is not an elective or part-time pursuit. It is life itself, and embraces everything one does, says and thinks.

What one thinks is the responsibility of the individual. The Apostle Paul wrote: *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:12-13). In deciding how to occupy or expend one's time, the Apostle's admonition must be borne in mind: *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"* (Col. 3:17).

Fellowship

Fellowship is a very important part in helping one to work out their own salvation: *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering... And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Heb. 10:23-25). The writer implies that forsaking the assembling of themselves together is an abandonment of the Christian's profession—very powerful words indeed!

However there is a danger in fellowship. Paul wrote: *"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they **strive not about words to no profit**, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness"* (2 Tim. 2:14-16). For Christians, the objective must always be edification, both of themselves and of those with whom they fellowship, which is not achieved by purely intellectual or academic debate. As Paul wrote: *"**Let no man deceive you with vain words**: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience"* (Eph. 5:6).

Thus the Christian is responsible for the stewardship of the time God has given to him or her. Physical limitations of concentration and the need to provide for material necessities mean that Christians cannot study the Bible all the time; there is to be a balance between exertion—be it mental, physical or spiritual—and leisure time.

Redeeming the time

The Apostle Paul exhorted the Christians at Ephesus

(Eph. 5:16) and Colosse (Col. 4:5) to *"redeem the time"*. "Redeem" means "buy back". However time cannot be bought back in the sense of buying time that is past, thus enabling one to repeat or alter past actions. The Apostle wrote: *"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, **Redeeming the time**, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but **understanding what the will of the Lord is**. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God"* (Eph. 5:14-21).

The sense of buying or redeeming time means to not continue to fritter it away on pursuits that do not have any eternal benefit, as might have been the case before one realised his or her calling of God. The Apostle exhorted the brethren to redeem the time by *"arising from the dead"* and filling their lives with praise and thanksgiving to God. Thus for a Christian to be always working in secular pursuits is not *"redeeming the time"*, but is enslavement to money, the acquisition of possessions, and prestige. On the contrary the Christian is exhorted to *"understand what the will of the Lord is"*, and *"having food and raiment, be content"* (1 Tim. 6:8).

"Redeeming the time" is not filling up time with a frenzied succession of activities; rather it is using the time available to the new creature in the service of God, as the Apostle Paul wrote: *"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men"* (Col. 3:23).

The Christian who not only preaches such things but does them, will have time *"to lie down in green pastures"*, be led *"beside the still waters"* and *"the paths of righteousness"*, and eventually, by God's mercy and grace, *"dwell in the house of the Lord for ever"* (Psa. 23:2-3; 6).■

LEAN HARD

Child of My Love....lean hard,
and let me feel the pressure of thy care;
I know thy burden, child; I shaped it,
Poised it in Mine own Hand, made no proportion
In its weight to thine unaided strength,
for even as I laid it on, I said,
*"I shall be near, and while he leans on Me
This burden shall be Mine, not his"*
Thou lovest Me? I know it. Doubt Not Then;
But loving Me, lean hard.

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psa. 122:1).

Psalms 122 does not state the occasion to which David referred when he expressed gladness that he was going to the "house of the LORD". However verse 2 might imply they were going to Jerusalem: *"Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem"* (Psa. 122:2), and David was joyful in anticipation of soon being in Jerusalem.

The Israelites were required to celebrate three feasts each year: the feast of Passover (Exod. 23:14-16, Lev. 23:4-5); the feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-20) and the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-34). Those feasts were over and above the more frequent feasts they were also required to observe (Lev. 23:37-38). The assumption that David was going to Jerusalem is strengthened by the fact that, in later times, "much people" gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (2 Chron. 30:13), and Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year for the feast of Passover (Luke 2:41-42). Nevertheless the reason David was going to the house of the Lord on the occasion mentioned in Psalm 122 is not stated.

The tabernacle

In David's time the house of the Lord to which they were going was the tabernacle, carried forward from God's commandment to Moses: *"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering... And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, just so you shall make it"* (Exod. 25:1-9 NKJV). Thus the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt amongst Israel.

The tabernacle was a portable structure which the Israelites took with them during their sojourn in the wilderness: *"And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up..."* (Num. 1:51 NKJV). *"So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped"* (Num. 9:16-18 NKJV). Such portability was facilitated by the

structure God had specified (Exod. chapters 25, 26 and 27), one feature being the walls were curtains (Exod. 26:1-13, 31-37).

Services

God also specified all other aspects of the tabernacle and the services pertaining to it.

Firstly, as already quoted, the materials with which it was to be built were to be a freewill offering made by the people (Exod. 25:1-2 NKJV).

Secondly, only the Levites were permitted to approach the tabernacle: *"And the LORD spake unto Aaron... I have given the children of Levi... the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation... But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation...it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations..."* (Num. 18:20-23).

Thirdly, only the priests went into the tabernacle: *"Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services"* (Heb. 9:6).

David

When David became king and the Israelites enjoyed a time of peace, David desired to build a permanent structure: *"Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains'"* (2 Sam. 7:1-2). However God reserved that privilege for Solomon: *"Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the leaders of Israel... Then King David rose to his feet and said, 'Hear me, my brethren and my people: I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD...But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you have been a man of war and have shed blood'... He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel... He said to me, 'It is your son Solomon who shall build My house... for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his Father'"* (1 Chron. 28:1-6 NKJV).

The temple

In due course Solomon decided to build the house: *"Then Solomon sent to Hiram, saying: 'You know how my father David could not build a house for the*

name of the LORD his God because of the wars which were fought against him on every side, until the LORD put his foes under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor evil occurrence. And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to my father David, saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name''" (1 Kings 5:2-5 NKJV).

The spiritual temple

The above history would be insignificant were it not for the tabernacle and temple being symbolic: *"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest... a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man... (which) serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'see that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'"* (Heb. 8:1-5 NKJV). God was very particular and specific regarding the construction of the physical tabernacle and temple because it was the fore-runner of His spiritual temple: *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God... For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"* (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

Further, just as the physical tabernacle was the place where God dwelt amongst physical Israel so the spiritual temple is where God dwells amongst His spiritual Israel: *"...you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their god, and they shall be my people'"* (2 Cor. 6:16).

Building the temple

Consistent with the physical temple being a fore-runner of the spiritual temple there is much similarity between the two.

One similarity is that the physical temple could not be built until God's due time—until Solomon was king. Similarly the spiritual temple could not be built until God's due time, as Paul explains: *"... the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me **the mystery... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men**, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets..."* (Eph. 3:1-5 NKJV). God's plan that Christian believers would comprise God's spiritual temple was one of the mysteries which God did not disclose until after Jesus had paid the ransom sacrifice and had been glorified.

Another similarity is that God did not allow David to build the temple because he was a man of war and his

building it could have been construed as it being built by his own efforts. Solomon was the one through whom God built the temple, likewise the spiritual temple is not being built by Man's own strength but by One whom God has chosen: *"...you are... members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, **in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord**"* (Eph. 2:19-21). Jesus is the One through whom God is building His spiritual temple: *"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, **for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end**"* (Heb. 3:1-6).

Yet a further analogy is that much of the material for the physical temple came from outside Israel, for example the cedar came from Lebanon (1 Kings 5:1-6). Likewise many of the members of the spiritual temple are not of the stock of Israel but are Gentiles: *"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"* (Acts 28:28), and: *"that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel"* (Eph. 3:6).

The stones for the temple were prepared "off-site". They were so perfectly prepared that when they were brought together there was not need for any further shaping: *"And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built"* (1 Kings 6:7). Likewise the stones of the spiritual temple are prepared individually but fit together perfectly: *"... you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit"* (Eph. 2:19-22).

Sacrifices

The principal service by which the Israelites were required to demonstrate their loyalty to God was offering sacrifices: *"Now when these things had been*

thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience--concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:6-12).

Likewise the priests of the spiritual house are required to offer sacrifices which show their loyalty and devotion to God: "... Jesus Christ... has made us kings and priests to His God and Father..." (Rev. 1:5-6). Therefore "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for **a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5). The priests of the physical tabernacle and temple had to bring animal and produce as sacrifices to God—the spiritual priests offer up spiritual sacrifices: "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1). The Christian's sacrifice is their time, money and talents in service to God which translates into services to others: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And

do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16).

The finished work

The construction of the spiritual temple is not yet complete, but the finished work will indeed be glorious: "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?... According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear! 'For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory'', says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine', says the LORD of hosts. **'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former'**, says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace', says the LORD of hosts" (Hag. 2:3-9). The Christian can only wonder about its glory.

Regarding the promised reward for the Christian today the Apostle John was told to write: "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (Rev. 3:12).

The promise of being a pillar in the glorious future temple of God should motivate every Christian to "lay aside every weight... And run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).■

TRUSTING

I follow Christ in His sure footsteps up the mountain

On the treacherous winding and steep trail;
Where He firmly plants His feet I plant mine,
There is not much light and my failing human eyes
can barely see,
At times all I can see is my glorious Master forever
moving forward there in front of me,
The heights would be dizzying were it not for the
dark mist closing in behind us, separating us from my
dark past.
I hear the sound of loose falling rocks as they
plummet down great distances,

This would produce fear were it not for the always
present necessity of staying close to the strong warm
figure in front of me.

*

Trusting in Jesus I find sweetest rest
Just simply trusting I know I am blest
Never a danger and never a fear
Now can affright me since Jesus is near
Trusting in Jesus by night and by day
O, how His presence illumines my way
Knowing He loveth and careth for me
Why should my heart ever sorrowful be?

OUR SCHOOLMASTER

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Galatians 3:24).

Translators seem to differ regarding the lesson to be learned from Galatians 3:23-26, the difference possibly arising from the meaning of the Greek word “*paidagogos*” from which the word “*schoolmaster*” in the King James Version is translated.

Definitions

The definitions of “*paidagogos*” given by some Bible dictionaries are:

- Strong’s Concordance: a *boy leader*, that is, a servant whose office it was to take the children to school; (by implication [figuratively] a *tutor*);
- Young’s Concordance: child conductor;
- Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words: a guide, or guardian or trainer of boys, literally a child leader, a tutor;
- Easton’s Bible Dictionary: As so used, the word does not mean teacher, but pedagogue... i.e., one who was intrusted with the supervision of a family, taking them to and from the school, being responsible for their safety and manners.

The Greek word “*paidagogos*” occurs only three times in the New Testament. The table below lists all three instances and its translation in five translations of the Bible. Some translations imply the role was leader, guide or guardian without any suggestion of them giving instruction, while other translations imply it means tutor or instructor.

The Law as a guide or guardian

The role of a guide or guardian is to ensure their charges stay on the correct path, both literally and symbolically. Part of that task might be to exercise control and stop them from engaging in certain activities. Such was the case with Israel; the need for a restraining influence is evident from the incident recorded in Exodus 32:15-22: “*And Moses turned, and went down from the mount... And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed*

hot... And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief”. Israel directly contravened God’s direction: “*And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...*” (Exod. 20:1-5). Thus is evident why Paul wrote: “*Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made...*” (Gal. 3:19).

When Christ came the role of the Law as Israel’s guardian was completed: “*But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*” (Gal. 3:25). However the majority of Israelites did not recognise they had reached “the place of their tuition” and continued to observe their obligations under the Law: “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they 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*” (Rom. 10:1-4). The majority of Israelites failed to realise that the practices which were obligatory under the Law were no longer required.

In that vein the Apostle Paul wrote that the Law was a “... *handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us...*” (Col. 2:14). The Law was a guide to the Israelites before Christ came but it was contrary to them after He came because it blinded them to the fact that indeed their Messiah had come.

The Law as an instructor

The other meaning of “*paidagogos*” is instructor or tutor. It might be difficult to comprehend how the Law was an instructor in the sense of teaching them or educating them because their minds were “*shut up unto the faith*” (Gal. 3:23)—what

Translation	1 Corinthians 4:15	Galatians 3	
		Verse 24	Verse 25
Diaglott	Interlinear: child tender Smooth: leaders	Interlinear: child leader Smooth: pedagogue	
KJV	Instructors	Schoolmaster	
NIV	Guardians	In Charge	Supervisor
RSV	Guides	custodian	
RV	Tutors	tutor	

God had closed could be opened only by Him: *“According as it is written, **God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear...**”* (Rom 11:8).

One possibility is that it was the repetitive and burdensome nature of their obligations under the Law that could have led them to Christ. Under the Law they were required to offer numerous sacrifices, a summary of which is given in Number 28. Frequent and ongoing repetition has the potential to influence the person performing them in two ways.

Firstly, repetition can cause the person performing the tasks to yearn for something better—a desire for change—in the same way as Solomon concluded that there had to be a greater purpose to life than what he observed: *“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit”* (Eccl. 1:14). Solomon realised the futility (vanity) of the repetitive nature of the things around him, which realisation led him to *“search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven”* (Eccl. 1:13). It can be argued that a similar realisation amongst the Jews would have prepared them mentally to look for something more meaningful than the burden of the Law, and therefore could have led them to recognise Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law as He declared: *“I am not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it”* (Matt. 5:17).

Secondly repetition can cause one to lose sight of the significance or meaning of the task—in modern day parlance it might be said they become bored with the task, and that was the case with the Israelites: *“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats... Bring no more **vain oblations**; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them: (Isa. 1:11-14). The Israelites lost sight of the significance of their sacrifices and performed them mechanically, rather than with conscious appreciation of their meaning, to the extent that the Lord regarded them as “*vain oblations*”. Thus they did not appreciate the significance of the sacrifices and therefore they meant nothing to them.*

Retrospect

In the temporal world it is not unusual for the full significance of instruction to not be realised until after the tuition is over and the student reflects on previous lessons or experiences—that is, retrospectively. Since

it was after the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when Paul wrote to the Galatians, they were in a position to reflect upon the ceremonies of the Law and its ceremonies, and such reflection could have led them to realise that the Law was an *“example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle...”* (Heb. 8:5).

The book of Hebrews draws many parallels between the Law and the Christian faith and in that sense the Law was and still is a tutor: *“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man”* (Heb. 8:1-2). The fact that Jesus is referred to as the high priest of a tabernacle perpetuates the significance of the tabernacle—just as the physical tabernacle in the wilderness was a physical manifestation of the Law to natural Israel so the **true tabernacle** is a spiritual manifestation to spiritual Israel—it being understood that God regards all Christians as Israelites, the Gentiles being grafted into the good olive tree: *“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles... 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; Boast not against the branches... For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”* (Rom. 11:13-25).

Paul wrote to the Galatians to also enlighten them that the “*Israel of God*” (Gal. 6:16) is **not** comprised solely of those who were “*Jews by nature*” (Gal. 2:15), but “*that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ*” (Gal. 3:14). As he wrote to the Ephesians: *“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel... But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ... who hath made **both one**, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances... Now therefore ye are **no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God**”* (Eph. 2:11-19).

Further Hebrews 9:5 reads: *“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.*

And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; of which we cannot now speak particularly" (Heb. 9:1-5). The "worldly tabernacle" contained lessons for the Hebrew Christians, however it was inappropriate for the writer to detail them at that time because they were spiritually immature: "...we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are **dull of hearing**. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be **the first principles of the oracles of God**; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb. 5:11-12). Thus the physical tabernacle contained many pictures of the spiritual tabernacle from which the Christians of later times were to benefit. The writer deems the pictures to constitute the first principles of the oracles of God—something basic which every Christian should understand.

Broader application

Paul's letter to the Galatians was written after the gospel had been taken to the Gentiles, Cornelius being the first Gentile to convert to Christianity (Acts 10). Thus there is great significance in the words of Romans 15:4: "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*". The "*things written aforetime*" are the things written in the Old Testament, and matters pertaining to the Law and its sacrifices comprise a large proportion of the Old Testament. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Ezra, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah contain details pertaining to the Law, or arguments centred around the tabernacle or temple. Hence the Apostle Paul declares that the Law and its ceremonies are relevant to the Christian in the twenty first century because a knowledge of them gives comfort and hope.

To the Old Testament records may be added some 140 references in the New Testament to the temple or its ceremonies. Jesus taught in the temple on many occasions (John 18:20) and acted to preserve its sanctity: "*And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves*" (Matt. 21:12-13). While the physical manifestation of the Law through the physical tabernacle is past, the spiritual temple remains (1 Cor. 3:16).

Contrasts

Another effective teaching technique is to contrast similar aspects, and the instruction which the Law provides to Christians today is powerful because of the contrasts between it and the spiritual temple.

One contrast is the ancestry of the High Priest. Aaron and his successors were from the tribe of Levi (Deut. 21:5) whereas Jesus' ancestry had no connection with the tribe of Levi: "*If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?... For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest*" (Heb. 7:11-15). Jesus' earthly "father" (Joseph) was a descendant of Judah, not Levi. Additionally Jesus Christ was a priest after the order of Melchisedec and not after Aaron, which makes **it yet far more evident** that the Christian's righteousness does not stem from the practices of the Law.

Characteristics of the High Priest

A comparison between the characteristics of the High Priests reveals two more contrasts between the physical and spiritual tabernacles.

Firstly, the High Priest under the Law had to offer two sacrifices, firstly the bullock "*for himself*" (Lev. 16:11) and secondly the goat "*for the people*" (Lev. 16:15). However the "*High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus*" (Heb. 3:1) offered only one sacrifice: "*For such an high priest became us... Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity*", whereas Jesus was "*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*" (Heb. 7:26-28). Secondly Christ Jesus does not need to offer up sacrifices "*daily*", that is not even every year, but once only: "*But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands... Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*" (Heb. 9:11-12).

Summary

Thus the Law was a "*paidagogos*" in both senses of the word—a guardian to Israel of old and a tutor (instructor) to the Israel of God, regardless of whether they be Jews by nature or wild olives who have been grafted into the good olive tree. May all Christians learn well the lessons from their schoolmaster. ■

ISRAEL: A TEST OF FAITH

The Middle East is in turmoil and Israel is in the middle of the region, surrounded by countries hostile to its very existence. In the south, Egypt has evicted President Mubarak and held elections but they have not yielded a peaceful solution—rival factions continue to struggle for power. To the east and north are Jordan and Syria with genocide prevalent in the latter. To the north-west is Lebanon where Hezbollah harbours deep antagonism towards Israel. Further north is Iran which has declared its intention to annihilate Israel. To the west/south-west is Gaza which continues to pound Israel with rockets. The only border from which Israel does not face an antagonistic foe is the west, and that is the Mediterranean Sea.

A realistic evaluation of the situation leads one to conclude that Israel's only hope of survival is for God to intervene and protect it. But in the light of history one may well wonder if Israel can realistically expect God to do so: He has saved them twice already from virtual extinction—from Egypt and Babylon.

The exodus

Not only did God “rescue” Israel from Egypt but He miraculously cared for them during their 40 years sojourn through the wilderness, leading them with a cloud by day and fire by night: *“And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near... But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea... And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people”* (Exodus 13:17-22).

After He delivered them from the Egyptian pursuit at the Red Sea, God continued to provide for them in miraculous ways during their journey through the wilderness: manna for food (Exodus 16:1-15); water from a rock (Exodus 17:1-7); clothes and shoes that did not wear (Deut. 8:4; 29:5). So remarkable was God's protection that it was remembered for more than 1000 years and recalled as an exhortation to them when they returned from 70 years captivity in Babylon (Neh. 9:1-21). Also God drove out seven nations from the land so that it could be theirs (Deut. 7:1-2; Acts 13:19).

However the people sinned again and began worshipping false gods, beginning with Jeroboam who appointed priests who were not descendants of

Levi (1 Kings 12:26-33). For a time Hezekiah redeemed the situation in Judah (2 Kings 18:1-8) but King Hoshea did not have the same influence in Israel, and so God gave Israel into the hand of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria: *“Israel obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them”* (2 Kings 18:12). In view of such transgression can they reasonably expect God to continue to provide for them yet again?

Babylon

Hezekiah was succeeded as king of Judah by his son Manasseh. However *“Manasseh... did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen... he reared up altars for Baal, and... worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them... And he built altars for all the host of heaven... he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD...”* (2 Kings 21:1-6).

Thus Israel and Judah sinned grossly before the Lord so that God sent His servant Nebuchadnezzar to take them captive to Babylon for 70 years: *“... And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets... but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear... Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts... Behold, I will send... Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof... And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years”* (Jer. 25:4-11).

Nevertheless God promised that, when the 70 years had been fulfilled, He would bring them back to their land: *“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... Then shall ye call upon me... and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart”* (Jer 29:10-13).

God honoured His promise—He blotted out their sins, directed Cyrus to do His bidding and so Israel returned to God: *“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee... for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel”* (Isa. 44:21-23).

Diaspora

In A.D. 70 Israel lost its sovereignty when the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. However they were not taken captive to any one country but scattered amongst many nations: *“I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them...”* (Zech. 7:14).

And so the land of Israel lay desolate for centuries. However God also planned to gather them again: *“Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and **I will give you the land of Israel.** And they shall come thither... I will put a new spirit within you; and ... give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God”* (Ezek. 11:16-20).

Ezekiel repeated the promise that Israel would return to its own land: *“Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered... **then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob.** And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence... and they shall know that I am the LORD their God”* (Ezek. 28:25-26).

Jeremiah confirmed that Israel’s return would be the start of a new era in God’s dealing with His people: *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night... If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD...”* (Jer. 31:31-37). God’s promise was unconditional—only if the sun, moon and stars ceased to regulate day and night would His promise not be fulfilled. The promise applies to both Israel and Judah who will then be united (Ezek. 37:15-22).

At that time not only Israel but all nations will know the sovereignty of God, : *“... and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you (Israel) from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will **bring you into your own land.** Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean... A new heart also will I give you... and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And **ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers;** and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God”* (Ezek. 36:21-28).

Prominence

Israel’s return to favour with God will be recognised by all nations: *“In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you”* (Zech. 8:20-23). The nations will recognise that God is favouring Israel above themselves and will seek to learn of God’s ways: *“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). The heathen will seek to learn the word of the Lord.

Further there will be penalties for those nations that refuse to come to Jerusalem: *“And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles”* (Zech. 14:16-18).

So, in spite of God’s previous dealings with Israel, He *“.. **hath not cast away his people...**”*. Rather He *“**hath given them** the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day... 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...**For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance...**”* (Rom. 11:1-34). The test for the Christian is to have faith in God’s promises.■

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE

A pure substance is unadulterated, that is, it does not contain any material other than what it is deemed to be. For example pure gold does not contain any material other than gold—it is not an alloy such as brass (a mixture of copper and zinc), nor does it contain any impurity such as clay.

Purity was of great importance in the tabernacle: the gold had to be pure gold (Exod. Chap. 25 verses 10-11, 17, 23-24, 29, 31, 36, 38, 39; chap. 28 verses 14, 22, 36); the oil for the candlestick had to be pure olive oil (Lev. 24:2); and the anointing oil had to be made from pure spices (Exod. 30:23). Likewise when Solomon built the temple he overlaid it with pure gold (1 Kings 6:20-23).

The above examples refer to concrete (tangible) objects. However in his letter to the Philippians Paul used the concept of pure in an abstract sense—he exhorted them to apply the concept of purity to the things which occupied their minds. He wrote: *“Finally, brethren... whatsoever things are pure, think on these things”* (Phil. 4:8).

Doctrine

Pure things, may be regarded as “plain” or “simple”, that is, not contaminated by spurious concepts. In that sense the gospel is simple. Paul referred to the gospel as simple. He wrote: *“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:3).

The gospel is simple also in the sense that one does not need a sophisticated level of education or complex argument to understand it. On the contrary, Jesus said (God) *“has hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes”* (Matt. 11:25), but has *“revealed them unto us by his Spirit”* (1 Cor. 2:10), and it was in that vein that Paul exhorted the Philippians to not get tangled up with complex arguments which distort and adulterate the gospel, but rather to think on the pure gospel.

The same challenge confronts the Christian in the twenty-first century, especially those who live in the Western world. Indeed the temptation maybe even greater due to the prevalence of numerous *“oppositions of science falsely so called”* (1 Tim. 6:20) which present elevated (“learned”) arguments. Thus it is imperative the Christian holds to the simple (pure) gospel of Christ—that God imposed death on all mankind because of Adam’s transgression, and that He cancels the condemnation because of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus (Rom. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:4-6).

No level of sophisticated thought can change that basic doctrine: *“Remember them... who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow... Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines...”* (Heb. 13:7-9).

Conduct

The challenge of thinking only on pure things also applies to Christian conduct, and Paul exhorted the Philippians to think on those aspects of mankind’s conduct which are pure and not devious or seductive. To that end the Christian should constantly remind themselves that *“... the whole world lieth in wickedness”* (1 John 5:19), and that is why Paul wrote: *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2 Cor. 6:17).

Separation from the world has the potential to bring criticism—one’s attitude may be deemed “holier than thou”. But so be it! As Paul exhorted Timothy: *“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure”* (1 Tim. 5:22). Likewise James wrote: *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this... to keep himself unspotted from the world”* (Jas. 1:27).

After warning Timothy of some of the perils he would face, Paul gave him some positive advice equivalent to the advice he gave the Philippians: *“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness”* (1 Tim. 6:11). The concept of “flee” is not just resisting but taking positive action to remove oneself from the environment where the attitudes Paul had previously outlined were practised.

In similar vein the Apostle Peter exhorted his readers: *“... gird up the loins of your mind, be sober... as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation”* (1 Pet. 1:13-15). Holy things are pure, unadulterated, and are the abode where the Christian’s mind is to dwell.■

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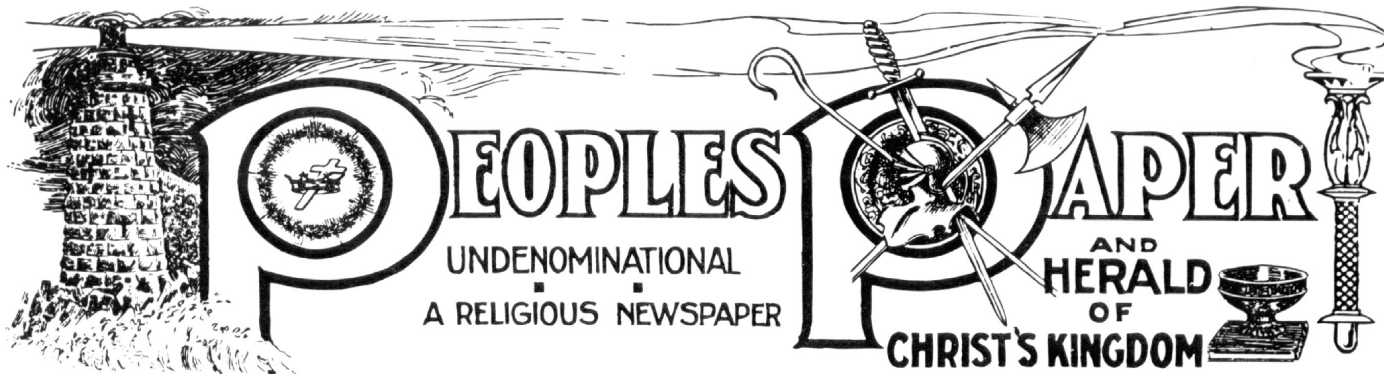
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DIVERSITY—UNITY—PURITY

Some of the changes in public attitudes that may be regarded as characteristics of the Western World in the present era are the recognition of diversity, attempts to preserve unity, and the efforts purportedly made to acquire purity.

Recognition of the **diversity** that exists amongst the nations of the world is becoming more widespread, with increased tolerance being exercised towards some differences. However tolerance is not universal and there are some so-called extremist groups that insist on exercising totalitarian power. Nevertheless overall, compared to the general attitudes that prevailed a hundred or more years ago, today there is greater acknowledgement of differences. One example of the increased recognition of diversity is the changed attitudes towards the colour of one's skin—there is greater acknowledgement of different skin colours today and less animosity stems from it than in earlier times.

Along with the colour of a person's skin, allowance is now being made for differences in culture as well as differences in language, gender and religion. Regarding gender, the opposite is almost true: some believe there is no difference between men and women, the only distinction being the differences in their anatomy. In that vein, in some Christian circles, Galatians 3:28 is quoted to support that view: *"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"*.

Continuing on the religious front, as the number of adherents of the Christian faith continues to fall, many compromises are being made to accommodate other faiths. One example occurred several years ago when an Anglican Archbishop invited a Moslem cleric to speak at the Anglican Cathedral in Perth, Australia. The event was cited and rationalised as an example of "increased breadth of understanding of Man as the creation of God". Another factor driving the ecumenical movement might be the increased financial viability of a larger group. Whatever the reason, there is a ground swell of opinion to unite.

While these initiatives might have some appeal at an organisational level, it is suggested it is possible insufficient weight is being ascribed to the differences in the objectives of different groups. Some believe the objective of the Islamic faith is to convert the world and govern it under Islamic rule; such an objective denies the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ and is contrary to the Christian's hope.

Unity

In the most part, the underlying objective of accommodating diversity and striving for unity is to promote peace and prosperity. Such efforts are epitomised in the body now known as the United Nations—an organisation comprising more than 190 nations with specialist arms to promote disarmament, peace, human rights, health and education. However in spite of a complex array of committees and hierarchies, the United Nations has failed to achieve its primary objective of peace for all. It has also failed to achieve its secondary objective of abolishing poverty in all countries.

Likewise the European Union is a group of nations the prime purpose of which is *"the promotion of peace and the well-being of the Union's citizens"* (see: <http://en.euabc.com/>). The motive to promote peace is in stark contrast to the events of

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1939-40 when Germany plundered the countries of Europe and which led to the global conflict of World War 2. The war lasted for almost seven years.

Purity

The endeavours of the nations of the world to accommodate the wide diversity that exists amongst the nations and to maintain peace have failed because, *inter alia*, of a lack of honest intention by all nations. Many endeavours have been under-mined by deceitful practices, one recent example being “illegal” arms dealings—who knows who is selling what to whom? Until the nations deal honestly with each other there is no hope of achieving a unilateral and lasting peace.

Dishonest practices are not confined to those between nations: deceit has permeated the core of nations which has resulted in efforts being made to eradicate it internally. One such effort in Australia is the establishment of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption* (ICAC), which was established in 1988 to combat corruption.

The lack of honesty—that is, purity of heart—is not unique to the present time. The prophet Jeremiah records the deceitful practices of the nation of Israel: *“Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited... For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace”* (Jer. 6:8-14). Israel did not have a “clean heart” and consequently they dealt deceptively with others, including their own kindred.

The Spiritual Realm

The treachery that afflicts mankind does not exist in the spiritual realm, even though there are significant differences amongst those in that sphere.

God and Jesus are different spirit beings and Jesus openly acknowledged that His father was superior to Him: *“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I”* (John 14:28). Additionally, Jesus ascribed all the credit for His work to His father: *“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works”* (John 14:10).

Nevertheless while they were and are different beings they worked together in complete unity: *“My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man*

is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:29-30).

The unity that existed and continues to exist between God and the Logos was so perfect that Jesus left His heavenly realm and came to earth to do His Father's will: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved”* (John 3:16-17). Jesus obeyed God's instructions perfectly and the unity of purpose that characterised their relationship is exemplified in Jesus' declaration when He was on the cross: *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4).

Such unity between the two great Beings was possible because they were pure; there was no hint of deceit with them. Of Jesus it is written that He was *“holy, harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners”* (Heb. 7:26), and He *“did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth... but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously”* (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

The church

The same three principles apply to the church on earth at the present time. There is great diversity in its membership, yet all members must understand and strive for unity, and in order to accomplish unity there must be purity of heart (that is, no guile).

The **diversity** of the members of the church is one of the first characteristics the members must acknowledge and accommodate. To illustrate the point the Apostle Paul compared the diversity of the members of the church with the members of the human body: *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free... for the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.... God hath tempered the body together... that there should be no schism in the body... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets,*

thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:12-30).

In those verses the Apostle addresses almost every kind of diversity that exists amongst human kind: heritage (Jew or Gentile); status (free man or slave); attributes (hands, ears); ability (seeing, hearing); function (apostles, prophets, teachers). The acknowledgement of the diversity amongst the members of the body is so important that Paul also included it in his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians: *“For as we have many members in one body, and **all members have not the same office**: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another”* (Rom. 12:4-5); *“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: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ... From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph. 4:11-16).

Unity

In spite of the wide diversity of the members of the church, diversity in itself is not to be a cause of division in the body—all members must strive for *“the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God”*, that there be *“no schism in the body”*.

The “unity” to which Paul refers requires effort. The word from which “unity” is translated occurs only twice in the Bible, both in Ephesians. The other instance is in chapter 4 verse 3: *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”*. The Apostle urged them to **endeavour** to keep the unity of the spirit, an expression that implies effort is required and, in the absolute sense, it also implies unity will not always be possible. The need for effort is apparent from the context: *“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. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”*** (Eph. 4:1-6).

The exhortation to walk with *“lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”* implies that unity of the faith would only be possible if they walked humbly, not proudly, and if they considered the welfare of each other.

Persuasion

The faith to which Paul referred is common throughout the Scriptures. Dr. Strong defines it as “persuasion or moral conviction” (#4102). The concept of persuasion is consistent with Romans 14:5 where Paul exhorts everyone to be *“fully persuaded in their own minds”*. However when taken together the concepts of each one being fully persuaded in their own mind and the diversity of characteristics and roles of the members of the church mean that their will be diversity of opinion amongst the members of the body.

Such a difference is acknowledged by Paul—he exhorted the Romans to tolerate such differences. He quotes two specific examples: *“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth... One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks... Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that **no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way**... For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men... therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another”* (Rom. 14:2-19). There are two important principles embodied in those verses.

The first is the challenge for each member to realise that the members of the body of Christ have different convictions and further to acknowledge that such differences do not constitute grounds to consider another to not be of “the body”.

Initially dietary practices might not be an issue but if the rules pertaining to the Law Covenant were enforced there could be “friction” between members—some foods considered permissible by some were forbidden under the Law.

Of greater significance is the day of the week when members should worship. The day of the week on which one believes they must worship might present

a challenge to some believers—they might need to ask themselves if they can accept, as a member of the body, one who believes they must worship on the seventh day. The Apostle Paul wrote that one must not be excluded on that ground alone, but some might find it difficult to accommodate one who deems such a practice to be obligatory.

In both cases the over-riding principle for each one to observe is that they must not allow the differences to hinder the spiritual growth of the other—to **not constitute a stumbling block to their fellow believer**. This principle is indeed the over-riding one and is the spirit behind Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4:3—that they walk with all “*lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*”. It is only when such an attitude of heart and mind is pursued that there is any prospect of keeping the unity of the faith.

Abstract convictions

The differences in the personal characteristics listed above—dietary practices and the day of the week when one “must” worship—are relatively easy to accommodate. History seems to indicate that it is differences in understanding of the Scriptures in relation to non-practical doctrine that have been more challenging. Nevertheless differences in understanding on all matters must be accommodated, such as differences in the fine points of defining “immortality” and to what extent the practices recorded in the Old Testament can be symbolised in relation to the Christian's walk.

Purity of heart

When brethren, who have different aptitudes and abilities, are fully persuaded in their own minds and are zealously pursuing the truth, it is understandable effort will be required to “*keep the unity of the faith*”. Thus is seen the need for **purity of heart**—a pure desire to serve the Lord in their own heart in accordance with their own convictions yet grant the same privileges for others. In such cases it must be realised that the Lord has placed the members in the body and so any differences are His doing. Such a realization removes all personal characteristics from “the debate” and leads to a recognition of God's omnipotence and watch-care over the church.

The height of the standard described above is indicated by the Apostle's wording to Timothy: “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*” (1 Tim. 1:5). The Greek from which “end” is translated (“*tellō*”) means “to set out for a definite point or goal; properly the point aimed at as a limit, that is, (by implication) the conclusion of an act or state...” (Strong's Concordance #5056).

The concept of love out of a pure heart being the end or goal of the commandment implies it is not the starting point and it requires effort to achieve.

Depart from iniquity

The need for effort and progress is further indicated in Paul's second letter to Timothy: “*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*” (2 Tim 2:19). The concept of departure implies effort to leave one's previous abode and set out for a new goal. Paul continues: “*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*” (2 Tim. 2:19-22). The concepts of “purge” and “flee” conjure up thoughts of effort—to leave previous habitats and move towards a new goal, the path being via righteousness, faith, love and peace as practised by those who have a pure heart.

On reaching the goal

The Apostle Peter adds a final word to the task of accommodating differences in a spirit of unity through the exercise of love coming from a pure heart: “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*” (1 Pet. 1:22). Peter's language exhorts those who consider themselves to have reached the goal to continue on—to maintain the effort—and not just merely to love one another but to love them **fervently** (intently; **without ceasing**).

Unique

Thus the church is unique. It is a body comprised of individuals who are diverse (in colour, in national customs, in language) and yet who have a common unified spirit, all striving together to build each other up, with each one prepared to forego their own preferences (preferences as distinct from convictions) in order to promote the welfare of other members, while overall each one strives to develop a pure heart, the thoughts and intents of which are known to the Creator. Indeed all members are to join with the Apostle Paul as he wrote: “*Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully... For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*” (2 Cor. 4:1-7). Praise be to God for His marvelous work!■

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Liberty means freedom. When Jesus finished His work on earth, when He cried on the Cross *“it is finished”* (John 19:30), *“the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom...”* (Matt. 27:51). At that moment Israel’s obligations under the Law Covenant ended—as the Apostle Paul wrote Jesus blotted *“out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Col. 2:14).

The Law Covenant was a form of bondage for Israel, and so the end of the Law Covenant represented liberty for them. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”* (Gal. 5:1).

The Law Covenant was a form of bondage from **two aspects**: there were certain things the Law prohibited them from doing and there were things they were required to do, both of which restricted them.

Prohibitions

Some of the prohibitions imposed by the Law Covenant are expressed directly in the “Ten Commandments” as recorded in Exodus 20:1-17. One gauge of how restrictive the Ten Commandments would be if they were imposed today is to consider their effect on the lifestyles of those living in the Western World:

- No work on the Sabbath Day (Deut. 5:14). This verse repeats the prohibition specified in Exodus 20:9-11. If the prohibition applied today it would destroy the life style of the inhabitants of every industrialised country because many of the processes which contribute to modern day life, such as the generation of electricity, require factories to operate 24 hours per day 7 days per week (commonly termed “24/7”). In other factories such as metal foundries the processes themselves cannot be started and stopped at the end of every day nor after a few days but must run continuously with minimum disruption;
- No marriage with the inhabitants of the promised land (Deut. 7:3). While there might not be a “promised land” involved today, there is marriage between people from different nations with different customs, hence there would be restrictions on the social lives of many;
- Not to eat certain animals and birds (Deut. 14:3-21). Bacon and pork were prohibited and they were permitted to eat only those fish that had fins and scales—neither of those restrictions is applied in Western countries today;
- Not permitted to borrow from other nations (Deut. 15:6). Such a restriction would bring the world’s

financial system to a complete stop, with a collapse of life styles in almost every country;

- Not permitted to wear garments comprised of more than one material (Deut. 22:11). This restriction would exclude many fabrics used today;
- Not permitted to lend to one of their brethren and gain interest from the loan (Deut. 23:19-20). Again the financial system would be in disarray;
- Not permitted to seek the return of anything lent to another (Deut. 24:10).

Consequently the present day Western World would not be able to operate under the restrictions imposed by the Law Covenant.

Obligations

As well as imposing restrictions on the Israelites, the Law Covenant imposed duties which were burdensome and which required constant attention. Perhaps the most onerous in terms of requiring constant attention was the requirement to offer the perpetual sacrifice. This obligation required an animal to be sacrificed every morning and every evening: *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering... shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season... This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even... it is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD... And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even...”* (Num. 28:1-8).

In addition to the continual sacrifice which had to be offered every day, on the Sabbath day two lambs had to be sacrificed: *“And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot...”* (Num. 28:9-10).

The sacrifice of these animals imposed a constant burden on Israel—the animals had to be killed every morning and every evening. Killing animals involves work and so the offering of these sacrifices required much effort and constant attention. An additional factor was that the animals had to be perfect—without blemish (Num. 28:19, 31)—which meant they were the best of the flock and thus the sacrifices might have constituted a considerable cost to the Israelites.

A consideration of these prohibitions and obligations brings into sharp focus the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to Israel that they not become *“entangled again with the yoke of bondage”* (Gal. 5:1).

The lusts of the flesh

However the termination of the Law Covenant brought a new challenge to Israel. When they realised they were liberated from the Law Covenant there was a danger they would feel free to do completely as they pleased, and so the Apostle Paul goes on to warn them of the dangers of such an attitude.

The warning is relevant today to those who have not experienced life under such restrictions and obligations as were imposed by the Law Covenant.

The Apostle wrote: *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another”* (Gal. 5:13). His warning has two fronts: at an individual level and at a corporate level. At the individual level there was a danger they would lull into unholy living (which Paul calls “occasion to the flesh”—that is they would indulge in activities which would satisfy the desires of their fleshly lusts). Additionally, at the corporate level, their self-indulgence would cause them to overlook their responsibilities to serve the interests of their brethren.

Regarding self-indulgence—using liberty for an occasion to satisfy the lusts of the flesh—Paul continued: *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another... Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, drunkenness, revels, and the like, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practise such*

things will not inherit the kingdom of God... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16-25). **The danger for the Israelites was the temptation to turn their liberty into licence.**

The Christian’s warfare

The temptations that confronted the liberated Israelis have confronted all Christians and continue to confront the Christian today. The natural tendencies of the flesh are contrary to the characteristics of the new creature: *“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would”* (Gal. 5:17).

Consequently those who are striving to develop the new creature—*“...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature* (2 Cor. 5:17)—must heed the words the Apostle wrote to the Ephesians: *“... take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints”* (Eph. 6:13-18).

Protecting oneself with the armour is the only way by which the Christian can ensure they continue to “walk in the Spirit” and do not abuse the liberty that results from not being subject to the Law Covenant.■

THE LIGHT TURNED YELLOW

The light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crossing, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating driver was furious and honked his horn, screaming in frustration—he had missed his chance to get through the intersection; **“that driver”** in front had caused him to waste precious time.

He was still in mid-rant when there was a tap on the window from a very serious police officer. The officer ordered him to exit the car. He took him to the police station where he was searched, fingerprinted and photographed. After a couple of hours the driver was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with his

personal effects. He said, “I’m very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn and abusing the driver in front of you. I noticed the ‘*What Would Jesus Do*’ sticker on your back window, the ‘*Choose Life*’ licence plate holder, the ‘*Follow Me to Sunday-School*’ bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the back of your car, so I assumed you had stolen the car”.

The above story might be an exaggeration, but it might also be a gentle reminder of the Apostle’s words: *“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, **known and read of all men**”* (2 Cor. 3:2). And as Peter wrote: *“Be sober, **be vigilant**; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8).■

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

In Romans 8:15 the Apostle Paul introduces the concept of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. A knowledge of the procedures involved under Roman rule increases the significance of his statement.

Roman adoption was a protracted and serious procedure which was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses.

The procedure was made difficult by the *patria potestas*—the father’s authority over his family. His authority was absolute and extended to the power of life and death—the law allowed a father to execute a grown son for treasonous behaviour.

A Roman son never came of age until his father died. No matter how old he was, he was still under the *patria potestas*—absolute possession and absolute control—of his father. Such subserviency added to the gravity of adoption—in adoption a person passed from one *patria potestas* to another; **he passed out of the possession and control of one father into the equally absolute possession and control of another.**

After marriage, a Roman girl left her father’s authority to enter the household of her husband (or father-in-law, if he was still alive).

The adoption procedure comprised two steps. The first was known as *mancipatio*, which was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out, twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back, but the third time he did not buy him back, when the original *patria potestas* was held to be broken.

After the sale there followed a ceremony called *vindicatio*. The adopting father went to the *praetor*, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transfer of the person to be adopted into his *patria potestas*. It was not until both procedures were completed that the adoption was accomplished.

Consequences

In spite of the adoption procedure being protracted, it was the consequences of the procedure that were more significant, and it is upon the consequences that Paul concentrates in his letter to the Romans. There were three main consequences:

- The adopted person lost all his inheritance in his

first family, but gained all the rights of a natural son in his new family;

- He became an heir of his new father’s estate, even if other sons were born after his adoption;
- All records of his previous life were obliterated, including all debts. The adoptee was regarded as entering a new life which was completely separate from his previous life.

Spiritual adoption

The adoption procedure for Christians is different from that used by the Romans. There is no “third sale” involved in the Christian’s spiritual adoption—it is a “once only” transaction. More so, Jesus warned His disciples about looking back to their previous earthly associations: *“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:62).

While the procedures might differ, the consequences of the Christian’s adoption parallel those that applied under Roman law.

Firstly, just as the Roman adoptee lost all rights to any inheritance arising from his previous family, likewise the Christian’s inheritance is no longer on the earth but in heaven: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which... hath begotten us again unto a lively hope... to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Secondly the Christian also obtains a new Father—*“whereby we cry Abba, Father”* (Rom. 8:15)—who cares for them as if they were His natural sons: *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”* (1 Pet. 5:7).

Thirdly they will be heirs of their new Father: *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”* (Rom. 8:17). *“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34).

Fourthly all records of past demeanors are cancelled: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Cor. 5:17).

Finally there is a witness to the Christian’s adoption: *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”* (Rom 8:16).■

TWO HEROIC BIBLE TRANSLATORS

Due in part to their ready availability in the Western World, it is easy to overlook the fact that the Bible is a treasure; to own one is a privilege and to be free to study it at times of one's choosing is a great blessing. A knowledge of the events that have resulted in the Bible being so readily available should increase one's appreciation of it and also one's desire to study it.

John Wycliffe

One early figure in bringing the Bible to the Western World was John Wycliffe (1330-1384). He lived in an age of ignorance and superstition, of worldly ambition and corruption in the established Church.

The schism of the Papacy in 1378 resulted in two Popes being placed at the head of the Church, one in Rome and the other in Avignon. Each anathematised the other, each raised armies resulting in the slaughter of helpless women and children for the sole purpose of aggrandisement for each of the pretenders to the title "vicar of Christ".

John Wycliffe was chief among the leaders opposing Roman aggression and corruption. He led a life of devotion and self-sacrifice, and was a most devoted student of Scripture. To him Christians are indebted for the first translation in 1383 of the Scriptures from Latin into English, the language of the people.

William Tyndale (1433-1536)

One hundred years after the death of Wycliffe, and one year after the birth of Martin Luther, William Tyndale was born. The year was 1483.

William Tyndale won a distinguished position in Oxford for scholarship. He moved to Cambridge at the time when Cambridge had received Erasmus's Greek New Testament. To Tyndale, this work of Erasmus was an inspiration, and probably set him on the task which was to become the object of his life.

The established Roman Catholic Church was opposed to translating the Scriptures into the language of the people, and Tyndale met with general opposition from Church authorities.

At the outset of his work Tyndale declared, "I defy the Pope and all his laws; and if God spare me I will one day make the boy that drives the plough in England to know more of the Scripture than the Pope does".

To accomplish his translation, Tyndale had to leave England and work in exile. He left England in 1524, never to see it again. At Hamburg in Germany, in

poverty and distress, and amid constant danger, the brave-hearted exile worked at his translation so diligently that in the following year he delivered the first sheets of his quarto New Testament to a printer in Cologne. But the Church discovered his work, and he had to flee to Worms, where the enthusiasm for Luther and the Reformation was at its height. There at length he achieved his purpose, producing for the first time a completely printed New Testament in English translated from Greek manuscripts.

Because of the opposition of the established Church, and the utmost vigilance of the authorities at the ports, Tyndale's New Testaments had to be smuggled into England in cases, barrels, bales of cloth, sacks of flour and every secret way that could be devised. Many were discovered, but many were not, and in a few years the books were scattered far and wide throughout the country.

William Tyndale pressed on with his translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, in continuing financial difficulty, distress and danger, until finally he was betrayed and imprisoned in the Castle of Vilvorden. It is pitiful to read of the poor prisoner there, in his cold and misery and rags, writing to the governor to beg "your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here during the winter, you will request the procureur to be kind enough to send me from my goods which he has in his possession a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from a perpetual catarrh, which is much increased by this cell. A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin; also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings—my shirts too are worn out... Also that he would suffer me to have my Hebrew Bible and Grammar and Dictionary".

In 1536 William Tyndale was strangled at the stake and his body burnt to ashes.

Poverty, distress, misrepresentation, imprisonment and death were constantly before him, but Tyndale pressed on unflinchingly with his translation work until his final betrayal.

Tyndale's translation

All English versions of the Scriptures before Tyndale were translations of translations, being derived from the Vulgate or older Latin versions. The Vulgate was a Latin version of the Scriptures translated by Jerome in the fourth century AD. Tyndale went back to the original Hebrew and Greek, though the manuscripts available to him were neither as old nor as authoritative as those available to more recent translators. Tyndale embodied that truth in so noble a

translation that his expression has been only slightly improved even to the present day, except for modern day spelling and vocabulary.

Tyndale devoted himself chiefly to the New Testament, bringing out edition after edition as he saw anything that could be improved. Of the Old Testament he translated only the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, and some of the Prophets.

In January 1604 a conference of bishops and clergy was held in Hampton Court Palace under the presidency of King James I of England. James I decreed that a new translation of the Bible was to be

made. The result was the production of the Authorised Version of the Bible.

It must be noted that since the Authorised Version appeared in 1611, many words used by the translators have become obsolete, and many have completely changed their meaning.

The Revised Version of 1885 brought about many desirable changes to the language of the Authorised Version and the modern versions have made many verses and passages clear to present-day readers. However not all “modern” translations yield a more accurate understanding.■

GOG AND MAGOG

At the time of going to press there was much unrest in the world, triggered by a variety of events. Some of the countries in which there had been “demonstrations” were Zimbabwe, Yemen, Somalia, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Afghanistan, Bolivia, Pakistan and Russia.

In the geographic centre of the strife is the nation of Israel, which is continually faced with threats of annihilation by Iran. Israel is one of the smaller countries in the area both in terms of land area and population, and so to the secular mind the prospect of their annihilation is plausible.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote much about God’s dealings with Israel in the end times. Chapter 36:1-15 reads (in part): “... *thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel... Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because the enemy hath made you desolate... Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen... Prophecy therefore concerning the land of Israel... Because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I have lifted up mine hand, Surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame. But ye, O mountains of Israel, ye shall shoot forth your branches... For, behold, I am for you... the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded: And I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings: and ye shall know that I am the LORD... Neither will I cause men to hear in thee the shame of the heathen any more, neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people any more...*” (Ezek. 36:2-15).

The prophecy describes a great upheaval in the affairs of the nations around Israel and in Israel itself. In common parlance it might be said that “the tables will

be turned” and Israel, which in times past has borne the shame of the heathen, will no longer bear that shame but will prosper and it will be the heathen nations that will bear the shame.

The prophecy continues and explains **why** God allowed Israel to suffer such despite: “*Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings... Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries... And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land*” (Ezek. 36:16-20).

Not only did Israel defile their own land but when they were scattered they profaned God’s name in the lands to which they went (although the actions by which they profaned God’s name are not listed).

God’s purpose

The prophecy continues further to explain why God, after scattering them, will gather them again into their own land: “*Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name, which ye have profaned among the nations, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which hath been profaned among the heathen... and the nations shall know that I am Jehovah, ... when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes*” (Ezek. 36:22-23). The prophet declares that God’s purpose in gathering Israel again into their own land is two-fold: to sanctify His Name; and to cause the heathen nations to acknowledge Him as God. That will be a dramatic change from the present when some nations

do not worship any god (they are atheistic), or worship a false god. Thus Ezekiel declares that the nation of Israel is a pivotal nation in God's dealings with the world of mankind.

The sequence

God has a planned sequence of action by which He will accomplish His two objectives.

Firstly He will implant His spirit in the hearts of Israel: *"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep mine ordinances, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God"* (Ezek. 36:25-28).

While those verses speak only of a blessing for Israel, the change will cause them some distress: *"Then shall ye remember your evil ways, and your doings that were not good; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations"* (Ezek. 36:31). Israel will have a guilty conscience when they recognise their misdemeanours.

God and Magog

The second stage of God's plan by which He will cause the heathen to acknowledge Him is also twofold. It involves the nation of Gog, together with several other nations: *"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee... in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee"* (Ezek. 38:1-7). Gog and the nations which will accompany them will not come of their own volition but God will direct

them so that He will accomplish His will through them—God will *"put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth"*.

Identification

It is not possible to identify from the Scriptures alone which nation is "Gog". The name Gog occurs only nine times in the Bible, seven of which are in Ezekiel, with the other two being in 1 Chronicles 5:4 and Revelation 20:8.

1 Chronicles 5:4 reads: *"The sons of Joel; Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son"*. Gog was a son of Joel who was the first son of Samuel (1 Sam. 8:1-2). Joel *"walked not in his ways (the ways of Samuel) but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgement"* (1 Sam. 8:3). Thus Gog did not have an upright father to guide him.

As well as not directly identifying the nation of Gog, the Scriptures also do not give any specific information about the area Gog inhabited, except to say it is in the *"north parts"* (Ezek. 38:15). Since the prophecy is directed to Israel (*"Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD"* Ezek. 36:1), it seems reasonable to assume that Gog comes from a region north of Israel. However it remains that historians are the only source of information regarding precisely who the nation of Gog is and where they are located on the earth.

In that vein, Halley's Bible Handbook (page 333) reads: *"Gog was ruler of the land of Magog. In Genesis 10:2 Magog, Meshech, Tubal, and Gomer are named the sons of Japheth and founders of the northern group of nations... Whatever may be the exact identification of these peoples, Ezekiel speaks of them as dwelling in 'the uttermost parts of the north' (38:6, 15; 39:2), and there can be little doubt but that he means nations beyond the Caucasus. A glance at the map makes it plain that he has in mind that part of the world known as Russia".* (The Caucasus is generally perceived to be the dividing line between Asia and Europe, encompassing the area between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea).

Notwithstanding the absence of any clear identification of the nation of Gog, it is clear that Gog is the nation God is going to use to demonstrate His power and turn the nations around, and some insight into future events on the world scene can be deduced from a study of Gog and Magog.

Israel dwelling safely

The prophecy states that at the time of the assault Israel will be *"dwelling safely"*, *"without bars or gates"*. It is also clear that the attack on Israel will be

initiated by Gog: *“Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that **at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought:** And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them **dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,** To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to **turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited,** and upon **the people that are gathered out of the nations,** which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land... Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee... And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and **I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me,** when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. Thus saith the Lord GOD; **Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel,** which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them?”* (Ezek. 38:10-17)

God’s direct involvement

Ezekiel continues to give more details of the assault and God’s direct involvement in the outcome: *“And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face... And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man’s sword shall be against his brother... and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD”* (Ezek. 38:18-23).

While Israel’s prosperity will incite Gog to plunder Israel, Zechariah 8:23 indicates other nations will be attracted to Israel because of their prosperity and will voluntarily come to learn of God through them: *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: **for we have heard that God is with you”**.”*■

TUNISIA AND THE JEWS

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Levites living in Djerba, Tunisia, did not heed Ezra the Scribe’s call to return to Israel. At its peak there were 110,000 Jews living in Tunisia—fewer than 2000 Jews remain today in one of the Diaspora’s oldest Jewish communities which some sources say was first settled by Jews around the time the First Temple was destroyed.

In December 2011, Tunisia-born Vice Prime Minister of Israel Silvan Shalom called on the Jews still living in Tunisia to immigrate to Israel. That call was rejected with much derision by the remnants of Tunisia’s once thriving Jewish community, but with new legislation being proposed in the Islamist Ennahda led government, Tunisian Jews may need to rethink their loyalty to a country that no longer wants them—the Tunisian Parliament is working to pass a law that will prohibit the import of religious books, kosher food, and even visitors from Israel.

In an interview with Makor Rishon, Rav Haim Biton, Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community in Tunisia said, “Today, the government lets us bring in food, medicine, religious and educational books from Israel. If this law passes, our condition will completely change”. Some community members believe the proposed law is part of the government’s strategy to cut off Jews from their culture.

He continued on to say that they are trying to explain to the government that, if the law passes, their relatives from Israel won’t be able to visit, they will not have much needed kosher food items, and they won’t be able to bring in religious and educational materials. Despite the fact that the new proposed law hasn’t yet been passed, Israeli citizens who have requested permission to visit Tunisia recently have been repeatedly turned down, while eight months ago, they could visit. **Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom is urging Tunisian Jews to leave while they can.**

[Data extracted from “*The Jewish Press*”, September 1st, 2012—<http://www.thejewishpress.com/>]

“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes” (Jer. 16:14-17).■

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY

In his letter to the Christians at Philippi the Apostle Paul listed eight characteristics of the things that should occupy their minds during their times of meditation. One of those characteristics was that the things were to be “lovely” (Phil. 4:8).

Things that human beings deem to be “lovely” are things that are favourable to them, things they enjoy. In secular circles the concept is applied very widely and is encapsulated in the idiom “everything in the garden is lovely”, which is another way of saying “life is good”—the expression is used in a general sense and its use is not restricted to physical gardens.

Significance

The characteristics of the things that people ponder affect their character. Proverbs 23:7 reads: “*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*”. Although the overall theme of Proverbs 23 is to warn God-fearing men of the subliminal objectives of deceitful men, the principle applies to all people—the things upon which one’s mind dwells modifies their disposition and consequently their actions.

God’s characteristics

Philippians 4:8 did not introduce any new concept—it was simply an exhortation for them to think on the things that reflected God’s character. Many centuries earlier David declared: “*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up. For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee*” (Psa. 5:4). David declared that God does not have any pleasure in wickedness and consequently those whom He has “*chosen to be a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4) also must not have pleasure in wickedness—that is, wickedness must be repulsed by the Christian. Such a mind-set is different from that of the natural man, as the Apostle exhorted the Ephesians: “*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind... who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ... and have been taught by him... that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph. 4:17-24). Thus the things that the Philippians regarded as lovely in times past—things that were pleasurable to them—were now to be discarded and they were to put on Christ and things that were consistent with God’s character.

Historical record

In times past God has taken a firm hand with His people when they have disregarded His standards and embraced wickedness. Regarding His dealings with Israel Paul wrote: “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men... because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God... but became vain in their imaginations... and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man... For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections... receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient*” (Rom. 1:18-28). Paul wrote those words from a natural man’s perspective, nevertheless God blinded their minds to the extent Israel failed to recognise their Messiah—God gave them over to a reprobate mind.

Eternal consequences

The meditations of one’s heart have consequences far beyond the present life. Romans 2:6-11 reads: “*Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good...*” (Rom. 2:6-10). “Well doing” is lovely in God’s sight; contention is not.

Thus the meditations of one’s heart—the things upon which one thinks or meditates—determine one’s reward. Consequently the Christian is exhorted to think—to meditate—on the things that are lovely in God’s sight. In this regard the Christian should meditate on things which make for peace because “*the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace*” (Jas. 3:18), and on those things that edify one another (Rom. 14:19).■

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